



2014 MLB PREVIEW

*Watch out for Hanley
Ramirez and the Dodgers*

70 Pages
Inside



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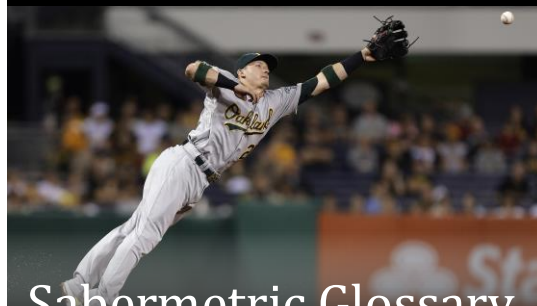
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Introducing RAWS

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Tony Gutierrez - AP Photo



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Gene J. Puskar - AP Photo



Top 50 MLB Prospects

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Elsa - Getty Images

This is now the eighth edition of my annual baseball preview. Over the years, it's changed a lot from a 14-page summary of each team to the 105-page monster-of-a preview in 2012 to this newest edition.

This year there are two big changes in terms of the most important aspect of the preview: the content. My writing is a bit more stat-heavy than it has been in past years, and it also involves input from several front office members in baseball.

Through covering baseball for the Charlotte Observer and Vanderbilt Hustler, I've been able to get in touch with several executives and scouts,

which should bring a new angle to this year's writing.

I've also included a glossary (on page 3) for sabermetric stats that I often use, and I strongly suggest reading over that because the team capsules can be hard to understand if you don't know what, say, wOBA is.

Additionally, my writing heavily revolves around the use of a retrospective analysis of wins system (RAWS) I've created, which you probably read about (on page 4) before diving into each team.

I hope you enjoy this year's baseball preview, and good luck to your favorite team.

This Baseball Preview is written by Ben Weinrib.

SABERMETRIC GLOSSARY



This year's baseball preview can read a little dense if you're not familiar with a few advanced statistics. Here is your translator for all things Sabermetrics:

AAV Average Annual Value
AAV is the average annual value of a contract.

BABIP Batting Average on Balls In Play
BABIP is batting average on balls hit in the field of play (everything but strikeouts and homers). League average BABIP is .300, and there is little year-to-year correlation, suggesting it is more luck than skill.

FIP Fielding Independent Pitching
FIP is one of the premier pitching statistics that is meant to imitate ERA (pitchers had a total ERA and FIP of exactly 3.87 last season). This stat only uses strikeouts, walks, and home runs—statistics only pitchers and batters control—to evaluate pitchers without considering his defense behind him.

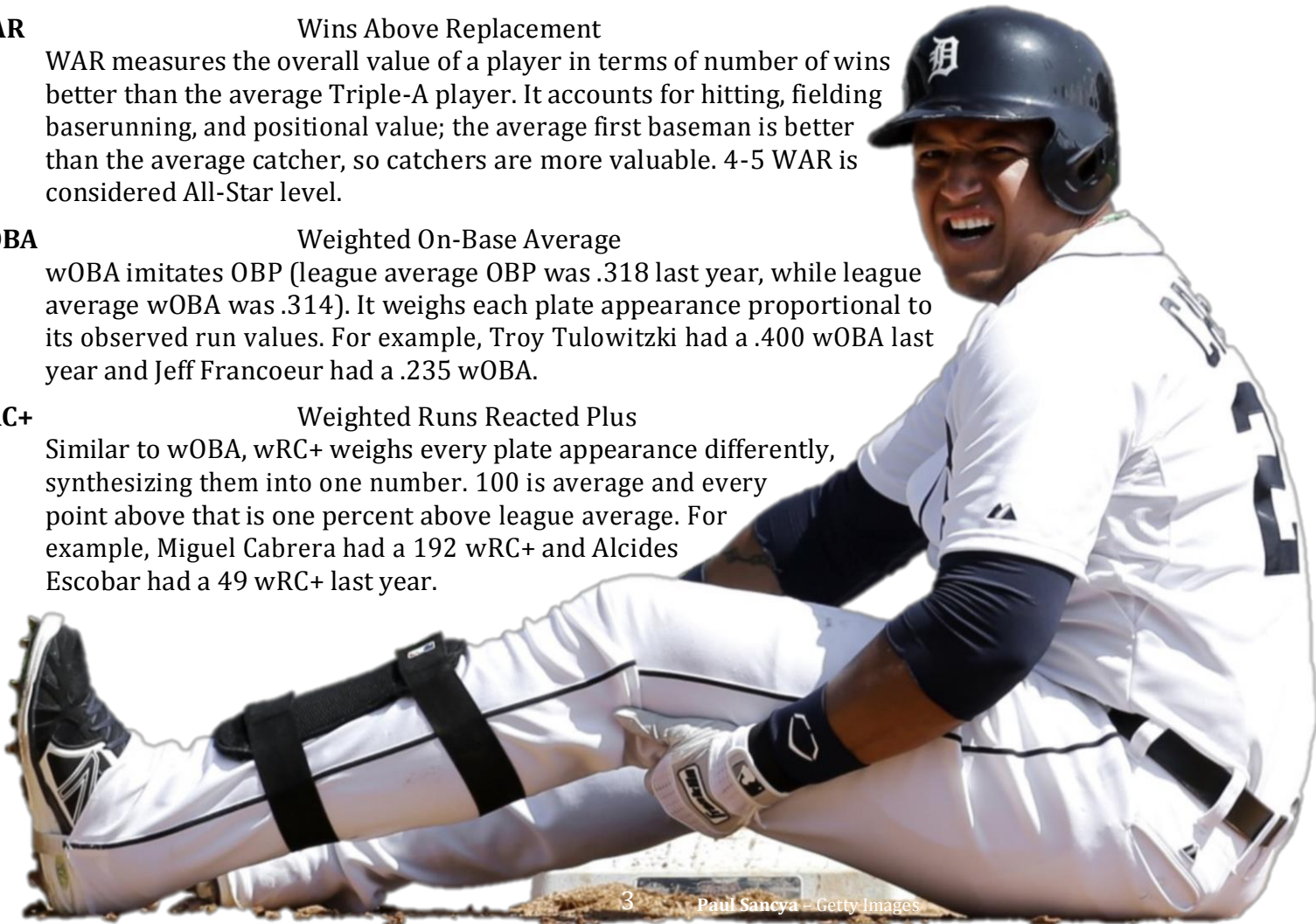
Pythagorean Record
Bill James came up with this formula to determine what a team's record should have been based off runs scored and allowed. This tries to remove luck from the equation. For a deeper explanation, check page 8.

UZR Ultimate Zone Rating
UZR measures runs saved (or lost) defensively. It's tracked by dividing the field into 78 zones and compares how the player did to how well others fielded similarly hit balls. UZR tends to vary a lot year to year. Last year Manny Machado led the league 31.2 UZR and Shin-Soo Choo was last with -16.9 UZR.

WAR Wins Above Replacement
WAR measures the overall value of a player in terms of number of wins better than the average Triple-A player. It accounts for hitting, fielding baserunning, and positional value; the average first baseman is better than the average catcher, so catchers are more valuable. 4-5 WAR is considered All-Star level.

wOBA Weighted On-Base Average
wOBA imitates OBP (league average OBP was .318 last year, while league average wOBA was .314). It weighs each plate appearance proportional to its observed run values. For example, Troy Tulowitzki had a .400 wOBA last year and Jeff Francoeur had a .235 wOBA.

wRC+ Weighted Runs Reacted Plus
Similar to wOBA, wRC+ weighs every plate appearance differently, synthesizing them into one number. 100 is average and every point above that is one percent above league average. For example, Miguel Cabrera had a 192 wRC+ and Alcides Escobar had a 49 wRC+ last year.





INTRODUCING RAWS

After 162 games, we tend to rank teams based off their record. But when it comes to determining which team is the best—not necessarily who played the best—wins are not the most important thing to look at.

Between the 2012 and 2013 seasons, the Cincinnati Reds had essentially the same roster. Yes, oft-injured Scott Rolen retired and they swapped Drew Stubbs for Shin-Soo Choo, but the vast majority of the personnel were the same.

But despite the similarity in teams, the outcomes of the past two seasons were drastically different. While the Reds were second in baseball with 97 wins two seasons ago, they dropped to 90 wins—just third in the NL Central—the very next season. Those seven wins were the difference between winning their division and having to play in the wild card playoff, which they ended up losing.

So what was the difference between the two seasons if the players were effectively the same? One could even make a case that they had a more talented team in

2013 considering how much better Choo is than Stubbs. The answer lies in the fact that wins aren't the end-all be-all for determining how good a team is.

In fact, they're far from it.

When it comes to evaluating teams, most people boil down their analysis to a quote used by Hall of Fame football coach Bill Parcells: "You are what your record says you are."

To be fair, that quote is generally correct. The team with the best record is generally the team that played the best, especially in Major League Baseball where they play a whopping 162 games in a season.

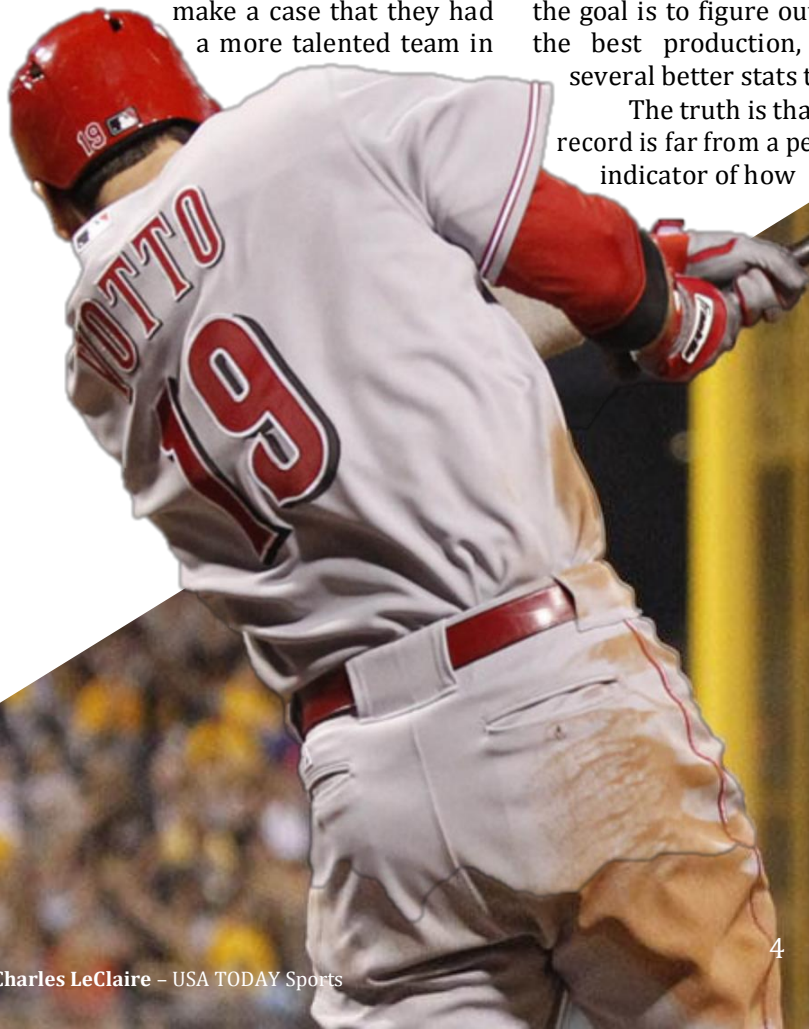
But I'm here to tell you that wins aren't the best way to evaluate a team. If the goal is to figure out which team had the best production, then there are several better stats to look at.

The truth is that a team's record is far from a perfect indicator of how

good of a team they were. For a team with a given talent level, there is a bell curve of possibilities for how a season could unfold. For instance, many picked the Blue Jays to win 90 games in 2013, but they only ended up winning 74.

Even in a single season, given the number of runs a team scores, there is a bell curve of possibilities for how the season could unfold. The 2012 Orioles only scored seven more runs than they gave up, yet they went 93-65.

That's why I've developed a system to determine what each team's record should have been, which I have named RAWs for Retrospective Analysis of Wins System. (These sort of things always catch on better when they



INTRODUCING RAWS



have an easy to pronounce abbreviation.)

Bill James came up with the idea of Pythagorean Record many moons ago, and the idea is that there is a relationship between runs scored, runs allowed, and wins. The equation for Pythagorean winning percentage is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{runs scored}^2}{\text{runs scored}^2 + \text{runs allowed}^2}$$

That formula has since been updated to match empirical results, and the current exponent used in all cases 1.83.

Runs are the best way to measure how productive a team was because, well, runs win games. Discrepancies between actual records and Pythagorean records often come about because of unsustainably good play in close games, like when the 2012 Orioles went 16-2 in

extra innings games and 29-9 in one-run games. Despite their 94-68 record, the O's had an 82-80 Pythagorean record, and largely thanks to regression to the mean, Baltimore went just 85-77 in 2013.

Another signal that a team is headed towards regression to the mean is with unsustainable play like the Cardinals had with runners in scoring position last year. They were head and shoulders above all other teams with a .370 wOBA and .377 BABIP when the next closest teams had a .344 wOBA and .321 BABIP. That type of outlier play isn't factored into Pythagorean Wins, but it is factored into the second half of RAWs' formula.

WAR is an incredibly useful stat in terms of describing the value of a single player. It's also incredibly useful when it comes to projecting wins and losses.

Chart Key

The first set of columns has runs scored, runs against, and Pythagorean record.

The second set of columns has total team WAR and then their record based on WAR.

The third set of columns has the official 2013 RAWs projected records.

The fourth set of columns has the actual 2013 record for the team.

The final column is the difference between the projected record and actual record in 2013.

2013 Season Projected Record																				
	R	RA	Pyth%	PythW	PythL		WAR	WAR%	WARW	WARL		ProjW	ProjL	Proj%		W	L	Win %		Diff
BOS	853	656	.618	100.1	61.9		58.3	.674	109.3	52.7		102.7	59.3	.634		97	65	.599		-7.5
DET	796	624	.610	98.8	63.2		55.8	.659	106.8	55.2		100.8	61.2	.622		93	69	.574		7.8
STL	783	596	.622	100.8	61.2		40.0	.656	91.5	70.5		94.2	67.8	.581		97	65	.599		-2.8
ATL	688	548	.603	97.6	64.4		43.2	.584	94.6	67.4		94.1	67.9	.581		96	66	.593		-1.9
OAK	767	625	.593	96.0	66.0		44.0	.589	95.4	66.6		93.7	68.3	.578		96	66	.593		-2.3
TEX	730	636	.563	91.2	70.8		45.3	.597	96.6	65.4		91.9	70.1	.567		91	71	.562		0.9
TB	700	646	.537	86.9	75.1		46.3	.603	97.6	64.4		90.3	71.7	.557		92	70	.568		-1.7
LAD	649	582	.550	89.0	73.0		43.4	.585	94.8	67.2		89.9	72.1	.555		92	70	.568		-2.1
CIN	698	589	.577	93.5	68.5		38.4	.555	89.9	72.1		89.7	72.3	.554		90	72	.556		-0.3
KC	648	601	.534	86.6	75.4		42.4	.579	93.8	68.2		88.2	73.8	.545		86	76	.531		2.2
PIT	634	601	.543	88.0	74.0		39.4	.561	90.9	71.1		87.5	74.5	.540		94	68	.580		-6.5
CLE	745	662	.554	89.7	72.3		36.8	.546	88.4	73.6		87.1	74.9	.538		92	70	.568		-4.9
BAL	745	709	.523	84.7	77.3		38.2	.554	89.8	72.2		85.2	76.8	.526		85	77	.525		0.2
WAS	656	626	.521	84.5	77.5		35.3	.537	86.9	75.1		83.7	78.3	.517		86	76	.531		-2.3
LAA	733	737	.498	80.6	81.4		36.7	.545	88.3	73.7		82.5	79.5	.509		78	84	.481		4.5
ARI	685	695	.493	79.9	82.1		33.0	.523	84.7	77.3		80.3	81.7	.496		81	81	.500		-0.7
COL	706	760	.466	75.5	86.5		34.1	.529	85.8	76.2		78.7	83.3	.486		74	88	.457		4.7
SF	629	691	.457	74.0	88.0		34.3	.531	86.0	76.0		78.0	84.0	.482		76	86	.469		2.0
NYN	650	671	.485	78.6	83.4		28.9	.498	80.7	81.3		77.7	84.3	.480		85	77	.525		-7.3
TOR	712	756	.473	76.6	85.4		28.2	.494	80.1	81.9		76.3	85.7	.471		74	88	.457		2.3
NYM	619	684	.454	73.6	88.4		29.0	.499	80.8	81.2		75.2	86.8	.464		74	88	.457		1.2
MIL	640	687	.468	75.8	86.2		24.6	.473	76.6	85.4		74.2	87.8	.458		74	88	.457		0.2
CHC	602	689	.439	71.0	91.0		26.7	.485	78.6	83.4		72.8	89.2	.450		66	96	.407		6.8
SD	618	700	.443	71.8	90.2		23.0	.463	75.0	87.0		71.4	90.6	.441		76	86	.469		-4.6
SEA	624	754	.414	67.1	94.9		21.1	.452	73.2	88.8		68.2	93.8	.421		71	91	.438		-2.8
CWS	598	723	.414	67.1	94.9		20.6	.449	72.7	89.3		67.9	94.1	.419		63	99	.389		4.9
PHI	610	749	.407	66.0	96.0		16.7	.425	68.9	93.1		65.5	96.5	.404		73	89	.451		-7.5
MIN	788	788	.388	62.8	99.2		19.5	.442	71.6	90.4		65.2	96.8	.403		66	96	.407		-0.8
MIA	513	646	.396	64.2	97.8		13.4	.406	65.7	96.3		63.0	99.0	.389		62	100	.383		1.0
HOU	610	848	.354	57.3	104.7		3.9	.349	56.5	105.5		54.9	107.1	.339		51	111	.315		3.9



INTRODUCING RAWS

Chart Key

The first set of columns has the official 2012 RAWS projected records.

The second set of columns has the actual 2012 record for the team.

Next is the difference between projected and actual 2012 record.

The fourth set of columns has the actual 2013 record for the team.

The final set of columns has the difference between 2012 RAWS record and 2013 record, difference between 2012 and 2013 record, and difference between those two numbers.

Glenn DuPaul's 2012 study showed that a team of replacement-level players is projected to win 52 games with each additional team WAR supplying an additional win. Thus, we can project what a team's record should be based off the sum contributions of their players.

By averaging the two winning percentages together and adjusting it so that the league-wide average winning percentage is exactly .500 (snipping off about two wins over a full season), we arrive at the record RAWS projects the team should have had considering its overall production.

When using RAWS, it's crucial to remember what the record it spits out actually means. RAWS is not a predictive tool; the fact that it said the Red Sox should have a 102.7-59.3 record does

not mean they are projected to win 103 games in 2014. The record RAWS gives us only tells us what record the team should have had last year.

But although RAWS itself does not predict future records, it can still be used as a baseline to help predict the future.

Take, for example, the 2014 Detroit Tigers. It's almost impossible to deny that Detroit has less talent this year with Prince Fielder, Doug Fister, and Jhonny Peralta gone, Jose Iglesias out for most of the season, and Ian Kinsler as the only notable addition. Since they won 93 games last year, one could logically deduce that they may only be a 90-win team in 2014.

But if we use RAWS to evaluate how good the Tigers actually were last year instead of using their 2013 record, you

2012 Season Projected Records

	ProjW	ProjL	Proj%		'12W	'12L	'12%		Diff		'13W	'13L	'13%		ProjDiff	ActDiff	Diff
NYN	95.0	67.0	.587		95	67	.586		0.0		85	77	.525		-10.0	-10.0	0.0
WAS	93.8	68.2	.579		98	64	.605		-4.2		86	76	.531		-7.8	-12.0	4.2
STL	93.0	69.0	.574		88	74	.543		5.0		97	65	.599		4.0	9.0	5.0
TEX	93.0	69.0	.574		93	69	.574		0.0		91	71	.562		-2.0	-2.0	0.0
TB	92.4	69.6	.570		90	72	.556		2.4		92	70	.568		-0.4	2.0	1.6
ATL	91.0	71.0	.561		94	68	.580		-3.0		96	66	.593		5.0	2.0	-3.0
LAA	90.4	71.6	.558		89	73	.549		1.4		78	84	.481		-12.4	-11.0	-1.4
CIN	89.8	72.2	.555		97	65	.599		-7.2		90	72	.556		0.2	-7.0	6.8
DET	88.9	73.1	.549		88	74	.543		0.9		93	69	.574		4.1	5.0	0.9
OAK	88.6	73.4	.547		94	68	.580		-5.4		96	66	.593		7.4	2.0	-5.4
MIL	88.1	73.9	.544		83	79	.512		5.1		74	88	.457		-14.1	-9.0	-5.1
SF	87.5	74.5	.540		94	68	.580		-6.5		76	86	.469		-11.5	-18.0	6.5
ARI	86.2	75.8	.532		81	81	.500		5.2		81	81	.500		-5.2	0.0	-5.2
CWS	85.6	76.4	.529		85	77	.525		0.6		63	99	.389		-22.6	-22.0	-0.6
PHI	83.9	78.1	.518		81	81	.500		2.9		73	89	.451		-10.9	-8.0	-2.9
LAD	83.0	79.0	.512		86	76	.531		-3.0		92	70	.568		9.0	6.0	-3.0
BAL	79.0	83.0	.487		93	69	.574		-14.0		85	77	.525		6.0	-8.0	2.0
BOS	76.2	85.8	.471		69	93	.426		7.2		97	65	.599		20.8	28.0	7.2
PIT	75.8	86.2	.468		79	83	.488		-3.2		94	68	.580		18.2	15.0	-3.2
KC	75.2	86.8	.464		72	90	.444		3.2		86	76	.531		10.8	14.0	3.2
SEA	74.5	87.5	.460		75	87	.463		-0.5		71	91	.438		-3.5	-4.0	0.5
NYM	74.3	87.7	.459		74	88	.457		0.3		74	88	.457		-0.3	0.0	-0.3
SD	73.8	88.2	.456		76	86	.469		-2.2		76	86	.469		2.2	0.0	-2.2
TOR	71.2	90.8	.439		73	89	.451		-1.8		74	88	.457		2.8	1.0	-1.8
MIA	70.9	91.1	.437		69	93	.426		1.9		62	100	.383		-8.9	-7.0	-1.9
COL	70.1	91.9	.432		64	98	.395		6.1		74	88	.457		3.9	10.0	6.1
MIN	69.0	93.0	.426		66	96	.407		3.0		66	96	.407		-3.0	0.0	-3.0
CHC	65.2	96.8	.403		61	101	.377		4.2		66	96	.407		0.8	5.0	4.2
CLE	64.4	97.6	.397		68	94	.420		-3.6		92	70	.568		27.6	24.0	-3.6
HOU	60.2	101.8	.371		55	107	.340		5.2		51	111	.315		-9.2	-4.0	-5.2

INTRODUCING RAWS



could knock a few wins off their 100.8-win projection instead. RAWS isn't a predictive system; it can be used as a baseline for how good a team was before.

Still in search for a reason why the Reds dropped seven games in the standings with essentially the same roster, an answer appears if we look at RAWS. Despite their lofty record, the Reds only had the production of an 89.8-72.2 team in 2012. Their 7.2-win difference between actual and projected record was the largest gap other than that of those lucky Orioles.

On the other side of the coin, we have the Cardinals. Although they only won 88 games to claim a Wild Card spot in 2012, they were the third-best producing team according to RAWS and had a projected record of 93.8-68.2. Of course, they would go on to win 97 games and the NL Central crown the following year.

The Reds and Cardinals are a perfect example of how to properly apply RAWS in analysis. Although

their records would indicate that the Reds had a much better season, the underlying numbers hint that the Cardinals were a better team. And since both teams effectively had the same rosters in both 2012 and 2013, it would have been logical to predict the Cardinals to have a better season than the Reds in 2013.

However, RAWS is far from perfect when it comes to projecting ahead, mostly because it is not a predictive measure. It doesn't factor in anything to do with the future like outlier player performances, injuries, or transactions. But what it does explain well is how teams actually performed in the past. Used within the context of what it actually represents, RAWS can be very helpful when it comes to making predictions because teams are often not as good (or bad) as their record says they are.

"RAWS isn't a predictive system; it can be used as a baseline for how good a team was before."

Jeff Curry - US PRESSWIRE



AMERICAN LEAGUE



AL East

Team	W-L	GB
Red Sox	95-67	--
Rays	93-69	2
Blue Jays	89-73	6
Yankees	84-78	11
Orioles	83-79	12

AL Central

	W-L	GB
Tigers	93-69	--
Royals	84-78	9
Indians	79-83	14
White Sox	66-96	27
Twins	65-97	28

AL West

	W-L	GB
Rangers	94-68	--
Athletics	87-75	7
Angels	85-72	9
Mariners	74-88	20
Astros	60-102	34

J. Meric - Getty Images



BOSTON RED SOX

Lineup					Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR
Shane Victorino					RF
.294	.351	.451	15	21	5.6
Dustin Pedroia					2B
.301	.372	.415	9	17	5.4
David Ortiz					DH
.309	.395	.564	30	4	3.8
Mike Napoli					1B
.259	.360	.482	23	1	3.9
Daniel Nava					LF
.303	.385	.445	12	0	1.8
Xander Bogaerts					SS
.250	.320	.364	1	1	0.2
A.J. Pierzynski					C
.272	.292	.425	17	1	1.6
Will Middlebrooks					3B
.227	.271	.425	17	3	0.3
Jackie Bradley Jr.					CF
.189	.280	.337	3	2	-0.2
Jonny Gomes					OF
.247	.344	.426	13	1	1.0
Grady Sizemore					OF
.224	.285	.422	10	0	0.1*

*2011 Statistics

Pitchers					L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR
Jon Lester					LHP
3.75	3.59	1.29	213.1	177	4.3
John Lackey					RHP
3.52	3.86	1.16	189.1	161	3.2
Felix Doubront					LHP
4.32	3.78	1.43	162.1	139	2.8
Jake Peavy					RHP
4.17	3.96	1.15	144.2	121	2.4
Clay Buchholz					RHP
1.74	2.78	1.02	108.1	96	3.2
Koji Uehara					RHP
1.09	1.61	0.57	74.1	101	3.3
Edward Mujica					RHP
2.78	3.71	1.01	64.2	46	0.0



Matt Stone – Boston Herald

A champion in a new form

After a surprise turnaround and winning the World Series, Boston's roster looks very different and is highly dependent on youngsters.

To be kind, nobody saw last year coming for the Red Sox. Even as one of the most optimistic prognosticators, I only saw them finishing fifth in the AL, yet they're hoisting another banner at Fenway Park.

Not only did the Red Sox win the World Series last year, they were by far the best team, at least according to my retrospective analysis system, RAWS. Despite their 97-65 record, RAWS found that the Red Sox's production last year should have led to a 102.7-59.3 record. Detroit came in second at 100.8-61.2, and the Cardinals were a distant third at 94.2-67.8.

Boston's turnaround from their last-

place 2012 season is easy to explain. GM Ben Cherington bought low on players who have historically produced at a high level (Shane Victorino, Mike Napoli, and Stephen Drew) and watched them regain their old form. Of course, the starting rotation's ERA dropping from 5.19 to 3.84, David Ortiz and Jacoby Ellsbury playing more than a combined 164 games, and the team shedding itself of Bobby Valentine helped too.

2012 went down the drain because everything that could go wrong did go wrong, and by the same token, everything that could go right did in 2013. Hell, John Lackey and his 91-mile per hour fastball

BOSTON RED SOX



had a sub-3.00 ERA for most of the season and Koji Uehara had a WHIP nearing a semi-realistic BAC level.

But with so much going right last year in addition to the losses of Ellsbury, Drew, and Jarrod Saltalamacchia, it's hard to imagine the Red Sox duplicating their level of regular season success. Still, though, the team is brimming with so much talent that a repeat season is not out of the question.

The main reason it's hard to conceive of the Red Sox not being successful this season is because of their rotation. Pitching isn't the strongest part of the team—Boston created 36.6 offensive WAR last year compared to second place Tampa Bay's 30.3—but it will hold the team together.

The rotation goes five deep with Jon Lester and Clay Buchholz returning to form and Lackey, Felix Doubront, and Jake Peavy holding together the rest of the rotation. Should any of them get hurt, the Sox have plenty of young arms waiting in Brandon Workman, Allen Webster, Anthony Ranaudo, Matt Barnes, and Rubby De La Rosa.

The real young talent, though, and the young talent that will determine how far this team goes, is in the lineup. Xander Bogaerts, 21, Jackie Bradley Jr., 23, and Will Middlebrooks, 25, all have

starting roles, and though we don't know whether they're ready.

Bogaerts, the 2nd-best prospect in baseball, is the surest bet, as he's hit at every level he's played at. The shortstop hit .267/.357/.408 between his late-season call-up and postseason action; with Troy Tulowitzki-type power, he's a favorite for Rookie of the Year.

Bradley lit up 2013 Spring Training, hitting .419/.507/.613, but he only managed a .189/.280/.337 line in his brief stint in the majors. While he'll never be Ellsbury at the plate, he's an elite defender with the chance to be a .300 hitter even this year.

Lastly, Middlebrooks may be the biggest enigma of all. He tore up his rookie season in 2012 with a .356 wOBA, but that fell to .300 his sophomore year, which also included a demotion to the minors. After getting called back up, though, he did sustain a .344 wOBA. If he can hit for average, he's a borderline All-Star. If not, he's a Mark Reynolds-type with less power.

If the young batters don't pan out, Boston will still be squarely in the playoff picture because of how deep they are, especially in the rotation. But if they do play up to their potential, which I think they largely will, we're looking at a potential repeat of 2013.

Strengths of the System

Aside from Bogaerts, the Red Sox don't have any other elite prospects, but the strength of their farm system is depth. They have three potential mid-rotation starters in Triple-A (Barnes, Webster, and Ranaudo) and three more pitchers who can be high-end relievers or back-of-the-rotation starters (Brandon Workman, Rubby De La Rosa, and Drake Britton).

They also have so many infielders it's tough to figure out where they fit into the Sox's long-term plan. Cecchini is blocked by Will Middlebrooks, Betts is blocked by Dustin Pedroia, and Deven Marrero is blocked by Bogaerts. Not all of them will reach their ceiling, but it's still an incredibly deep system.

Weaknesses of the System

Although they have a lot of bats, Boston really lacks power. Bogaerts should develop 30-home run power, but Bradley, Cecchini, Swihart, and Betts don't have much power to write home about. 17-year old Rafael Devers, a top international free agent prospect, has future power to dream on but is so young and raw that it's tough give him too high of expectations right now.

The Red Sox could also use more outfielders. After Bradley, the Red Sox only have 25-year old Bryce Brentz, toolsy but raw Manuel Margot, and a bunch of non-prospects. If needed, Betts could be moved to center field, which may eventually happen since he's blocked by Pedroia.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Xander Bogaerts	SS	A
.293/.382/.467, 16 HR, 8 SB	21	MLB
Elite bat, great approach. Has every tool except speed. Athletic enough to stick at SS.		
Jackie Bradley Jr.	CF	B+
.255/.353/.439, 13 HR, 9 SB	24	MLB
Top-notch defender with a plus bat. Patient with limited power, can over-extend swing.		
Garin Cecchini	3B	B+
.322/.443/.471, 7 HR, 23 SB	23	AA
Can flat out hit. Smart at the plate, on the basepaths and out-performs average tools.		
Henry Owens	LHP	B+
2.67 ERA, 11.3 K/9, 4.5 BB/9	21	AA
Big, projectable; improved offerings with deception boosts stock. Lacks command.		
Matt Barnes	RHP	B
4.13 ERA, 11.3 K/9, 3.8 BB/9	24	AAA
Barnes starts a run of older starters with similar bios. He has great stuff—fastball up to 98 with two good off-speeds and a great frame—but command comes and goes. Could be a #2 starter or power reliever.		
Blake Swihart	C	B
.298/.366/.428, 2 HR, 7 SB	22	High-A
Athletic, above-average defender. Switch-hitter with plus bat, and power set in soon.		
Mookie Betts	2B	B
.314/.417/.506, 15 HR, 38 SB	21	High-A
Above-average across the board with plus speed, bat, and suddenly surprising power.		
Trey Ball	LHP	B
6.43 ERA, 6.4 K/9, 7.7 BB/9	20	Rookie
Risk/reward prep pitcher should improve as he ditches the bat. Projectable, up to 95.		
Allen Webster	RHP	B
4.72 ERA, 9.2 K/9, 4.1 BB/9	24	MLB
Great movement on fastball, slider, change but shaky command. Gets lots of grounders.		
Anthony Ranaudo	RHP	B
2.96 ERA, 8.2 K/9, 3.02 BB/9	24	AAA
Injuries held him back, but control caught up to off-speeds. Nice downward plane.		



TEXAS RANGERS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Shin-Soo Choo						LF
.285	.423	.462	21	20	5.2	
Elvis Andrus						SS
.271	.328	.331	4	42	2.8	
Prince Fielder						1B
.279	.362	.457	25	1	2.2	
Adrian Beltre						3B
.315	.371	.509	30	1	5.2	
Alex Rios						RF
.278	.324	.432	18	42	3.1	
Mitch Moreland						DH
.232	.299	.437	23	0	0.7	
Geovanny Soto						C
.245	.328	.466	9	1	1.0	
Jurickson Profar						2B
.234	.308	.336	6	2	-0.4	
Leonys Martin						CF
.260	.313	.385	8	36	2.7	
Michael Choice						OF
.278	.316	.333	0	0	0.0	
J.P. Arencibia						C
.194	.227	.365	21	0	-0.6	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Yu Darvish						RHP
2.83	3.28	1.07	209.2	277	5.0	
Derek Holland						LHP
3.42	3.44	1.29	213.0	189	4.8	
Martin Perez						LHP
3.62	4.23	1.34	124.1	84	1.6	
Tanner Scheppers						RHP
1.88	3.74	1.07	76.2	59	0.8	
Joe Saunders						LHP
5.26	4.72	1.60	183.0	107	0.6	
Joakim Soria						RHP
3.80	3.68	1.35	23.2	28	0.2	
Neftali Feliz						RHP
0.00	3.25	1.50	4.2	4	0.1	



Louis DeLuca – The Dallas Morning News

Everything's bigger in Texas

Texas had a disappointing 2013 with their lowest offensive output since 1995. They've solved that problem with a bulked up lineup.

For the first time since 2009, the Rangers didn't make the playoffs. Despite the fact that they led the AL West for exactly half the season, they collapsed at the end, holding a two-game lead on the division at the start of September and ending the year five games out of first, losing 16 of the 28 games in September.

It was also a weird season because of the lack of an overpowering offense. Although the Rangers were 4th in wRC and 2nd in wOBA the past two seasons, they fell to 14th and 9th in each category in 2013. Some of the lack of hitting can be attributed to bad luck—their BABIP had been .306 the

past three years, it was just .294 in 2013—but there was a serious dropoff in power throughout the team.

Losing Josh Hamilton and Mike Napoli certainly hurt, but the rest of the team regressed a bit. Adrian Beltre, Elvis Andrus, David Murphy, and Ian Kinsler combined for a net loss of 6.3 WAR in one season.

Unhappy with the state of the offense, the Rangers made sure to change things up. More than a quarter billion dollars later, Texas' lineup can rival just about any other roster in the league.

Texas' 2013 roster was a bit oddly constructed because perhaps the most

TEXAS RANGERS



talented player—Jurickson Profar—had no position. The consensus top prospect in baseball could play across the infield, but between Beltre, Andrus, and Kinsler, there was no room for him. That all changed after a blockbuster deal with Detroit.

The Rangers shipped Kinsler north to Detroit, freeing up second base for Profar, but equally importantly bringing in Prince Fielder, the power bat Texas lacked since Hamilton's departure. Although the \$138 million left on Fielder's contract will likely look ugly at the end of the deal, it immediately makes the Rangers' lineup much more scary.

But they weren't done quite yet. In the market for a new leadoff hitter after Andrus posted just a .328 OBP, the Rangers brought in someone with an OBP nearly 100 points higher: Shin-Soo Choo. Just like Fielder, the \$130 million remaining over the next seven years will look unwise at the end of the contract, but Choo takes the lineup to an entirely new stratosphere for the near future.

The terrifying thing for other teams is that the Rangers already had very strong pitching before adding so much more hitting. Yu Darvish has established himself as one of the very elite pitchers in baseball; he led the league with 11.89

K/9, and Detroit's Max Scherzer was a distant second at 10.08.

Even young guys like lefties Derek Holland (3.42 ERA) and Martin Perez (3.62 ERA) took a big step up last year, signaling good things for the future. Unfortunately, Holland will be out until mid-season recovering micro-fracture surgery after injuring his knee chasing his dog (true story), he will be around for a late-season push and any potential playoff games.

The impressive part about the Rangers isn't just that they're extremely talented; they're also extremely young. Beltre, 34, is the only starter over 31 years old, and they're also starting 25-year old Leonys Martin, 25-year old Evlis Andrus, and 21-year old Profar. And even if Martin sinks instead of swims, the Rangers have Michael Choice and Engel Beltre waiting in the wings.

If they can pitch like they did last year—which basically means don't suffer any more major injuries atop the rotation, this team will hit enough to be a playoff lock. To me, there are three great teams in the American League—Boston, Texas, and Tampa Bay—and each have a great shot at a title. While this team lacks much more financial flexibility, it's hard not to be impressed by the lineup they've assembled.

Strengths of the System

Texas has a ton of depth at the most important place: up the middle hitters. They already have Elvis Andrus and Jurickson Profar in the majors, but Odor and Sardinas profile as every day players. Not only that but Alfaro and Brinson should eventually be impact hitters with their power.

The Rangers also had potentially the most talented A-Ball team ever last year with \$13.7 million in signing bonuses split between Alfaro, Brinson, Gallo, Ronald Guzman, and Mazara. However, according to a rival scout, the most talented player on that team may have been Williams, who only had a \$500,000 signing bonus. Texas is just oozing with raw minor league talent.

Weaknesses of the System

Texas an incredible amount of talent, power, and athleticism, but that is paired with a ton of strikeouts. Alfaro, Brinson, Gallo, Mazara, and Williams combined for an outrageous 726 strikeouts last season—over 31% of their plate appearances. Gallo and Brinson led the way with 172 and 191 whiffs, which was over 37% of their plate appearances. Even older prospects like Choice have that issue.

Strikeouts are something that only get worse and worse the higher up in the minors a player goes. Whiffs are less of an issue for players with power like Gallo and Brinson, but it's an issue a lot of players in this system need to correct sooner rather than later.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Rougned Odor 2B B+

.303/.362/.472, 11 HR, 31 SB 20 AA

Great bat, and all other tools are at least average. Strong defender with good speed.

Jorge Alfaro C B+

.265/.346/.463, 18 HR, 18 SB 21 C

Strong arm, big raw power, but he lacks any discipline. Athletic with great mechanics.

Joey Gallo 3B B

.251/.338/.623, 40 HR, 15 SB 20 A

Ruthian power with a ton of swing and miss too. Strong arm, but his range isn't great.

Lewis Brinson CF B

.237/.322/.427, 21 HR, 24 SB 20 A

Quick wrists lead to plus power, but he Ks too much. Plus speed, defense, athleticism.

Michael Choice LF B

301/.388/.441, 14 HR, 1 SB 24 MLB

Hasn't quite tapped into huge power with so many whiffs. Patient approach at the plate.

Alex Gonzalez RHP B

3.80 ERA, 7.4 K/9, 3.4 BB/9 22 High-A

Advanced college starter with good ground ball numbers and four promising pitches.

Nick Williams LF B

.293/.337/.543, 17 HR, 8 SB 20 A

Aggressive approach hurts nice power and speed combo. Uses whole field when he hits.

Luis Sardinas SS B

.288/.342/.348, 2 HR, 32 SB 21 AA

Good defender with a strong arm and plus speed. Bat is nothing special, has no power.

Nomar Mazara RF B

.236/.310/.382, 13 HR, 1 SB 19 A

Mazara got the 2nd-biggest signing bonus in Rangers history (\$4.95 million) but only flashed raw tools so far. Like his Hickory teammates, he has a strikeout problem but massive power when he makes contact.

Luke Jackson RHP B

2.04 ERA, 9.4 K/9, 4.2 BB/9 22 AA

Three pitches and frame are good, but his delivery, command suggest he may relieve.



TAMPA BAY RAYS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
David DeJesus						LF
.251	.327	.402	8	5	2.1	
Ben Zobrist						2B
.275	.354	.402	12	11	5.4	
Evan Longoria						3B
.269	.343	.498	32	1	6.8	
Wil Myers						RF
.293	.354	.478	13	5	2.4	
Matt Joyce						DH
.235	.328	.419	18	7	1.7	
James Loney						1B
.299	.348	.430	13	3	2.7	
Desmond Jennings						CF
.252	.334	.414	14	20	3.2	
Yunel Escobar						SS
.256	.332	.366	9	4	3.9	
Ryan Hanigan						C
.198	.306	.261	2	0	0.0	
Sean Rodriguez						Util
.246	.320	.385	5	1	1.1	
Jose Molina						C
.233	.290	.304	2	2	0.2	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
David Price						LHP
3.33	3.03	1.10	186.2	151	4.4	
Matt Moore						LHP
3.29	3.95	1.30	150.1	143	1.8	
Chris Archer						RHP
3.22	4.07	1.13	128.2	101	1.2	
Alex Cobb						RHP
2.76	3.36	1.15	143.1	134	2.4	
Jake Odorizzi						RHP
3.94	3.89	1.21	29.2	22	0.3	
Grant Balfour						RHP
2.59	3.49	1.20	62.2	72	0.6	
Heath Bell						RHP
4.11	4.10	1.37	65.2	72	0.0	



Jared Wickerham - Getty Images

The perils of a small market

Tampa Bay has as much talent as any team in the AL, but David Price is nearing a big payday. At what point do they trade him? Or do they?

There are certain things we've come to expect with the Tampa Bay Rays. 1) No matter the circumstances, they will win at least 90 games. 2) Once any player nears free agency, he will be traded for young players. 3) The Rays will have an even better young player waiting in the wings to replace the expensive free agent-to-be.

That's just how it's been since Tampa Bay exorcised the Devil from its name.

In 2011, Matt Garza was traded with three years before free agency to the Cubs for Chris Archer and Hak-Ju Lee, and Jeremy Hellickson replaced him in the rotation. Last winter, James Shields was

traded with two years before free agency to the Royals for Wil Myers and pitching prospects, and Archer replaced him in the rotation. Although they didn't trade B.J. Upton, they let him leave in free agency last winter; Evan Longoria is the only youngster they've actually retained.

Now the hottest name on the market is David Price. The 2012 Cy Young Award winner. The former number one overall pick. Price is two years away from free agency and in the prime of his career—right about the time the Rays usually trade their young assets.

It seems like a good time to trade Price.

TAMPA BAY RAYS



His value will likely never be higher than it is now, and Tampa has great second options with Jake Odorizzi, Enny Romero, and Alex Colome ready to step in. Yet here we are near Opening Day, and Price is still wearing number 14 in navy and Columbia blue.

Furthermore, the Rays' moves this off-season don't signal that the team is ready to throw in the towel. Sure, as we've seen in the past, it's very possible to remain contenders after trading a top-of-the-rotation pitcher, but Tampa has never had a pitcher the caliber of Price, and they undoubtedly have a better chance to win a World Series if he's playing in Tropicana Field.

The Rays re-signed James Loney for three years and \$21 million and brought back Grant Balfour after a three-year hiatus for two years and \$12 million. While that doesn't sound like much, those are two of the three largest free agent contracts the Rays have doled out under their current ownership.

Furthermore, the Rays traded for underrated bats Ryan Hanigan and Logan Forsythe along with reclamation project Heath Bell—moves that only contenders would be making.

Should they hold onto Price for the whole season, the Rays will be one of the premier teams. A rotation of Price, Matt

Moore, Archer, Alex Cobb, and Jake Odorizzi is already fantastic to start with, and each pitcher is young enough to make significant improvements during the season. The same can be said with the lineup, just substitute in the names Myers, Desmond Jennings, and Longoria.

And, hey, maybe the Rays' ownership has turned a new leaf; they could even re-sign Price when he hits free agency. They did invest \$144.5 million in Evan Longoria for his two extensions spanning 15 years. But it seems rather unlikely that they will be able to afford both superstars, especially with Clayton Kershaw receiving a 7-year \$215 million extension in January.

In the inevitable case that the Rays do move Price—history tells us they will sooner or later—the Rays will still be great. Maybe Romero or Alex Colome will be Price in 2009 or Archer in 2013. With incredible depth of young talent, Tampa has been able to sustain a .565 winning percentage over the past six years, even though they're still searching for that first World Series trophy. Since they're still short of the ultimate goal, I think Tampa holds onto Price for at least one more season for a shot at the World Series. One more shot before the cycle starts again and we're talking about trading Matt Moore in 2 years.

Strengths of the System

The strength of the Rays system right now is pitching close to the majors. Even with guys like Chris Archer graduated out of the minors, the Rays still have a fairly deep collection of pitchers. Specifically, they have three older prospects who are ready to help out the big league team.

Odorizzi has been tabbed the Rays' fifth starter—likely until Jeremy Hellickson comes back from elbow surgery in late May or June. Romero and Colome have a higher upside with much better stuff than Odorizzi, but their lack of control will probably force them to the bullpen for now, where they can still make a large impact.

Weaknesses of the System

While the Rays are fairly deep in terms of impact pitchers, they lack the upside they've had in recent years. Guerrieri is the only pitcher with top-of-the-rotation potential, and he probably won't pitch at all this season coming off Tommy John surgery.

A lot of the reason for the lack up top prospects is the surprisingly bad drafts for the Rays. 2012 first-rounder Richie Shaffer had an awful season, and nine of the Rays 10 first-round picks in 2011 look like busts. The Rays had three first-round picks in 2010, and they've either busted (Jose Sale and Justin O'Connor) or been traded (Drew Vettleson). You can't draft that poorly and have a strong system.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Taylor Guerrieri

2.01 ERA, 6.9 K/9, 1.6 BB/9

Tommy John surgery will keep Guerrieri

out for most of this season, but when he's healthy, he's absolutely dominant. His has a fastball up to 97, a plus curveball, and great control: the makings of an ace.

Hak-Ju Lee

.422/.536/.600, 1 HR, 6 SB

Missed nearly all of 2012 with a knee injury. Still has plus defense, arm, speed, solid bat.

Enny Romero

2.53 ERA, 6.6 K/9, 4.7 BB/9

Fastball and curveball are tantalizing, but lacks any control. Slider, change improving.

Alex Colome

2.92 ERA, 8.8 K/9, 4.0 BB/9

Nasty stuff with plus plus velocity. Lack of control, inconsistent release point hurts.

Jake Odorizzi

3.45 ERA, 8.5 K/9, 2.8 BB/9

Four pitch mix is average with no knockout pitch. Has good control and a high floor.

Nick Ciuffo

.258/.296/.308, 0 HR, 0 SB

Above-average defender is still improving. Bat in question, but power should play up.

Ryan Brett

.302/.356/.454, 7 HR, 26 SB

Calling card is the hit tool, although speed nears plus, and his defense should be solid.

Ryne Stanek

Did not play

Nice velocity with three solid off-speeds, but command isn't great, mechanics are off.

Andrew Toles

.326/.359/.466, 2 HR, 62 SB

Can flat out fly and defend well. Aggressive without power, but bat should be average.

Blake Snell

4.27 ERA, 9.6 K/9, 6.6 BB/9

Nice size and impressive stuff, but there are serious control issues holding him back.



DETROIT TIGERS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Ian Kinsler						2B
.277	.344	.413	13	15	2.5	
Torii Hunter						RF
.304	.334	.465	17	3	2.5	
Miguel Cabrera						1B
.348	.442	.636	44	3	7.6	
Victor Martinez						DH
.301	.355	.430	14	0	0.9	
Austin Jackson						CF
.272	.337	.417	12	8	3.1	
Alex Avila						C
.227	.317	.376	11	0	0.6	
Nick Castellanos						3B
.278	.278	.278	0	0	-0.2	
Rajai Davis						LF
.260	.312	.375	6	45	1.2	
Hernan Perez						SS
.197	.217	.227	0	1	-0.6	
Andy Dirks						OF
.256	.323	.363	9	7	1.7	
Don Kelly						Util
.222	.309	.343	6	2	0.0	



Mandi Wright – Detroit Free Press

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Justin Verlander						RHP
3.46	3.28	1.31	218.1	217	5.2	
Max Scherzer						RHP
2.90	2.74	0.97	214.1	240	6.4	
Anibal Sanchez						RHP
2.57	2.39	1.15	182.0	202	6.2	
Rick Porcello						RHP
4.32	3.53	1.28	177.0	142	3.2	
Drew Smyly						LHP
2.37	2.31	1.04	76.0	81	1.9	
Joe Nathan						RHP
1.39	2.26	0.90	64.2	73	2.5	
Bruce Rondon						RHP
3.45	3.01	1.36	28.2	30	0.4	

Budget concerns hurt Detroit

The Tigers' cavalcade of talented players is impressive, but with so many near free agency, it was too expensive to hold onto all of them.

This is not the usual off-season a team has after making its third straight ALCS. Teams with this sort of prolonged success don't sell low on two of their best players over the off-season. Yet here the Tigers are, still poised for another run into October.

The explanation for Detroit's sustained success has been twofold: they have had an incredibly deep pitching staff and dynamic middle of the order. Over the past three seasons, the Tigers are tops in the league at 73.2 pitching WAR, finishing atop the league the past two seasons. They're also second in wOBA over that same stretch.

They've also had the last three MVPs:

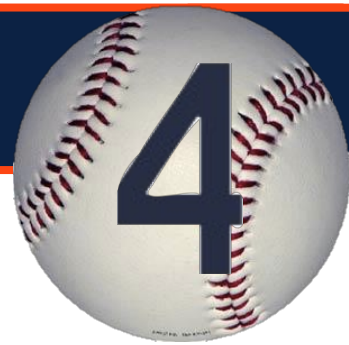
Justin Verlander and Miguel Cabrera twice.

Even after this off-season, the Tigers still have an incredibly deep pitching. The middle of their lineup is still incredibly potent. And they still have more star power than about any other team. It's just not quite the same this season.

In late November, the first shoe of the off-season dropped for Detroit when they pulled off a trade seemingly out of a fantasy baseball league: shipped Prince Fielder, whom they signed for \$214 million just two winters ago, to Texas for Ian Kinsler.

There was plenty of reason to trade Fielder. He had a down year, dropping

DETROIT TIGERS



from 4.8 WAR to 2.2 WAR in one season. He was due \$24 million annually for the next seven years of his declining skills. Both he and Cabrera looked like future DHs, and Cabrera certainly shouldn't be playing third base much longer.

But Kinsler has nearly as many warts. Kinsler posted the second-lowest WAR of his career, despite the fact that his BABIP was at a three-season high. His power is zapped, his legs aren't the same, and his defense went from Gold Glove level to very average. He missed a month with an intercostal strain after years of playing injury-free.

In the long term, this trade makes sense for Detroit. Fielder's contract looks pretty brutal at this point. They needed to unload money to be able to keep Max Scherzer and Austin Jackson. Cabrera needed to move off the hot corner.

But the move makes them worse this year. Kinsler isn't the same as Fielder.

The next shoe fell two weeks later when they shipped Doug Fister to Washington for a bunch of spare parts. Steve Lombardozzi is an adequate utility man, Ian Krol is a solid lefty reliever, and Robby Ray may become a back-of-the-rotation starter; that's terrible value for a cheap, young starter who was 9th in the majors in WAR (13.3) over the last three seasons.

The Tigers have a very solid replacement for Fister in Drew Smyly, who will look to nearly triple his innings after posting a 2.37 ERA as a reliever last year. Yes, Smyly will probably be very serviceable, and the Tigers still have the league's best starter one-two punch in Justin Verlander and Scherzer along Anibal Sanchez, who had a better ERA than either one, but Smyly's move to the rotation will further thin the bullpen, even after Detroit brought in Joe Nathan this winter at a high price.

But the move makes them worse this year. Smyly isn't the same as Fister.

It's hard to deny that the Tigers have a worse talent level this year, even with potential to improve from young players like Nick Castellanos and Jose Iglesias—if he recovers from stress fractures in both shins. But it's also hard to deny that last year's team underachieved in the regular season, giving hope that 2014's team could have an even better season.

According to my retrospective analysis system, Detroit's production last year should have led to a 100.8-61.2 record. In reality, they only went 93-69, and that 7.8 win differential is the largest among any team. So even though this team may not be as talented, they may have an even better regular season just because of regression to the mean.

Strengths of the System

Detroit's drafting strategy is very different from how they collect players at the major league level: they love high-probability low-upside guys. After Castellanos, they have a group of hitters who probably won't start but certainly will be majors leaguers: McCann, Fields, Collins, and Devon Travis. One rival scout especially likes Travis as a gamer who plays above his average tools.

Along those same lines, Detroit likes to draft players from strong college programs. In the last three years they've taken Curt Casali, Will Clinard, Connor Harrell, VerHagen, Aaron Westlake, and Ziomek, from Vanderbilt, which is clearly a huge plus

Weaknesses of the System

Although there are a lot of pitchers on the Tigers top prospects list, they almost all profile better as a reliever than a starter. Thompson and Ray are the only two who for sure can be starters, although Ray only has back-of-the-rotation stuff.

Overall, there's just not a lot of talent in this system, which is the product of a lot of bad drafts. Because they keep signing top free agents, the Tigers keep losing their first round picks as compensation and have a smaller draft budget to work with. That could happen again this year if they sign Stephen Drew before June, but the team has already hinted they'll probably stay in house at shortstop.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Nick Castellanos	3B	B+
.276/.341/.444, 18 HR, 4 SB	22	MLB
Transitions back to third after a year in the outfield. Bat, power, arm strength are plus.		
Jonathan Crawford	RHP	B-
1.89 ERA, 10.0 K/9, 4.3 BB/9	22	Low-A
Plus fastball and slider, but changeup great. Shaky command may shift him to the pen.		
Jake Thompson	RHP	B-
3.13 ERA, 9.8 K/9, 3.5 BB/9	20	A
Big frame with good durability. Breaking ball may end up plus, leads to strikeouts.		
Robbie Ray	LHP	B-
3.36 ERA, 10.1 K/9, 3.9 BB/9	22	AA
Velocity fluctuates, and secondary pitches will only be average. Can eat lots of innings.		
James McCann	C	B-
.277/.328/.404, 8 HR, 3 SB	24	AAA
Solid defensively and calls games well. Bat is only be average, can be overly-aggressive.		
Endrys Briceno	RHP	B-
4.47 ERA, 5.0 K/9, 3.9 BB/9	22	A
Briceno is more of an upside pick. He's 6'5" and just 150, meaning he will certainly add to his mid-90s velocity, and he already has an intriguing three-pitch mix that generates ground balls despite his iffy command.		
Daniel Fields	CF	B-
.284/.356/.435, 10 HR, 24 SB	23	AA
Athletic, flashes above average power, plus speed. Much improved fielder, high upside.		
Kevin Ziomek	LHP	B-
4.50 ERA, 3.4 K/9, 5.6 BB/9	22	Low-A
Great command, with at least average off-speeds. Mechanics may bump him to relief.		
Drew VerHagen	RHP	B-
2.90 ERA, 5.3 K/9, 3.1 BB/9	23	AA
Gets a ton of ground balls with his delivery, but a lack of quality off-speeds hurts him.		
Tyler Collins	LF	B-
.240/.323/.438, 21 HR, 4 SB	24	AA
Added much more power at the cost of his average. Great discipline but average tools.		



TORONTO BLUE JAYS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Jose Reyes						SS
.296	.353	.427	10	15	2.2	
Melky Cabrera						LF
.279	.322	.360	3	2	-0.9	
Edwin Encarnacion						1B
.272	.370	.534	36	7	4.1	
Jose Bautista						RF
.259	.358	.498	28	7	4.2	
Adam Lind						DH
.288	.357	.497	23	1	1.8	
Brett Lawrie						3B
.254	.315	.397	11	9	1.3	
Colby Rasmus						CF
.276	.338	.501	22	0	4.8	
Dioner Navarro						C
.300	.365	.492	13	0	1.7	
Ryan Goins						2B
.252	.264	.345	2	0	0.4	
Anthony Gose						OF
.259	.283	.403	2	4	-0.3	
Maicer Izturis						IF
.236	.288	.310	5	1	-2.1	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
R.A. Dickey						RHP
4.21	4.58	1.24	224.2	177	2.0	
Brandon Morrow						RHP
5.63	5.42	1.49	54.1	42	-0.1	
Mark Buehrle						LHP
4.15	4.10	1.35	203.2	139	2.5	
Drew Hutchison						RHP
4.31	3.26	1.31	56.1	62	--*	
J.A. Happ						LHP
4.56	4.31	1.47	92.2	77	1.2	
Casey Janssen						RHP
2.56	2.74	0.99	52.2	50	1.3	
Steve Delabar						RHP
3.22	2.79	1.35	58.2	82	1.4	

*Minor League Statistics



Rick Osentoski - USA TODAY Sports

Fool me once shame on you

Toronto had high hopes last year but only went 74-88. They still have the talent to go far, though, if Murphy's Law doesn't strike again.

Last season, I predicted that the Blue Jays would go to the World Series. Turns out that was a fairly poor prediction, as they finished 14 games below .500. But I still stand by my logic of going with a team that has five (at one point) good starting pitchers and plenty of hitting.

I even finished off the Jays' profile with this gem: "There's not much to dislike about this team, unless you have a sneaking suspicion that (R.A.) Dickey, (Jose) Bautista, Edwin Encarnacion, and Melky Cabrera will all come crashing down to Earth at the same time."

So I was half right. Bautista and

Encarnacion were great—other than the 64 combined games they missed—but Dickey and Cabrera did go full-Hindenburg along with J.P. Arencibia, Maicer Izturis, Josh Johnson, Brett Lawrie, Brandon Morrow, Jose Reyes, and Ricky Romero.

But this sets up the Blue Jays for a terrific turnaround—much like the one the Red Sox had last year. And no, I'm just making that comparison because I like talking about Boston. Like we saw with the 2012 Red Sox, everything that could go wrong did go wrong.

What looked to be one of the best rotations in the league fell flat on its face as

TORONTO BLUE JAYS



Johnson and Morrow pitched awfully for the brief time they were healthy, Dickey ran up a 4.66 ERA through July because back issues forced him to throw a harder knuckleball with less movement, and Romero was relegated to the minor leagues after catching a bad case of Steve Blass Disease. Even Mark Buehrle had the third-highest ERA of his career.

Production nosedived on offense too. Reyes lasted ten games before landing on the 60-day DL with an ankle injury, and the rest of the offense had a down year, partly thanks to a team BABIP of .284 (27th in the majors) that should correct itself next year.

On a bell curve of possibilities for how a season goes, Toronto's 2013 probably falls around the 5th to 10th percentile. I'm not saying the Blue Jays will be due for a 95th or 90th percentile year in 2014, but even a 50th percentile year is a massive jump from their 74-88 campaign.

Some of the Jays' improvements will come from off-season moves. Last year's catching tandem of Arencibia and Josh Thole combined to have a .253 wOBA and a -1.1 WAR. Not to be outdone, Izturis posted a -2.1 WAR playing around the infield. That trio is replaced by Dioner Navarro and literally anyone not named Izturis at second base (Ryan

Goins looks like the favorite). That alone is a swing in 8.4 WAR over a full season.

Furthermore, Toronto will get another boost from their young players. Although Adam Lind or Buehrle are not improving at this point, young players like Lawrie and Colby Rasmus are bound to keep improving. We've already seen Rasmus take a big leap up last year. Plus, at least one of their young pitchers like Drew Hutchison, Marcus Stroman, Sean Nolin, or eventually Aaron Sanchez will figure their way into the rotation.

This is not all to say that the Blue Jays will win the World Series this year because they were the cruel victim of Murphy's Law last year. But like the Red Sox last year, don't count out a talented team because their entire squad was plagued by injuries and bad seasons.

Players like Morrow, Cabrera, Reyes, and Lawrie are too talented net 2.5 WAR again this season. If things don't go disastrously again, this team is set up to be just as good as—if not better than—last year's team was projected to be. It's the exact same group of players minus the bad eggs at second and catcher.

You can see the pieces of a great team (Dickey's 2012, Morrow's 2012, Rasmus' 2013, Encarnacion's 2013...); they just need to string them together into the season.

Strengths of the System

The Blue Jays' system is littered with high-upside players they've gambled on in recent drafts. They're headlined by Sanchez with his ace stuff but back-of-the-rotation control, but Norris may be the most interesting pitcher in their system. A rival scout said his stuff is "through the roof" but the key will be reining in his delivery, which has serious mechanical flaws.

The Jays also have intriguing upside in their up-the middle bats. Davis and Barreto don't have much in the way of power, but good bat speed makes things promising for the two youngsters. Betting on upside is good, but they need to have baseball instincts and acumen, too.

Weaknesses of the System

Toronto used to have one of the strongest minor league systems in the league, but they liquidated much of their assets when they traded for R.A. Dickey, Jose Reyes, and Mark Buehrle last year. Noah Syndergaard and Travis d'Arnaud are both top-50 MLB prospects in New York, and Jake Marisnick played a large chunk of last season in the majors for Miami. Justin Nicolino isn't much farther behind.

Instead of having those guys close to contributing now, the Jays are left with lower upside guys like Jimenez and Nolan and lower probability guys like Davis and Tirado. It's just hard to replace that much talent in a short time frame.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Aaron Sanchez	RHP	A-
2.88 ERA, 7.9 K/9, 4.2 BB/9	21	High-A
Gets lots of ground balls with plus sinker, curve. Ace potential, some command issues.		
Marcus Stroman	RHP	B+
3.28 ERA, 10.4 K/9, 2.2 BB/9	23	AA
Stuff isn't the issue here; his fastball, slider, cutter, change all potentially grade out as plus. The issue is he's 5'9", which means he will be prone to fly balls and likely won't be consistently durable for 200 innings.		
Daniel Norris	LHP	B
3.97 ERA, 9.9 K/9, 4.6 BB/9	21	High-A
Command sharpened in the second half, but he still has some issues. Top-notch arsenal.		
Mitch Nay	3B	B
.300/.364/.426, 6 HR, 0 SB	20	Rookie
Hit, power, arm strength tools are all above-average. Improved bat will carry his value.		
Sean Nolin	LHP	B
3.25 ERA, 10.2 K/9, 2.9 BB/9	24	MLB
Deception and control make up for lack of velocity. Plus changeup, future workhorse.		
Franklin Barreto	SS	B
.276/.343/.482, 4 HR, 10 SB	18	Rookie
High upside with great bat speed. 5'9" size will limit power, ability to play shortstop.		
Alberto Tirado	RHP	B-
1.68 ERA, 8.2 K/9, 3.7 BB/9	19	Rookie
Up to 98, but off-speeds need work. Needs to command the inside of the plate better.		
Roberto Osuna	RHP	B-
5.53 ERA, 10.8 K/9, 3.7 BB/9	19	Rookie
Would rank above Tirado on pure stuff, but he's out for 2014 with Tommy John Surgery.		
D.J. Davis	CF	B-
.240/.323/.418, 6 HR, 13 SB	19	Rookie
Nice combination of speed and raw power, but a lack of a hit tool hinders production.		
A.J. Jimenez	C	C+
.287/.332/.406, 4 HR, 1 SB	24	AAA
Health has been an issue, but he's a stud on defense. Hits for some average, no power.		



OAKLAND ATHLETICS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Coco Crisp						CF
.261	.335	.444	22	21	3.9	
Josh Donaldson						3B
.301	.384	.499	24	5	7.7	
Jed Lowrie						SS
.290	.344	.446	15	1	3.6	
Yoenis Cespedes						LF
.240	.400	.442	26	7	2.3	
Brandon Moss						1B
.256	.337	.522	30	4	1.9	
Josh Reddick						RF
.226	.307	.379	12	9	2.7	
John Jaso						DH
.271	.387	.372	3	2	1.2	
Derek Norris						C
.246	.345	.409	9	5	2.0	
Eric Sogard						2B
.266	.322	.364	2	10	1.3	
Craig Gentry						LF
.300	.400	.500	50	50	10.0	
Alberto Callaspo						IF
.258	.333	.369	10	0	0.6	



Gene J. Puskar - AP Photo

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Sonny Gray						RHP
2.67	2.70	1.11	64.0	67	1.5	
Scott Kazmir						LHP
4.04	3.51	1.32	158.0	162	2.5	
A.J. Griffin						RHP
3.83	4.55	1.13	200.0	171	1.4	
Dan Straily						LHP
3.96	4.05	1.24	152.1	124	1.9	
Jesse Chavez						RHP
3.92	3.01	1.22	57.1	55	0.7	
Jim Johnson						RHP
2.94	3.45	1.28	70.1	56	0.9	
Ryan Cook						RHP
2.54	2.74	1.29	67.1	67	1.6	

Betting on thin margins

The A's have done incredibly well the considering their tight budget the past two seasons, but injuries and regression may test their luck.

MLB.com ran a (dumb) contest at the end of the off-season called Face of MLB, in which one player from each team battled in a Twitter vote to see who is the Face of MLB. Oakland's Eric Sogard nearly won the contest, leading by 10 percentage points with an hour to go but was ousted by David Wright 51-49 with five minutes to spare.

Did you know who Eric Sogard was before reading this? Did you even know MLB.com was running this promotion?

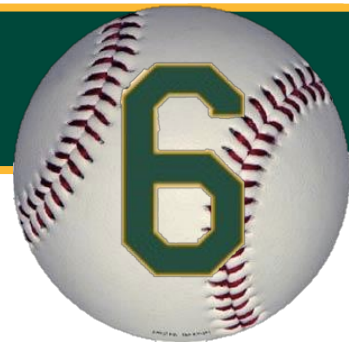
For the 99% of you who (rightly) don't know who he is, Sogard is a 27-year old glasses-wearing, nerd-nicknamed, career .297 OBP utility infielder. Sogard knocked

off Anthony Rizzo, Troy Tulowitzki, Buster Posey, and Jose Bautista along the way, fueled by internet trolls wanting to ruin MLB.com's (ridiculous) tournament. I know for sure it wasn't Athletics fans voting because they were one of eight teams to attract less than 2 million fans all season.

On the surface, Sogard seems like one of the worst players to represent the A's, especially with players like Yoenis Cespedes and Josh Donaldson on roster. Oh? You don't know those players either? Well that's exactly why Sogard was the best player to represent Oakland.

The Athletics are a rag-tag group of

OAKLAND ATHLETICS



players that most fans haven't even heard of. Did you know that the A's had the players with the third-highest WAR in the league last year? Donaldson went from a complete unknown with a sub-.300 OBP to a complete unknown who could hit .300 with nice power.

To most fans, the A's were a team with the old, fat pitcher (since departed Bartolo Colon), those guys with the beards (Josh Reddick and Derek Norris), the guy named after a cereal (Coco Crisp), and bunch of Joe Schmos.

Although they lack the star power of three other teams in their division (hint: not the Astros) and worked with the fifth-smallest payroll in baseball last year, the Athletics built a team to fit their spacious ballpark that was good enough to win their division for the second year in a row, proving critics wrong, including myself, who called them "an island of misfit toys" in last year's preview.

The Athletics had 19 players with at least 1 WAR last year, allowing them to masterfully use platoons. Only the World Champion Red Sox bested that. The big difference, though, was that the Red Sox spent an average of \$7.7 million on those 19 players, while the A's spent less than \$2 million average on their 18 players.

In terms of building a team around their field, the Athletics play half their

games in a field with a giant outfield and the largest foul ground in baseball that allows the 5th-least runs and 6th-least home runs in the league. This means that the Athletics can use lots of flyball pitchers and athletic outfielders.

And that's exactly what they've done lately. Though most teams prefer ground ball pitchers because they lead to less balls in the air with a chance to leave the park, it's not such a big risk at a large stadium like O.co Coliseum. With that in mind, the A's had the staff with by far the lowest ground ball rate; their 39.5% ground ball rate, while the 2nd-worst Royals had a 41.8% rate.

The A's accentuated that trend by bringing in Scott Kazmir and his 39.1% career ground ball rate and trading ground ball machine Brett Anderson for reclamation project and fly ball aficionado Drew Pomeranz. With plus defenders Cespedes, Crisp, and Reddick, the A's are just exploiting their ballpark.

But as great a team as they've created within the restrictions of their budget and ballpark, their talent is still limited, especially with Jarrod Parker out for the season with Tommy John surgery again. And with teams like Texas and Toronto muscling up, I just can't see this team scrapping together a third straight playoff appearance.

Strengths of the System

After graduating or trading four of their top ten prospects last year (Michael Choice, Sonny Gray, Dan Straily, and Grant Green), the Athletics have done a great job replenishing their system in the past two drafts, where seven of their top ten prospects this season come from.

They've added up-the-middle talent at the top of each the two drafts in Russell, Robertson, and McKinney and also added a pair of power bats in Olson and Muncy. Even Wahl and Covey look like major league pitchers. The duo of college starters should each have a solid chance to stick as starters, and if they don't, they'll be very good relievers..

Weaknesses of the System

Other than Russell, who is the sixth-ranked prospect in baseball, the A's ironically don't really have that many athletic players. McKinney has the instincts to stick in center field but doesn't have the blazing speed of a prototypical center fielder. Even Robertson, who is at shortstop for now, probably doesn't have the lateral quickness to stick at the position.

There's nothing wrong with betting on hitters who consistently show quality bats or pitchers with consistent track records in college, but Oakland's players-specifically their hitters—don't have the upside of, say, the Rangers prospects because they aren't as physically gifted.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Addison Russell SS A

.269/.369/.495, 17 HR, 21 SB 20 AAA

Excellent bat, power, speed. Great hands defensively, athletic enough to stick at SS.

Daniel Robertson SS B

.277/.353/.401, 9 HR, 1 SB 20 A

Bat is great for a shortstop, but he probably ends up at third, where he's more average.

Raul Alcantara RHP B

3.11 ERA, 7.1 K/9, 1.4 BB/9 21 High-A

Up to 95 with two nice secondary offerings. Missing more bats, showing better control.

Billy McKinney CF B

.326/.387/.437, 3 HR, 8 SB 19 Low-A

Bat is only plus tool, but it's strong. May stick in center because of strong instincts.

Michael Ynoa RHP B

3.69 ERA, 8.1 K/9, 4.2 BB/9 22 High-A

Big frame, big velocity, big upside. Command and off-speeds behind because of injuries.

Bobby Wahl RHP B

4.15 ERA, 11.6 K/9, 3.3 BB/9 22 Low-A

Plus velocity and slider, although changeup lags behind. Has faced lots of small injuries.

Renato Nuñez 3B B-

.258/.301/.423, 19 HR, 2 SB 22 A

Quick bat speed brings big power, although he's too aggressive. Strong arm, poor range.

Dylan Covey RHP B-

3.79 ERA, 7.0 K/9, 2.7 BB/9 22 A

Covey was Milwaukee's 14th overall pick in 2010 but chose to go to college when he found out he had Diabetes. His stock fell since then, but he still has low-90s velocity with nice sink and a solid four-pitch mix.

Matt Olson 1B B-

.225/.326/.435, 23 HR, 4 SB 20 A

Big three true outcomes guy, needs better pitch recognition. Long swing, quick bat.

Max Muncy 1B B-

.273/.381/.476, 25 HR, 1 SB 23 AA

Very patient with plus power. Less home run power than Olson. Limited defensively.



LOS ANGELES ANGELS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Kole Calhoun						RF
.282	.347	.462	8	2	1.1	
Mike Trout						CF
.323	.432	.557	27	33	10.4	
Albert Pujols						1B
.258	.330	.437	17	1	0.7	
Josh Hamilton						LF
.250	.307	.432	21	4	1.9	
David Freese						3B
.262	.340	.381	9	1	0.3	
Raul Ibañez						DH
.242	.306	.487	29	0	0.0	
Howie Kendrick						2B
.297	.335	.439	13	6	2.7	
Chris Iannetta						C
.225	.358	.372	11	0	2.1	
Erick Aybar						SS
.271	.301	.382	6	12	1.6	
J.B. Shuck						OF
.293	.331	.366	2	8	0.5	
Grant Green						IF
.250	.301	.343	1	0	-0.1	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Jered Weaver						RHP
3.27	3.82	1.14	154.1	117	2.4	
C.J. Wilson						LHP
3.39	3.51	1.34	212.1	188	3.3	
Hector Santiago						LHP
3.56	4.44	1.40	149.0	137	1.5	
Garrett Richards						RHP
4.16	3.66	1.34	145.0	101	1.5	
Tyler Skaggs						LHP
5.12	4.86	1.37	38.2	36	0.1	
Ernesto Frieri						RHP
3.80	3.72	1.24	68.2	98	0.7	
Sean Burnett						LHP
0.93	4.19	1.34	9.2	7	-0.1	



Jae C. Hong - AP Photo

Minor fixes to a major problem

LA ran into trouble throwing money at their potent offense without addressing their pitching. They're finally making some progress.

Baseball is a funny sport. Mike Trout led the majors in WAR by a very large margin—his 10.4 WAR was 2.2 higher than anyone else—yet he just made \$510,000, ten grand over the minimum. The seven highest-paid players in the league totaled just 15.5 WAR last year, and they cost a whopping \$171.8 million.

The lesson we've learned is that teams really don't spend money well. The best players usually enter free agency past their prime, so their blockbuster deals end up looking terrible. We also learned that the best player in the world is 21 and therefore on a wonderfully team-friendly deal.

Having Trout over the past few years has been nothing short of a blessing for the Angels. But at the same time, the Angels have also wasted mountains of cash on free agents that have kept them out of contention.

Albert Pujols and Josh Hamilton are still owed \$310 million with 12 combined years left on their contracts. Yet in the three total seasons they've been in LA, the two have combined for just 6.3 WAR, including just 2.6 WAR between the two of them last season. When teams invest so much of their payroll into fairly unproductive players, it's very hard to compete.

LOS ANGELES ANGELS



Despite the two failures of Space Shuttle Columbian proportions, the lineup still remained one of the best in baseball last season: Los Angeles was fourth in the league in wOBA and wRC+. Sure, some of the names are different this year—Mark Trumbo, Peter Borjous, and Alberto Callaspo are out and Kole Calhoun, Raul Ibanez, and David Freese are in—but the fact remains that this offense was incredibly strong without any significant contributions from two of its most talented hitters.

But as was said last year, hitting is not the issue with this team. The Angels have been one of the better offensive teams now for years. The issue is a pitching staff that ranked 24th in pitching WAR for the last two years.

Last year they ran into trouble because they let Zack Greinke, Ervin Santana, and Dan Haren go and only brought in Tommy Hanson and Joe “My Massive Goatee Covers Up My Double Chins” Blanton. This year, however, they made a strong effort to boost the pitching staff.

Even after trading Bourjos, the Angels still had too many outfielders, so Trumbo became expendable. In shipping him to Arizona, the Angels picked up two key arms: Hector Santiago and Tyler Skaggs.

Santiago doesn’t have overwhelming stuff—his fastball mostly sits below 92 mph—but he has shown at age 26 that he can stick around as a mid- to back-rotation starter, which is better than most of the Angels pitchers last year. The key to the trade, though, was Skaggs, who was originally drafted by LA and traded to Arizona for Haren in 2010. Skaggs has the potential to be a top of the rotation starter, something the Angels have lacked from their own system since Jered Weaver made his debut in 2006.

It’s clear that the Angels have addressed their biggest weakness—starting pitching—but it’s unclear how much that improvement will change their playoff chances.

My retrospective analysis system said last year’s Angels should have had a 82.5-79.5 record, 4.5 wins better than their actual record. That, combined with the improved pitching and low chance of Pujols and Hamilton being so bad for another season gives the Angels a prayer at making the playoffs for the first time since 2009. But then again, the rest of their players after Trout are well past their prime—even top of the rotation starters Weaver and C.J. Wilson—making it hard to see much improvement and a playoff birth in their future.

Strengths of the System

The good segment of the Angels’ farm system basically comes down to three players who are years away from the majors: Green, Rondon, and Ricardo Sanchez.

Green probably should have been a first-round pick last year, but the high school arm out of Kentucky feel to LA in the second round. Rondon has a solid upside as a plus defender with a possibly average bat, and Sanchez was the Angels’ top international signee. But at the same time, they’re all so far away from the majors, especially Sanchez. The 17-year old is under six feet tall but already touches 90 mph and has plenty of room to fill out and improve his arsenal.

Weaknesses of the System

There’s no easy way to put this: the Angels farm system is really bad. Like it might just be the worst grouping of minor league players in baseball. They don’t have a top-100 prospects in baseball, and it’s not even close.

Cowart was a borderline top-50 prospect last season, but his previously thought of plus bat completely deserted him. At this point he looks like a plus defender who ends up a utility infielder. The Angels have a couple of interesting pitchers, but they all profile as relievers. This is the type of thing that happens when teams sign a lot of free agents and forfeit all their top draft picks.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Taylor Lindsey	2B	B
.274/.339/.441, 17 HR, 4 SB	22	AA
Hitting for more power at the cost of hitting for average. Solid all-around, low ceiling.		
Kaleb Cowart	3B	B-
.221/.279/.301, 6 HR, 14 SB	22	AA
Athletic with a strong arm, but his bat has completely disappeared. Age is on his side.		
C.J. Cron	1B	B-
.274/.319/.428, 14 HR, 8 SB	24	AA
His overall production in a vacuum wasn’t terrible, but considering the standards for first base, his age, and his drop in power (27 to 14 home runs), there are serious questions about whether he’ll pan out.		
Hunter Green	LHP	B-
4.32 ERA, 5.9 K/9, 8.6 BB/9	18	Rookie
Highest upside in the system; command and mechanics need work. Two solid off-speeds.		
Mark Sappington	RHP	B-
3.45 ERA, 7.8 K/9, 4.7 BB/9	23	AA
Durable, back-of-the-rotation type. Sinker-slider combination generates ground balls.		
R.J. Alvarez	RHP	B-
3.53 ERA, 14.0 K/9, 4.5 BB/9	23	High-A
Future closer. Gets a lot of whiffs with a max effort delivery. Command tends to wobble.		
Jose Rondon	SS	B-
.293/.359/.399, 1 HR, 13 SB	20	Rookie
Excellent defender with gap power. Good eye leads to solid contact, plenty of walks.		
Alex Yarbrough	2B	C+
.313/.341/.459, 11 HR, 14 SB	22	High-A
Bat may grade out as plus plus, but the rest of his tools are mediocre. Won’t take walks.		
Eric Stamets	SS	C+
.281/.335/.375, 4 HR, 13 SB	22	High-A
Strong defender with solid speed. Struggles to hit against righties, lacks much power.		
Zach Borenstein	LF	C+
.337/.403/.631, 28 HR, 5 SB	23	High-A
Poor defensively, but will hit for power. Numbers are deceiving but still promising.		



NEW YORK YANKEES

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Jacoby Ellsbury						CF
.298	.355	.426	9	52	5.8	
Derek Jeter						SS
.180	.288	.254	1	0	-0.6	
Carlos Beltran						RF
.296	.339	.491	24	2	2.0	
Mark Teixeira						1B
.151	.270	.340	3	0	-0.2	
Brian McCann						C
.256	.336	.461	20	0	2.7	
Alfonso Soriano						DH
.255	.302	.489	34	18	2.9	
Kelly Johnson						3B
.235	.305	.410	16	7	1.2	
Brian Roberts						2B
.249	.312	.392	8	3	0.9	
Brett Gardner						LF
.273	.344	.416	8	24	3.2	
Ichiro Suzuki						OF
.262	.297	.342	7	20	1.1	
Brendan Ryan						IF
.197	.255	.273	4	4	-0.6	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
CC Sabathia						LHP
4.78	4.10	1.37	211.0	175	2.7	
Masahiro Tanaka						RHP
1.27	2.19	0.94	212.0	183	--*	
Hiroki Kuroda						RHP
3.31	3.56	1.16	201.1	150	3.8	
Ivan Nova						RHP
3.10	3.47	1.28	139.1	116	2.5	
Michael Pineda						RHP
3.32	3.71	1.11	40.2	26	..°	
David Robertson						RHP
2.04	2.61	1.04	66.1	77	1.6	
Shawn Kelley						RHP
4.39	.63	1.31	53.1	71	0.5	

*Japanese Pacific League Stats °Minor League Stats



Patrick McDermott – Getty Images

Buying their way into contention

The Yankees' aging, expensive team only won 85 games last year, so New York spent almost a half billion dollars to rejoin the playoff hunt.

We've seen this movie before. The New York Yankees spent \$486 million this off-season, including \$413 million on just three players. The question is if the ending will be any different.

Five years ago, the Yankees had a very similar winter. Coming off an 89-win season, their first time out the playoffs since 1993, the Yankees spent \$448 million, including \$424 million on CC Sabathia, Mark Teixeira, and A.J. Burnett. They ended up winning an astonishing 103 games and the World Series, their first since the turn of the century.

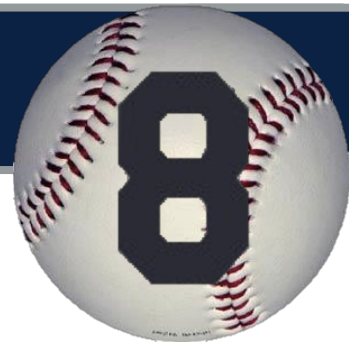
This time, the names are different—the Yankees signed Masahiro Tanaka, Jacoby

Ellsbury, and Brian McCann—but the story is the same. New York is coming off an 85-win season, their first time missing the playoffs since 2009. It's déjà vu all over again—so this means championship number 28 in the Bronx, no?

Well, clearly by the way I've ranked the American League, you can't tell I don't believe that's true.

Although nine-figure deals rarely work out, to be fair to the Yankees, they've been spending their money on young players with years left in their prime. Ellsbury and McCann are 30 years old and Tanaka is just 25 years old. But at the same time, all that

NEW YORK YANKEES



money could be spent much more effectively.

Despite the fact that the Yankees dropped a half billion dollars this winter, they're starting Kelly Johnson and Brendan Ryan with either Alfonso Soriano or Ichiro Suzuki at DH. What's more is the back of their rotation and entire bullpen still looks like a mess.

Hell, even Derek Jeter and Mark Teixeira were below replacement level last season in their limited action.

Yes, New York has all sorts of star power—the kind of lineup that would make any kid with MLB '08 The Show giddy—but they're also toeing the line between collecting stars and collecting former stars.

I have no doubts in Ellsbury, McCann, Brett Gardner, Tanaka or even Carlos Beltran this year. But the rest of the lineup has so many question marks that no longer can be covered up by throwing money at it. We know the Yankees don't really have bottomless pockets—they let Robinson Cano go because the Mariners offered him a sizably bigger contract.

As glamorous as spending \$412 million on three players is, the Yankees could have spent their money more wisely by signing many players to smaller deals. The Yanks could've had Jhonny Peralta, Stephen Drew, Ricky

Nolasco, and Matt Garza with well over \$200 million left to spend.

But for now, the Yankees still have a talented team. Through big spending, they've separated themselves as a playoff contender. Assuming Sabathia's falling ground ball rate, rising home run rate, and falling velocity are temporary setbacks, the Yankees will have three top-of-the-rotation pitchers, better than most teams can say. And with seven hitters with a 4-WAR season in the past four seasons (plus Jeter and Roberts), this lineup has the potential to be scary.

But as always seems to be the problem, the Yankees will be at the mercy of the health of their lineup with an average age of 33.7 years old and no player under 30.

The Bronx Bombers will be far more talented this year with their new acquisitions, but they were also lucky to be as good as they were in 2013. According to RAWs, the Yankees should only have gone 77.7-84.3 last year, and their 7.3-win gap between actual and projected record was the second worst in baseball. Much of that had to do with going 30-16 in one-run games, tough to replicate, especially without Mariano Rivera. They'll compete, but I doubt they have the legs to keep up with Boston, Tampa Bay or even Toronto.

Strengths of the System

The Yankees are overflowing with high-upside bats, especially in the outfield. They already have Jacoby Ellsbury and Brett Gardner penciled in for the foreseeable future, but Williams, Austin, Heathcott, and Judge all have the potential to be everyday outfielders as well.

It's not just in the outfield, though, the Yankees also are strong at catcher and third base, two positions for which they have no long-term answers. Murphy looks more like a backup catcher because he can't consistently get on base, but Sanchez is one of the higher upside Yankee prospects in years, despite coming off a down season.

Weaknesses of the System

As high-upside as the Yankees prospects are, they all had seasons that fell somewhere on a spectrum between 'absolutely dreadful' and 'not ideal.'

Heathcott continued the narrative that his all-out play will not support his body long-term because he keeps getting injured. Austin played hurt for most of the year, which zapped his power and held back his fringy bat tool.

Even more disappointing was the poor play from the pitchers. Manny Banuelos missed the entire season, Ty Hensley missed most of the season, and Jose Ramirez missed time with injuries too.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
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Gary Sanchez	C	B+
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.253/.324/.412, 15 HR, 3 SB	21	AA
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Huge arm makes up for average mechanics. Big-time power, but hasn't lived up to tools.

Mason Williams	CF	B
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.245/.304/.337, 4 HR, 15 SB	22	AA
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Very good defender thanks to plus speed, but bat disappeared last year. No power.

Tyler Austin	RF	B
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.265/.351/.378, 6 HR, 4 SB	22	AA
----------------------------	----	----

Above-average power zapped by a wrist injury. Bat carries all value, so he's risky.

Eric Jagielo	3B	B
---------------------	-----------	----------

.264/.376/.451, 6 HR, 0 SB	22	Low-A
----------------------------	----	-------

Has impressive power, discipline, and arm strength with a lot of swing-and-miss too.

Slade Heathcott	CF	B-
------------------------	-----------	-----------

.261/.327/.411, 8 HR, 15 SB	23	AA
-----------------------------	----	----

Toolsy, lead by a rocket arm in center, but his all-out style leads to too many injuries.

J.R. Murphy	C	B-
--------------------	----------	-----------

.262/.343/.426, 12 HR, 1 SB	23	MLB
-----------------------------	----	-----

Average bat with improving, but just solid defensive skills. A surefire major leaguer.

Aaron Judge	CF	B-
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Did not play	22	--
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Along with Jagielo and Clarkin, Judge is one of the Yankees three 2013 first-round picks. His' 6'7" frame will inevitably shift him away from center field, but he'll hit for power at a decent on-base percentage.

Ian Clarkin	LHP	B-
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10.80 ERA, 7.2 K/9, 7.2 BB/9	19	Rookie
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Has three intriguing pitches, but command needs work. High upside, has faced injuries.

Greg Bird	1B	B-
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.288/.428/.511, 20 HR, 1 SB	21	A
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Three true outcomes hitter. Good patience and power and will be average in the field.

Luis Severino	RHP	B-
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2.45 ERA, 10.8 K/9, 2.1 BB/9	20	A
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Fastball, slider, changeup all good, but he hasn't shown much durability and is small.



KANSAS CITY ROYALS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Norichika Aoki						RF
.286	.356	.370	8	20	1.7	
Omar Infante						2B
.318	.345	.450	10	5	3.1	
Eric Hosmer						1B
.302	.353	.448	17	11	3.1	
Billy Butler						DH
.289	.374	.412	15	0	1.4	
Alex Gordon						LF
.265	.327	.422	20	11	3.4	
Lorenzo Cain						CF
.251	.310	.348	4	14	2.6	
Mike Moustakas						3B
.233	.287	.364	12	2	1.1	
Salvador Perez						C
.292	.323	.433	13	0	3.7	
Alcides Escobar						SS
.234	.259	.300	4	22	1.1	
Justin Maxwell						OF
.252	.328	.436	7	6	1.1	
Danny Valencia						3B
.304	.335	.553	8	0	0.9	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
James Shields						RHP
3.15	3.47	1.24	228.2	196	4.5	
Jason Vargas						LHP
4.02	4.09	1.39	150.0	109	1.5	
Bruce Chen						LHP
3.27	4.12	1.18	121.0	78	1.4	
Jeremy Guthrie						RHP
4.04	4.79	1.39	211.2	111	1.1	
Yordano Ventura						RHP
3.52	5.33	1.24	15.1	11	0.0	
Greg Holland						RHP
1.21	1.36	0.87	67.0	103	3.2	
Aaron Crow						RHP
3.3	4.34	1.48	48.0	44	-0.1	



Brian Kersey - Getty Images

Just one power bat short

The Royals pushed their chips all-in on a playoff push, and they did improve by fourteen wins last year. But they're still missing one bat.

The Royals sent their franchise in a totally different direction on December 12, 2012 when they traded Wil Myers and prospects for James Shields. By now that seems like old hat, but that singular trade shifted the trajectory of the team for the foreseeable future.

The story's been told a million times, but the Royals traded Myers—who was a top-five prospect in baseball according to every scouting service—for Shields in an effort to spark a playoff run at the cost of mortgaging the future. Trading six, cheap years of a potential All-Star outfielder for two years of a number two starter is rarely

a good idea unless the team is in a position to win a World Series. And that is something the Royals are not.

Coming off a 72-win season, the Royals did drastically improve to 86-76; no one can argue they didn't improve in the short term. Their pitching staff went from having the 8th-worst to the 6th-best ERA, and their batters went from producing the 22nd-most to 16th-most offense WAR. But at the same time, they still finished six games out of the playoffs, while they watched Myers collect AL Rookie of the Year honors in Tampa.

But at this point Myers is gone. That ship has sailed. As much better as the

KANSAS CITY ROYALS



Royals could be going forward with Myers hitting cleanup, there's still plenty of reason to be excited about this team.

For starters, the Royals' 14-win upswing was likely understated. According to RAWs, the KC's production last year should have led to an 88.2-73.8 record. That was better than the Wild Card-winning Cleveland Indians.

A large part of that improvement came from the offense, where the Royals posted their largest offensive WAR total since 1982. Of course, that still left them in the bottom 50% of offensive WAR in baseball, but things have to be taken in context with the Royals.

Eric Hosmer went from a .304 OBP and a -1.7 WAR to having a .302 batting average and 3.1 WAR. They even had six players with at least 2.4 WAR, two more than they had in 2012. But then again, the Royals shockingly high WAR was the product of the 21st-ranked offense and 3rd-ranked defense, and defensive metrics aren't so reliable year-to-year.

If that weren't enough of a damper, cornerstone players across the board regressed. Alex Gordon and Mike Moustakas both dropped at least 2 WAR, while Billy Butler and Alcides Escobar fell 1.5 and 1 WAR respectively.

The bigger reason for the Royals turnaround was their massive

improvement on the mound. Shields helped immensely, but the real surprise was that Ervin Santana tossed a career-low 3.24 ERA over 211 innings in his age 30 season. The only problem now is that he's since departed to the Braves, and the Royals replaced him with Jason Vargas and his career 4.30 ERA.

For now, the Royals are continuing to go all-in on their win-now mantra, signing Omar Infante and trading for Norichika Aoki. While neither player moves the needle too much—and KC will almost certainly regret giving Infante a four-year deal—these are the small but important moves that push them to the brink of Wild Card contention.

Because this team is so young with much room to improve—Hosmer is a major breakout candidate and maybe Moustakas will figure out how to get on base more than 30% of the time—they have the potential to take a leap. But the Shields trade hurts their long-term potential because they only acquired two years of a pitcher when they're clearly not a title contender, and they could have just spent that same money in free agency without giving up a young star. They are still one bat short; if only they had a young right fielder to hit cleanup. Like, I don't know, Wil Myers?

Strengths of the System

The Royals had the strongest farm system in the league a couple years back because of the strength of their bats. Now they have a very strong system because of so many high-ceiling arms.

KC has spent first-round picks each of the past two years on big college arms in Zimmer and Manaea. The latter needs to iron out his control a bit, but both look like future top-of-the-rotation pitchers. Ventura will start out the year in Royals' rotation, but his small stature and fly ball tendencies could force him to be a high-end closer. Even Almonte, who is the furthest away from the majors, looks like at worst a mid-rotation starter.

Weaknesses of the System

While pitching is the strength of the farm system, it's not as if they lack bats. What they do lack, though, is power bats. Which is pretty ironic because they traded off Rookie of the Year Wil Myers last winter who is now hitting cleanup for the Rays.

Bonifacio has the frame of a power hitter, but he hasn't tapped into it yet. Starling has the same issue, except he hasn't reached that power because of a poor swing, while Bonifacio has faced some injuries.

Kansas City also has fairly little talent up the middle. Mondesi and Calixte are great defenders but haven't developed even an average bat yet, although Mondesi has huge upside.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Kyle Zimmer	RHP	A-
4.32 ERA, 11.6 K/9, 3.0 BB/9	22	AA
Plus plus fastball, curve, intriguing slider, change. Had faced some shoulder issues.		
Yordano Ventura	RHP	B+
3.18 ERA, 10.0 K/9, 3.5 BB/9	23	MLB
Fastball up to 100 and a power curve. 5'10" size makes him HR-prone, hurts durability.		
Raul Mondesi	SS	B+
.261/.311/.361, 7 HR, 24 SB	18	A
Held his own at a young age. Very toolsy, great defender, should develop a plus bat.		
Miguel Almonte	RHP	B+
3.10 ERA, 9.1 K/9, 2.5 BB/9	21	A
Impressive fastball-changeup combo. Great control, but needs to improve breaking ball.		
Sean Manaea	LHP	B
Did not play	22	--
Fell in the draft due to injuries and loss in velocity. Normally a 3-pitch power starter.		
Bubba Starling	CF	B
.241/.329/.398, 13 HR, 22 SB	21	A
The 5 th overall pick in 2011 has been a disappointment so far. He's a plus defender with a strong arm and good speed, but mechanical issues in his swing have kept him from tapping into his plus power.		
Jorge Bonifacio	RF	B
.298/.372/.429, 4 HR, 3 SB	21	AA
Broken hamate bone zapped his power, but it should set in soon. Plus arm, bat speed.		
Hunter Dozier	3B	B
.308/.397/.495, 7 HR, 3 SB	22	A
Above-average power potential and well disciplined. May be able to feign shortstop.		
Orlando Calixte	SS	B-
.250/.312/.368, 8 HR, 14 SB	22	AA
Flashy defender with solid speed and nice pop. Plate discipline is holding him back.		
Sam Selman	LHP	B-
3.38 ERA, 9.2 K/9, 6.1 BB/9	23	High-A
Hard to hit with nice sinker/slider combo. Avoids home runs, needs to avoid walks.		



BALTIMORE ORIOLES

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Nick Markakis						RF
.271	.329	.356	10	1	-0.1	
Manny Machado						3B
.283	.314	.432	14	6	6.2	
Chris Davis						1B
.286	.370	.634	53	4	6.8	
Adam Jones						CF
.285	.318	.493	33	14	4.2	
Nelson Cruz						DH
.266	.327	.506	27	5	1.5	
Matt Wieters						C
.235	.287	.417	22	2	2.4	
J.J. Hardy						SS
.263	.306	.433	25	2	3.4	
Ryan Flaherty						2B
.224	.293	.390	10	2	1.4	
Nolan Reimold						LF
.195	.250	.336	5	0	-0.8	
David Lough						OF
.286	.311	.413	5	5	2.4	
Steve Lombardozzi						IF
.259	.278	.338	2	4	-0.7	



Scott Strazzante - Chicago Tribune

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Ubaldo Jimenez						RHP
3.30	3.43	1.33	182.2	194	3.2	
Chris Tillman						RHP
3.71	4.42	1.22	206.1	179	2.0	
Bud Norris						RHP
4.18	3.86	1.49	176.2	147	2.7	
Miguel Gonzalez						RHP
3.78	4.45	1.23	171.1	120	1.7	
Wei-Yin Chen						LHP
4.07	4.04	1.32	137.0	104	2.0	
Tommy Hunter						RHP
2.81	3.68	0.98	86.1	68	0.7	
Darren O'Day						LHP
2.18	3.58	1.00	62.0	59	0.7	

A two-year window to hit

The O's have homegrown hitters, but the pitching remains a mystery. They'd better figure it out soon because they only have two years to win.

A year after breaking the 90-win barrier for the first time since 1997—not to mention breaking the 70-win barrier for the first time since 2006—it's hard not to see 2013 as a disappointment for the O's. Yes, the team was expected to regress, but a drop-off from the playoffs to eighth in the American League is a tough pill to swallow.

There were red flags aplenty after their 2012 campaign. Despite their 93-69 record, they only scored seven more runs than they gave up. Much of the disparity between their excellent record and ordinary run differential was their completely unsustainable 16-2 record in extra innings

and 29-9 record in one-run games.

And we saw their luck come crashing back down to Earth in 2013 when they went 8-7 in extra inning games and 20-31 in one-run games. Although their run differential rocketed up from +7 to +36, they won eight less games.

But if you squint hard enough, there are reasons to be optimistic about the last two seasons. The team's Pythagorean record went up from 82-80 to 85-77, and the team made some nice improvements over the off-season.

Of course, they were improvements the Orioles had to make. As a small market

BALTIMORE ORIOLES



team, their window is closing rapidly with several key players approaching free agency. J.J. Hardy is in the final year of his deal—although Manny Machado could easily slide back to his natural position of shortstop—and Chris Davis and Matt Wieters—who combined for 9.2 WAR last season—are hitting free agency in 2015.

Baltimore made two big free agent acquisitions, making it known that they are pushing their chips all-in on the next two seasons. They sacrificed their first two picks in the 2014 draft to sign Ubaldo Jimenez to a four-year deal and Nelson Cruz to a one-year deal.

After surrendering their first-round pick for Jimenez, the O's only had to give up a second-round pick for Cruz. Their lineup was already great last year—good for fifth in the league in offensive WAR—but the DH spot was a black hole. All their DHs last year combined for just 0.4 WAR and a .304 wOBA—11th in the AL—and Cruz has averaged 2.4 WAR and a .360 wOBA over the past five seasons.

The Jimenez deal fixed a bigger need for the Orioles: pitching. Baltimore starters had the fourth-worst ERA in the league, and none of their top six starters had a FIP under 4.00. The former Indians starter is fairly affordable at \$12.5 million per year, but he still comes

with a lot of risk.

Jimenez was great in Cleveland last year with a 3.30 ERA and career-high strikeout rate, but it's the first time he's pitched that well in a long time. After posting a 2.88 ERA and finishing second in the league in WAR in 2010, Jimenez lost his control and wound up with a 5.03 ERA from 2011-2012. He's always had incredible stuff—upper 90s fastballs with crazy movement—but if he doesn't have his control from the 2013 or 2010 seasons, he's a barely usable pitcher.

Just adding Jimenez won't be enough to turn around the dreadful pitching staff, especially with a weak bullpen thanks to Jim Johnson's departure and Grant Balfour failing his physical. They do have two promising young pitchers in Dylan Bundy and Kevin Gausman, but Bundy is no sure bet to return to form coming off Tommy John surgery, and Gausman's command was missing when he was rushed to the Majors last year.

Baltimore is trending up because of their recent acquisitions, and they likely even trended up in talent level over the past two years, despite their declining record. But the real question is whether they've acquired enough talent to keep up with the rest of the AL, especially in terms of pitching, and I don't see how that is the case.

Strengths of the System

Pitching is the real strength for the Orioles' farm system, which has been an area of focus for GM Dan Duquette since he took over in late 2011. The Orioles' last three first-round picks have all been pitchers (Bundy, Gausman, and Harvey) and are all top-50 prospects. Rodriguez also grades out as at least a mid-rotation starter.

One AL executive doubts the O's use prospects to bolster their weak bullpen because of the high demand for starting pitching. Gausman will be making an impact in the majors at some point this year, but don't expect to see Bundy, who won't pitch until at least June and will mostly focus on setting up for a successful 2015.

Weaknesses of the System

With attention in the draft and international market shifted towards pitching, the Orioles could really use more up-the-middle prospects. Schoop is close to ready to help in the majors (he's being groomed at second and not short anymore), and Marin has high upside with a ways to develop, but after that the system is pretty thing.

Sisco and Michael Ohlman have potential behind the plate—Sisco is especially impressive considering how well he's picking up catching after first starting in his senior year of high school. Really, Baltimore could use more impact bats with Chris Davis, J.J. Hardy, and Matt Wieters set to hit free agency in the next two years.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Pos

Age

Grade

Level

Dylan Bundy

RHP

A-

Did not play in 2013

21

MLB

After reaching the majors in his first year and being the top pitching prospect in the game, he missed 2013 with Tommy John Surgery. Should return to form with 99 mph heat, outstanding off-speeds, command.

Kevin Gausman

RHP

A-

4.30 ERA, 9.1 K/9, 1.9 BB/9

23

MLB

Great fastball and changeup, but breaking ball needs work. Was rushed to the majors.

Hunter Harvey

RHP

B+

1.78 ERA, 11.4 K/9, 2.1 BB/9

19

Low-A

Projectable velocity, promising off-speeds but a long way to go. Son of an MLB closer.

Eduardo Rodriguez

LHP

B

3.61 ERA, 7.9 K/9, 2.7 BB/9

20

AA

Future mid-rotation starter with three at least above-average pitches. Few strikeouts.

Jonathan Schoop

2B

B

.263/.321/.439, 18 HR, 1 SB

22

MLB

Good power, but he won't hit for average. Strong arm allows him to play third, too.

Mike Wright

RHP

B-

3.11 ERA, 8.3 K/9, 2.3 BB/9

24

AAA

Workhorse with underwhelming stuff. He pounds the zone well with a four-pitch mix.

Josh Hart

CF

B-

.218/.302/.286, 0 HR, 11 SB

19

Low-A

Great athlete with plus speed, defensive instincts. Won't have more than gap power.

Chance Sisco

C

B-

.363/.468/.451, 1 HR, 1 SB

19

Low-A

Good receiver, despite starting catching last spring. Should be an above-average hitter.

Adrian Marin

SS

B-

.265/.311/.356, 4 HR, 11 SB

20

A

Excellent defender with a fringy bat, but has time to develop as his frame fills out.

Tim Berry

LHP

C+

3.67 ERA, 7.2 K/9, 2.3 BB/9

23

High-A

Very durable with low 90s fastball, curve could end up plus. Back of the rotation type.



CLEVELAND INDIANS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Michael Bourn						CF
.263	.316	.360	6	23	2.0	
Nick Swisher						1B
.246	.341	.423	22	1	2.4	
Jason Kipnis						2B
.284	.366	.452	17	30	4.5	
Carlos Santana						DH
.268	.377	.455	20	3	3.6	
Michael Brantley						LF
.284	.332	.396	10	17	1.7	
Asdrubal Cabrera						SS
.242	.299	.402	14	9	0.6	
David Murphy						RF
.220	.282	.374	13	1	0.4	
Yan Gomes						C
.294	.345	.481	1	2	3.7	
Lonnie Chisenhall						3B
.225	.270	.398	11	1	0.5	
Ryan Raburn						OF
.272	.357	.543	16	0	2.5	
Mike Aviles						IF
.252	.282	.368	9	8	0.3	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Justin Masterson						RHP
3.45	3.35	1.20	193.0	195	3.4	
Corey Kluber						RHP
3.85	3.30	1.26	147.1	136	2.7	
Zach McAllister						RHP
3.75	4.03	1.36	134.1	101	1.5	
Danny Salazar						RHP
3.12	3.16	1.13	52.0	65	1.2	
Carlos Carrasco						RHP
6.75	4.10	1.76	46.2	30	0.2	
John Axford						RHP
4.02	4.34	1.52	65.0	65	-0.5	
Cody Allen						RHP
2.43	2.99	1.25	70.1	88	1.0	



Tony Dejak - AP Photo

Regression meets lesser talent

The Tribe needed good fortune to get to 92 wins in 2013, and they lost a lot of pitching this winter. They'll need even more good future in 2014.

The Indians were one of the biggest surprises of 2013, going from the fifth-worst team to a Wild Card winner. Even though they lacked the Detroit Tigers' big names, they finished just one game out for the AL Central crown. But despite their magical season, don't expect a repeat season; this team is a major candidate for regression.

Perhaps the reason few prognosticators predicted the Indians to do so well last year is because they weren't actually such a talented team. According to RAWS, the Indians' production last year was equal to that of just a 87.1-74.9 team—nearly a five-

win drop from their actual record. That five-win gap was the fourth-biggest difference between projected record and actual record in the majors last year.

The hiring of Terry Francona, a two-time World Champion who never won less than 86 games in eight years in Boston, certainly made a difference for this team. But while having a strong managerial presence can mean a lot, a 10-2 record in extra innings and 30-17 record in one-run games is completely unsustainable. That, and their late season streakiness—winning 20 of their last 25, including their final 10—go a long way to explaining the

CLEVELAND INDIANS



shockingly good season.

Overall, Cleveland did not have an especially talented team last year; They finished 15th in baseball in offensive WAR and 16th in pitching WAR. Their third-worst ranked defense that features the entire starting lineup except for Nick Swisher posting a negative UZR didn't help at all.

To make matters worse, they didn't make any acquisitions of note this winter to remedy those middling rankings, unless you're a big fan of John Axford's mustache from early 2012.

After spending nine-figures on Nick Swisher and Michael Bourn last winter, the Indians depleted their free agency budget, thus letting Ubaldo Jimenez and the suddenly-back-from-the-dead Scott Kazmir walk in free agency. All that Cleveland did this winter was sign David Murphy to a one-year deal, and he stumbled to a .289 wOBA, even in hitter-friendly Arlington, last year.

What remains in Cleveland is a group of low-power hitters and relatively untrustworthy starters.

Jason Kipnis will forever go unappreciated as a player who does everything very well but nothing spectacularly, and Carlos Santana can flat-out mash but lacks a position he can pass at on defense, but the rest of the

lineup is very non-descript.

The left side of their infield—Lonnie Chisenhall and Asdrubal Cabrera—only had a .289 OBP last year, and their entire starting outfield had a combined 26 home runs in 1667 plate appearances. The team's one bright spot, Yan Gomes, hit extremely well in his half-season as a starter but does not project to be even an average starter by most scouts.

Their lineup has all sorts of holes, but the Indians' bigger problem lies in the rotation. Cleveland's starting pitching was already a tad shaky before Jimenez and Kazmir left for greener pastures—or less-fiery rivers, perhaps—and its only additions were Aaron Harang and Shaun Marcum on minor league deals. Danny Salazar should be exciting in his first full season—he was tied for the hardest throwing starter with at least 50 innings last year—but his stamina will be strongly tested. After all, it took him ten starts to break the 50-inning barrier last year.

What the Indians did last year was amazing, and it's hard to doubt Francona. But this team was already bound for regression before they let their already weak pitching thin out and didn't address their lack of power. It's just hard to see where this team has improved from last season.

Strengths of the System

The Indians have a fairly average farm system, but its very top-heavy with several top-notch prospects. Lindor doesn't have much more to prove in the minors, and he's a bad Asdrubal Cabrera April away from taking over at shortstop for good. Bauer's velocity looked much better this spring and is at worst the third-most talented pitcher on the team. Of course, his command has been one of the worst one the team.

After those two and Clint Frazier, there's not a ton to be excited about. One rival scout does like Anthony Santander as a sleeper, though, citing a great, powerful swing from both sides of the plate.

Weaknesses of the System

Cleveland has a lot of bats, but very few of them can hit well. Naquin has improved his defense to the point he can realistically stay in center field, but he'll never hit more than 15 homers or steal more than 15 bases.

This sentiment is especially true with their glut of middle infield prospects. Paulino, Ramirez, and Ronny Rodriguez all have the tools to be at least average hitters, but things haven't quite clicked yet. Even center fielder Luigi Rodriguez and catcher Wolters haven't been able to generate much power, let alone hit for average. The saving grace for Cleveland is that these prospects still play prime positions and have decent raw tools.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Francisco Lindor	SS	A
.303/.380/.407, 2 HR, 25 SB	20	AA
Has four tools, although no power. One of the best gloves around, great on-base skills.		
Clint Frazier	RF	B+
.297/.362/.506, 5 HR, 3 SB	19	Rookie
Lightning quick hands lead to huge power. Average runner, fielder, value all in his bat.		
Trevor Bauer	RHP	B+
4.29 ERA, 7.6 K/9, 5.8 BB/9	23	MLB
Lost all control last year, but still has 97 mph heat, three potential plus off-speeds.		
Cody Anderson	RHP	B
2.65 ERA, 8.1 K/9, 2.7 BB/9	23	AA
Big frame, velocity up with plus command that plays up his average four-pitch mix.		
Tyler Naquin	CF	B
.269/.334/.405, 10 HR, 15 SB	23	AA
Defense improved to the point he can stick in center, but bat may only be just average.		
Dorsyys Paulino	SS	B
.246/.297/.349, 5 HR, 12 SB	19	A
Young for his level, average fielder. Bat speed makes up for aggressive approach.		
Jose Ramirez	2B	B
.273/.328/.353, 3 HR, 38 SB	21	MLB
Switch hitter with nice pop and plus speed. Rarely strikes out, but doesn't walk much.		
Tony Wolters	C	B-
.277/.369/.353, 3 HR, 3 SB	22	High-A
Converted shortstop with a ways to go on defense. Controls the zone but lacks power.		
Luigi Rodriguez	CF	C+
.275/.368/.370, 1 HR, 8 SB	21	High-A
Rodriguez had been ranked as a top six prospects by me the last two years, but he hurt his shoulder and lost power last season. He'll run and defend well, but he needs his hit or power tool to come back.		
Ronny Rodriguez	SS	C+
.265/.291/.376, 5 HR, 12 SB	22	AA
Toolsy, but hasn't produced. Doesn't make many adjustments at the plate. Just raw.		



SEATTLE MARINERS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Abraham Almonte						CF
.264	.313	.403	2	1	0.1	
Brad Miller						SS
.265	.318	.418	8	5	1.7	
Robinson Cano						2B
.314	.383	.516	27	7	6.0	
Kyle Seager						3B
.260	.338	.426	22	9	3.4	
Corey Hart						DH
.270	.334	.507	30	5	2.2*	
Logan Morrison						RF
.242	.333	.375	6	0	-0.6	
Mike Zunino						C
.214	.290	.329	5	1	0.0	
Justin Smoak						1B
.238	.334	.412	20	0	0.4	
Dustin Ackley						LF
.253	.319	.341	4	2	0.5	
Michael Saunders						OF
.236	.323	.397	12	13	1.2	
Nick Franklin						IF
.225	.303	.382	12	6	0.4	

*2012 Statistics

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Felix Hernandez						RHP
.304	2.61	1.13	204.1	216	6.0	
Hisashi Iwakuma						RHP
2.66	3.44	1.01	219.2	185	4.2	
Erasmus Ramirez						RHP
4.98	4.83	1.45	72.1	57	0.2	
James Paxton						LHP
1.50	3.26	0.92	24.0	21	0.5	
Blake Beavan						RHP
6.13	4.99	1.36	39.2	27	-0.2	
Fernando Rodney						RHP
3.38	2.84	1.34	66.2	82	1.3	
Danny Farquhar						RHP
4.20	1.86	1.19	55.2	79	1.9	



Tony Guteirrez - AP Photo

A lost sense of direction

Seattle dropped \$240 million on Robinson Cano, and its dysfunctional front office may misguidedly think they're ready to contend right now.

About the last thing anyone expected to happen this off-season was the Yankees to get out-bid for one of their players. Even more surprising was the fact that the team to do so was a mid-market team consistently in the bottom 50% of payrolls.

The Seattle Mariners swiped up Robinson Cano from the Yankees in early December for an astounding \$240 million over ten years, the third-largest contract in baseball history. The Yankees offered an extra million per year, but their offer only ran to \$175 million over seven years.

With that move, the Mariners signaled they were no longer going to sit back and

rebuild—they were ready to contend. The only problem is the rest of their roster is not quite playoff material.

The Mariners were coming off a season in which they had the 6th-worst record in the entire league. My retrospective analysis system indicates that their 71-91 record may even have been a bit lucky too, saying that they produced like a 68.2-93.8 team.

Even after adding a 6-WAR player like Cano, Seattle still needs more help, especially in a division with the Rangers, Athletics, and Angels. But the only additions they made after Cano were adding Logan Morrison, Corey Hart, and

SEATTLE MARINERS



Fernando Rodney, who netted 0.7 WAR last year.

Immediately after acquiring Cano, the Mariners were tied to all the top trade targets, headlined by David Price. They have the firepower to pull off a blockbuster trade with one of the premier pitching prospects in Taijuan Walker along with Nick Franklin, who was relegated to the bench after the Cano signing. But no trade ever formulized, and the Mariners are sticking by their young players.

While the Mariners haven't been very good lately, they do have a lot of young talent. Brad Miller, Kyle Seager, Mike Zunino, and Franklin have all exhausted their rookie eligibility but should all become above-average regulars. After that, the Mariners still have several intriguing prospects close to the majors like Walker, James Paxton, and D.J. Peterson.

But reliance on young players is what's gotten the Mariners into their current mess. At least reliance on players who have not developed. Justin Smoak, Jesus Montero, and Dustin Ackley have all been ranked as top-10 MLB prospects, but their 10 total seasons in the majors have grossed 4.2 WAR. Ackley has already been moved off his native second base, and Montero was

demoted to Triple-A last year.

Some of that failure to develop young players can be attributed to the dysfunction in their front office. This past December, the Seattle Times spent 2,500 words chronicling the mass madness atop the organization. But unfortunately the only big change among front office personnel is the swap of old retread manager Eric Wedge with new retread manager Lloyd McClendon. Besides blind optimism, there's not much reason to think things will drastically change among the Seattle suits.

Bringing in Cano will certainly make this team better, and the emergence of young players like Walker, Miller, and Paxton will only help. But while Seattle has shifted into win-now mode, they need a serious amount of improved talent to catch up to the Rangers, Athletics, and even the Angels. And at the same time, the Mariners may have more current talent than the Astros, but the Astros have the deepest minor league system in the game and may pass them in major league talent in two years. Having Cano and Felix Hernandez locked up through 2023 and 2019 respectively is great, but you need a lot more than two great players to win a World Series.

Strengths of the System

The Mariners used to have a bunch of great middle infield prospects, but Brad Miller and Nick Franklin graduated and Stefen Romero fell off the radar a bit. Now the strength of the team is in the form of starting pitching, although not in the same way it's been the strength before.

Walker, Hultzen, and Paxton used to be the reason why the Mariners were proud of their pitching prospects, but the real strength here is their depth. There's plenty of depth and upside with four youngsters: Sanchez Diaz, Gohara, and Pike. None of them have played above A-Ball, but in a year from now, this team could be loaded with quality pitchers.

Weaknesses of the System

Although there's plenty of depth in term of Mariners pitching prospects, the top crop of pitchers is down compared to recent years. Walker looks as good as ever, but Hultzen will miss all of 2014 with a shoulder injury, and Paxton still hasn't fixed his control.

Perhaps more concerning is the lack of hitting prospects coming up the pipeline. Of course, several young hitters recently graduated, but there are no outfield prospects to speak of after Wilson, and that's a big need for the big league club. Wilson's athletic but he lacks plus speed, another tool that is completely missing from notable Mariners position player prospects.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Taijuan Walker RHP A

2.99 ERA, 9.9 K/9, 3.5 BB/9 21 MLB

Tremendous upside, athleticism. Easy 97, knockout cutter, and developing off-speeds.

D.J. Peterson 3B B+

.303/.365/.553, 13 HR, 1 SB 22 A

Quick, short, powerful swing; can flat out hit. Won't stay at third base much longer.

Austin Wilson RF B

.241/.319/.414, 6 HR, 2 SB 22 Low-A

Big and athletic with plus arm, good speed, defense. Big power if he can fix his swing.

Danny Hultzen LHP B

2.02 ERA, 10.6 K/9, 1.8 BB/9 24 AAA

The former 2nd pick in 2011 looked to have fixed his control problems, but had to be shut down last year with a shoulder injury that will keep him out for most of this season. Great stuff when he's healthy.

James Paxton LHP B

4.03 ERA, 8.1 K/9, 3.5 BB/9 25 MLB

Great fastball with movement and a plus curve, but command is all over the place.

Victor Sanchez RHP B

2.78 ERA, 6.3 K/9, 1.4 BB/9 19 A

Little deception and a bad frame, but he has great velocity and control, solid change.

Edwin Diaz RHP B-

1.43 ERA, 10.3 K/9, 2.4 BB/9 20 Rookie

Fastball, curveball look good, and changeup is improving. Good control, can add weight.

Tyler Marlette C B-

.304/.367/.448, 6 HR, 10 SB 21 A

Bat is plus, but he made big improvements defensively. Power held back by selection.

Luiz Gohara LHP B-

4.15 ERA, 11.2 K/9, 3.7 BB/9 17 Rookie

Works in the low-90s, doesn't have much room to fill out. Nice breaking ball, upside.

Tyler Pike LHP B-

2.37 ERA, 7.3 K/9, 4.7 BB/9 20 A

3-pitch mix is just average. Over-the top delivery helps deception, hurts command.



CHICAGO WHITE SOX

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Adam Eaton						CF
.252	.314	.360	3	5	-0.5	
Alexei Ramirez						SS
.284	.313	.380	6	30	3.1	
Jose Abreu						1B
.382	.535	.735	13	2	--*	
Adam Dunn						DH
.219	.320	.442	34	1	-0.2	
Avisail Garcia						RF
.283	.309	.422	7	3	-0.4	
Connor Gillaspie						3B
.245	.305	.390	13	0	0.7	
Dayan Viedo						LF
.265	.304	.426	14	0	-0.1	
Tyler Flowers						C
.195	.247	.355	10	0	-0.1	
Gordon Beckham						2B
.267	.322	.372	5	5	1.0	
Alejandro De Aza						OF
.264	.323	.405	17	20	2.2	
Paul Konerko						1B
.244	.313	.355	12	0	-1.8	

*Cuban National Series Statistics

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Chris Sale						LHP
3.07	3.17	1.07	214.1	226	5.1	
Jose Quintana						LHP
3.51	3.82	1.22	200.0	164	3.7	
John Danks						LHP
4.75	5.06	1.29	138.1	89	0.3	
Erik Johnson						RHP
3.25	5.40	1.55	27.2	18	-0.1	
Felipe Paulino						RHP
6.51	4.57	1.81	27.2	26	--°	
Nate Jones						RHP
4.15	2.64	1.22	78.0	89	2.0	
Matt Lindstrom						RHP
3.12	3.15	1.43	60.2	46	1.0	

°Minor League Statistics



Chris Walker - Chicago Tribune

Accepting the rebuild process

Chicago hasn't accepted losing in the past decade—often leading to detrimental trades—but rebuilding efforts have had shocking success.

Over the last two years, the White Sox have lacked a foundation for success. The White Sox has never had consecutive losing seasons since Kenny Williams was named General Manager in 2000, but at the same time, the Chicago hasn't been a true playoff contender since 2010.

The problem really became serious last year, when their aging roster looked like it really only had one building block: 24-year old ace Chris Sale. Lacking playoff contending talent as well as lacking young talent is about the worst situation a team can be in. And with just two of their last seven first-round picks reaching the majors

and many other prospects dealt for established majors leaguers, the White Sox have had one of the worst farm systems in the baseball.

Chicago began last year decently, considering their talent level, starting off 24-24. But after losing 41 of their next 61 games, it was time for a change. The White Sox traded away Jake Peavy and the \$19 million remaining on his contract at the trade deadline for Avisail Garcia. Eleven days later, they shipped Alex Rios and the \$16.5 million left owed to him to Texas for Leury Garcia.

While Leury Garcia may just be a

CHICAGO WHITE SOX



bench player moving forward, Avisail Garcia is a key cog in Chicago's long-term plan. And the Sox were just beginning to add franchise building blocks.

Chicago didn't even wait until the end of the 2013 season before making the big move of their off-season. The day before the Red Sox won the World Series, the White Sox agreed to a six-year, \$68 million deal with Cuban star Jose Abreu, outbidding those very Red Sox, along with the Brewers and Astros.

The 27-year old first baseman put up astounding numbers in the Cuba, hitting .382/.535/.735 while nearly launching a home run every other game. Given, the overall talent level of his competition is close to that of the lower minor leagues, but we've seen Cuban players make smooth transitions. Just look at Yasiel Puig and Aroldis Chapman or even Abreu's new teammates Alexei Ramirez and Dayan Viciedo. While he won't put up those exact monstrous numbers, even in U.S. Cellular Launching Pad, he's a premier power hitter in a market low on right-handed power.

The White Sox continued to add to their foundation with two trades in December with Arizona, shipping off expendable starter Hector Santiago for Adam Eaton, who packs a lot of pop in his 5'8" frame, and trading "proven

closer" Addison Reed for power hitting third baseman Matt Davidson. Slowly but surely, the core of the future South Siders was taking form.

With four cornerstone hitters—Abreu, Davidson, Eaton, and Avisail Garcia—and three still young, possible long-term pieces—Gordon Beckham, Josh Phegley, and Viciedo—along with a trio of intriguing infielders in Triple-A—Leury Garcia, Carlos Sanchez, and Marcus Semien—the White Sox have most of their bases covered offensively. The next key step is just to develop young pitchers after Sale.

For the first time since 1988-89, the White Sox are going to fail to reach 80 wins in consecutive seasons. But at the same time; they've finally built a solid foundation. No longer are they exhausting their resources to sniff the fringe of playoff contention, they've made great progress on a rebuild that should only take them one or two more years to finish. They won't be quite as bad as their 63-99 season last year, unless they trade off veterans like Adam Dunn for whatever return they can find, but their front office is more excited that they finally have a base of young players. Remember, last year only five White Sox hitters generated more than 0.3 WAR. It's not going to get any worse.

Strengths of the System

The White Sox have a tendency to draft athletic, up-the-middle position players, which can be extremely valuable if they pan out. There's a lot of promise in this system, especially in the infield, but the players that have mostly panned out so far don't have huge upside.

Semien, Micah Johnson, and Sanchez are all very close to the majors, but only Semien projects as a starter. A rival scout thinks Johnson can be an impact utility man at second, third, center, and left because of his speed, but he's probably not smooth enough at any one position to be a regular. May could be an impact bat in center, but he has some recognition issues.

Weaknesses of the System

Chicago's gamble on athletes has the potential to pay off in big ways, but it's also led to flops more often than not. Jared Mitchell was a bust in 2008, Keenyn Walker has done little since he was drafted in 2011, and Hawkins was a disappointment after being pushed to High-A in his first full seasons.

A lot of the White Sox's prospects need to work on their approach at the plate—a lot of that is knowing when to lay off breaking balls. According to a rival scout, a lot of these players Chicago is bringing in have great tools but need to refine their baseball skills. They made a good bet on pure athleticism, but it's a bet that hasn't worked out well lately.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Erik Johnson	RHP	B
2.17 ERA, 7.9 K/9, 2.7 BB/9	24	MLB
Workhorse frame with nice four-pitch mix (3 possible plus pitches). Solid command.		
Tim Anderson	SS	B
.277/.348/.363, 1 HR, 24 SB	21	A
Toolsy with great speed, fringy power. His strikeout issue shouldn't be a huge deal.		
Courtney Hawkins	CF	B
.178/.249/.384, 19 HR, 10 SB	20	High A
Results don't match tools (plus power, arm, speed) since he was too young for High-A.		
Matt Davidson	3B	B
.242/.347/.419, 20 HR, 1 SB	23	MLB
Plus raw power than hasn't translated into home run power fully. Nice-looking swing.		
Marcus Semien	2B	B
.267/.373/.447, 21 HR, 26 SB	23	MLB
Out-performs tools with great eye, nice speed, power. Can also play short and third.		
Micah Johnson	2B	B-
.312/.373/.451, 7 HR, 84 SB	23	AA
Incredibly fast with solid on-base kills, but other tools lag behind. May be moved to CF.		
Jacob May	CF	B-
.303/.372/.458, 8 HR, 24 SB	22	A
Grandson of Lee but his plus tool is speed. Lacks the frame to add much more power.		
Chris Beck	RHP	B-
3.07 ERA, 4.9 K/9, 2.8 BB/9	23	AA
Can throw a lot of innings and induces weak contact. Still lacks any knockout pitches.		
Trayce Thompson	CF	B-
.229/.321/.383, 15 HR, 25 SB	23	AA
Power, speed tools haven't translated with poor plate discipline. Defense still strong.		
Carlos Sanchez	2B	C+
.241/.293/.296, 0 HR, 16 SB	22	AAA
Reached AAA at age 20, but his bat really disappointed last year. Still, he remains one of the best defenders in the minors—he can play a fringy shortstop—and he's much more effective running the bases now.		



MINNESOTA TWINS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Brian Dozier						2B
.244	.312	.414	18	14	2.8	
Kurt Suzuki						C
.232	.290	.337	5	2	0.4	
Joe Mauer						1B
.324	.404	.476	11	0	5.2	
Josh Willingham						LF
.208	.342	.368	14	1	0.0	
Jason Kubel						DH
.216	.293	.317	5	0	-1.7	
Trevor Plouffe						3B
.254	.309	.392	14	2	0.4	
Oswaldo Arcia						RF
.251	.304	.430	14	1	-0.4	
Aaron Hicks						CF
.192	.259	.338	8	9	-0.7	
Pedro Florimon						SS
.221	.281	.330	9	15	1.3	
Alex Presley						OF
.276	.313	.373	3	1	-0.1	
Josmil Pinto						C
.342	.398	.566	4	0	0.9	



Jason Miller - Getty Images

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Ricky Nolasco						RHP
3.70	3.34	1.21	199.1	165	3.0	
Kevin Correia						RHP
4.18	4.40	1.42	185.1	101	1.3	
Phil Hughes						RHP
5.19	4.50	1.46	145.2	121	1.3	
Mike Pelfrey						RHP
5.19	3.99	1.55	152.2	101	2.1	
Kyle Gibson						RHP
6.53	5.17	1.75	51.0	29	0.0	
Glen Perkins						LHP
2.30	2.49	0.93	62.2	77	1.7	
Jared Burton						RHP
3.82	3.61	1.26	66.0	61	0.9	

Biding time until Buxton

Long gone are the days of Twins dynasties, but the highly touted group of prospects on the way that could make things change.

It seems like ages ago that the Twins were a vibrant team with young Torii Hunter, Jacque Jones, and Johan Santana when Ron Gardenhire took over in the early 2000s, winning three straight division crowns. It even seems like ages ago that the Twins won back-to-back divisions with Justin Morneau, Denard Span, and Michael Cuddyer.

It's been a long time since the Twins have been anything other than dreadful.

If you're looking for two stats to summarize the Twins season last year, here are pair of pretty of pretty disheartening ones: Mike Pelfrey, who had

a 5.19 ERA last year, led the team in pitching WAR. Additionally, their pitchers had the lowest strikeout rate in the league, while the batters whiffed the second-most.

The Twins weren't good, and they weren't even fun. Outside of Joe Mauer, every other player on the roster falls between "eyesore" and "good job, good effort." And when Mauer was shut down for the year with concussion complications, the team became downright unwatchable, going 12-27 to end the season.

Between the injury concerns and owing him another \$115 million, the Twins finally decided to move Mauer off catcher

MINNESOTA TWINS



to first base, which should decrease his value but increase his longevity. The one positive that comes out of this move is it will mean more reps for promising young catcher Josmil Pinto, who had a crazy .418 wOBA in 83 plate appearances last year.

The Twins have long been known for their farm system, but their prospects haven't fared too well lately. Aaron Hicks was the team's leadoff hitter to start last season but was so bad (-0.7 WAR in 81 games) than he got optioned back to Triple-A. Former top prospects like Joe Benson haven't been close to making an impact and Kyle Gibson is struggling to stick in the majors.

But despite the lack of recent success with its young players, there's plenty of reason to be optimistic about the team's future. Byron Buxton is the top prospect in baseball with the potential to be Mike Trout-lite, and Miguel Sano has a Miguel Cabrera-type bat with a defensive profile to match. They boast the second-best farm system in the game with guys close to the majors too, like Alex Meyer and Eddie Rosario.

Still, though, those players are at least a year away from sniffing the majors, let alone making a large impact, so the team is stuck with Mauer, promising young Oswaldo Arcia, and a

bunch of stop-gap players for now. That didn't stop the front office from spending big money in free agency, however.

Big money, of course, comes in context, but the Twins spent \$74 million on two starters. Ricky Nolasco should be worth the \$49 million he's due, especially if his mediocre 4.37 career ERA approaches his solid 3.76 career FIP—something he's yet to do in the last five years. Phil Hughes is a real head-scratcher at \$24 million, though. He's an extreme flyball pitcher who lost his plus fastball and breaking ball that made him a top prospect years ago.

At the same time, there's a question of the wisdom of spending all that money on pitching for a team that may crack 72 wins at most. The Twins aren't going anywhere, so why not spend that money on developing young talent?

The answer probably is that the team needs some kind of hope. That's what happens when you have a team that has the potential to win the division down the road with just two of their cornerstone players currently in the majors and the rest developing in the minors. Adding players like Nolasco will make the team marginally more watchable, but this team won't be worth following again until the Buxton, Sano, and Co. are playing at Target Field.

Strengths of the System

The Twins have one of the top-5 farm systems in the game because of how much high-upside talent they have, much of which is close to the majors. Of course, their headlined by the top prospect in the game (Buxton) and another one who probably would've been a top-10 MLB prospect had he not been shut down because of Tommy John surgery (Sano).

The high-upside pitching is almost entirely in the lower minors. Stewart, Berrios, and Thorpe all have top-of-the-rotation projection but are years away, especially Thorpe, who has yet to make his pro debut. They all have plus velocity too, which makes the group especially intriguing.

Weaknesses of the System

There really isn't too much to complain about with this loaded farm system, especially since they'll be adding another key piece with the fifth pick in June's draft. The concern for the Twins is that even if all their top prospects pan out, they still may not have enough talent for a playoff run.

Buxton, Sano, Rosario, Joe Mauer, and Oswaldo Arcia are not enough to make a lineup great, although a rotation of Meyer, Stewart, Berrios, and Thorpe would be great if—if they all lived up to their full potential. But it's even a reach to assume most of the prospects will pan out, so the Twins could because they have so little talent in the majors.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Pos	Grade
CF	A

.334/.424/.520, 12 HR, 55 SB
20 High-A

Sky-high ceiling with five tools ranging from plus to plus plus. Best prospect in baseball.

Pos	Grade
3B	A-

.280/.382/.610, 35 HR, 11 SB
21 AA

Whiffs will limit batting average, but light tower power, patience make him a stud.

Pos	Grade
RHP	B+

1.35 ERA, 10.8 K/9, 1.8 BB/9
19 Rookie

Top prep arm almost played QB at Texas A&M. Athletic with plus slider and fastball.

Pos	Grade
RHP	B+

3.02 ERA, 11.0 K/9, 3.4 BB/9
24 AA

6'9" size, upper-90s fastball, hammer curve with high K, GB rate make him intriguing.

Pos	Grade
2B	B

.302/.350/.460, 10 HR, 10 SB
22 AA

Converted outfielder; nice line drive swing and aggressive approach. Solid all-around.

Pos	Grade
RHP	B

3.99 ERA, 8.7 K/9, 3.4 BB/9
21 Low-A

High upside with 3 potentially solid pitches. Velocity, command faded down the stretch.

Pos	Grade
C	B-

.313/.400/.494, 19 HR, 0 SB
24 MLB

Can mash, defense steadily improving. Can struggle against top pitching. Late bloomer.

Pos	Grade
LHP	B-

2.05 ERA, 13.1 K/9, 1.2 BB/9
18 Rookie

The Aussie added 5 mph last year, and may add more as he matures. Impressive control and four-pitch mix, especially for his age, leading to him dominating rookie ball. He still has a ways to develop.

Pos	Grade
LF	B-

.237/.312/.424, 9 HR, 2 SB
21 A

Hampered by injuries, should tap into big power as he fills out frame. Raw approach.

Pos	Grade
2B	B-

.308/.362/.452, 5 HR, 4 SB
20 A

Good discipline at the plate and versatile defensively. Switch-hitter with solid pop.



HOUSTON ASTROS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Dexter Fowler						CF
.263	.369	.407	12	19	2.2	
Jose Altuve						2B
.283	.316	.363	5	35	1.3	
Jason Castro						C
.276	.350	.485	18	2	4.3	
Chris Carter						DH
.223	.320	.451	29	2	0.4	
Jesus Guzman						1B
.226	.297	.378	9	3	0.0	
Robbie Grossman						LF
.268	.332	.370	4	6	-0.1	
Matt Dominguez						3B
.241	.286	.403	21	0	1.0	
L.J. Hoes						RF
.282	.332	.365	1	7	0.0	
Jonathan Villar						SS
.243	.321	.319	1	18	-0.2	
Marc Krauss						OF
.209	.267	.366	4	2	-0.3	
Marwin Gonzalez						IF
.221	.252	.319	4	6	-0.4	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Scott Feldman						RHP
3.86	4.03	1.18	181.2	132	2.1	
Jarred Cosart						RHP
1.95	4.35	1.35	60.0	33	0.4	
Brett Oberholtzer						LHP
2.76	3.65	1.10	71.2	45	1.3	
Brad Peacock						RHP
5.18	4.98	1.38	83.1	77	0.1	
Lucas Harrell						RHP
5.86	5.42	1.70	153.2	89	-0.9	
Chad Qualls						RHP
2.61	3.32	1.23	62.0	49	0.5	
Jesse Crain						RHP
0.74	1.52	1.15	36.2	46	1.9	



Bob Levey - Getty Images

Countdown to liftoff

There's not much to be excited about for the major league Astros right now, but there's a world of talent ready to hit the big leagues soon.

Really, it's just impressive how bad the Astros are. It's impressive not just because they're intentionally trying to be bad and succeeding but because they're trying to be bad and are far worse than anyone else in Major League Baseball.

Last season the Astros managed just 3.9 total WAR when average MLB team had 33.4 WAR. Let that sink in for a minute. Their roster was less than four wins better than a team of Triple-A players. According to my retrospective analysis system, the Astros actually underperformed in their 51-111 season, producing like a 54.9-107.1 team. However, the second-worst team in

the league, the Marlins, had the talent level of a 64-99 team. Even that 9.1-win difference underscores the 11-win difference between their actual records.

After the Astros traded off Michael Bourn, Roy Oswalt, Hunter Pence, Carlos Lee, and Wandy Rodriguez in the past three years, they've fallen so far off the baseball map than they've won just 162 games over the past three seasons. That's the worst any team has been since the 1963-1965 New York Mets, which were three of the first four years for the Mets franchise.

But the Astros have improved their

HOUSTON ASTROS



overall talent level in the past three years, despite their slowly dropping record. Trade by trade and draft pick by draft pick, the Astros have brought in a very intriguing group of young talent. GM Jeff Lonhow's specialty has been buying low on prospects whose stars have fallen in trades.

Houston got Matt Dominguez for Lee. It got L.J. Hoes for Bud Norris. It got Robbie Grossman for Rodriguez. It got Chris Carter and Brad Peacock for Jed Lowrie. Although each have a relatively low chance of scratching 80% of their previously-thought ceiling, but with such a volume of buy-low candidates, it's hard to see none of them panning out (in context).

The problem is that Houston hasn't had much luck with that strategy lately. After picking up Brett Wallace and Fernando Martinez—formerly ranked 22nd and 27th overall among prospects by Baseball America—the Astros ended up releasing and trading them this February and last May, respectively.

But the good news is that the Astros have the best farm system in the minors—and that gap is going to continue to widen after June's draft. They've got a trio of top-50 prospects on the verge of the reaching the majors—George Springer, Jonathan Singleton,

and Mark Appel—but that's just the start of their prospect crop.

The Astros minor leagues is littered with high-upside players from top 100 guys like Carlos Correa—a top-five prospect in baseball—to Mike Foltyniewicz to Delino DeShields Jr. They have high-risk high-reward prospects like Lance McCullers Jr., Vincent Velasquez, Domingo Santana, Rio Ruiz, and Michael Feliz. Perhaps most tantalizing, though, they own three of the first 34 picks in June's MLB Draft, including the first overall pick that will likely be NC State ace Carlos Rodon.

It's clear that the Astros have talent, although most of it is still years away from reaching the majors, let alone reaching their peak seasons. So there's still reason to be excited about this team, even if none of the buy-low older prospects pan out; at the very least Springer and Singleton should get starting roles by May or June. But as long as most of that talent is still in Oklahoma City, Corpus Christi, Lancaster, and Quad Cities, this team will continue to be nothing short of dreadful, something that signing Scott Feldman, Jesse Crain, and Jesus Guzman won't change. Maybe this year, though, they won't be in last place by double-digit games.

Strengths of the System

The Astros have the top farm system in the game because of how many future major leaguers they have at nearly every position. Director of Pro Scouting Kevin Goldstein said that they will be in trade discussions for a young player they really like and have to questions where he would even play plan because of how many quality prospects they have.

Additionally, so much of this talent-rich system has players close to the majors. Their top six prospects will all likely start at Double-A or higher, meaning they'll all be reaching the majors at about the same time. That'll be good because they should also all reach their peaks at the same time.

Weaknesses of the System

There's really not a lot to complain about with this system. It's worth noting that they have a lot of really hard-throwing prospects between highly touted guys like Foltyniewicz and McCullers and even lower-level guys in rookie ball like Jandel Gustave and Reymin Guduan. That's both a product of drafting big-framed, high-velocity pitchers and an excellent player development group.

If you needed to nitpick, the Astros could use more up-the middle prospects. DeShields has already been moved off second for the most part, and Correa may have to switch to third eventually. Nolan Fontana has the glove for short, but his bat is shaky.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Carlos Correa	SS	A
.320/.405/.467, 9 HR, 10 SB	19	A
Advanced approach, great fielder. Plus bat, will develop bigger power as he fills out.		
George Springer	CF	A-
.303/.411/.600, 37 HR, 45 SB	24	AAA
Supreme power, speed with great defense. Will walk, but gets in trouble with whiffs.		
Mark Appel	RHP	A-
3.79 ERA, 7.8 K/9, 2.1 BB/9	22	A
3 plus pitches and great projection. Nearly MLB-ready top-of-the-rotation starter.		
Jonathan Singleton	1B	B+
.230/.351/.401, 11 HR, 1 SB	22	AAA
Lost 2013 due to suspension, poor shape. Still has massive power and intriguing bat.		
Mike Foltyniewicz	RHP	B+
3.06 ERA, 8.6 K/9, 4.6 BB/9	22	AA
Up to 102 with a big, durable frame. Still needs serious work on control, off-speeds.		
Delino DeShields Jr.	CF	B
.317/.405/.468, 5 HR, 51 SB	21	High-A
A personal favorite, DeShields has supreme athleticism, 80-grade speed, a solid bat, and bloodlines. He can play second, where he is also below-average. Some scouts knock his effort, which I couldn't care less about.		
Lance McCullers Jr.	RHP	B
3.18 ERA, 10.1 K/9, 4.2 BB/9	20	A
Hits 100 with sink, plus curve, but change and command could leave him a reliever.		
Vincent Velasquez	RHP	B
3.54 ERA, 10.3 K/9, 3.0 BB/9	22	High-A
Lower upside than other Astros pitchers, but features plus fastball, change, control.		
Domingo Santana	RF	B
.252/.345/.498, 25 HR, 12 SB	21	AA
Huge power, a strong arm, but aggressive approach leads to low batting averages.		
Rio Ruiz	3B	B-
.260/.335/.430, 12 HR, 12 SB	20	A
New swing helped show plus raw power. Has a strong arm, but his range is lacking.		

NATIONAL LEAGUE



NL East

Team	W-L	GB
Nationals	96-66	--
Braves	92-80	4
Phillies	70-92	26
Mets	69-93	27
Marlins	63-99	33

NL Central

	W-L	GB
Cardinals	94-62	--
Reds	89-73	5
Pirates	86-76	8
Brewers	73-89	21
Cubs	66-96	28

NL West

	W-L	GB
Dodgers	94-68	--
D-Backs	79-83	15
Giants	78-84	16
Rockies	75-87	19
Padres	75-87	19

Ezra Shaw - Getty Images



WASHINGTON NATIONALS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Denard Span						CF
.279	.327	.380	4	20	3.5	
Ian Desmond						SS
.280	.331	.453	20	21	5.0	
Jayson Werth						RF
.318	.396	.532	25	10	4.6	
Ryan Zimmerman						3B
.275	.344	.465	26	6	3.0	
Bryce Harper						LF
.274	.368	.486	20	11	3.8	
Wilson Ramos						C
.272	.307	.470	16	0	1.8	
Adam LaRoche						1B
.237	.332	.403	20	4	0.6	
Anthony Rendon						2B
.265	.329	.396	7	1	1.5	
Nate McLouth						OF
.258	.329	.399	12	30	2.5	
Danny Espinosa						IF
.158	.193	.272	3	1	-0.6	
Tyler Moore						1B
.222	.260	.347	4	0	-1.2	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Stephen Strasburg						RHP
3.00	3.21	1.05	183.0	191	3.2	
Jordan Zimmermann						RHP
3.25	3.36	1.09	213.1	161	3.6	
Gio Gonzalez						LHP
3.36	3.41	1.25	195.2	192	3.1	
Doug Fister						RHP
3.67	3.26	1.31	208.2	159	4.6	
Taylor Jordan						RHP
3.66	3.49	1.35	51.2	29	0.7	
Rafael Soriano						RHP
3.11	3.64	1.23	66.2	51	0.5	
Tyler Clippard						RHP
2.41	3.82	0.86	71.0	73	0.4	



Vincent Rush – Ohio Sports

Washington is too big to fail

With a deeper pitching rotation and their young offense another year more mature, the Nationals seem too talented to not succeed.

It's hard to not see 2013 as a disaster for the Nationals. After leading the majors with 98 wins in 2012 and adding Denard Span, Rafael Soriano, and Dan Haren, they dropped out of the playoffs to 86 wins. Furthermore, I predicted them to win the World Series, and how often have I been wrong? (Try the last six years.)

But as badly as last year went, this team still has the potential to be just as good as many predicted them to be last year. They've even added more players to bolster an already a loaded, young roster.

Last year was not quite the worst-case scenario for the Nationals—they could

have had a total rotation implosion and injury pandemic like the 2012 Red Sox—but it was a far cry from what most people expected out of the World Series favorite.

Early on, Jayson Werth missed time with a broken wrist, and by the time he got back, Bryce Harper was riding the pine with a hip injury. Despite being out for so long, those players were still the second and third on the team in WAR, and they would have given the Nationals and additional 2.6 WAR had they not missed those 77 games.

When the All-Star Break rolled around and the Nationals were finally relatively

WASHINGTON NATIONALS



healthy, they started taking off. After starting 49-54, they closed the season by winning 37 of their final 59, a finish only the Braves topped. And that's the kind of potential this team has for all of 2014.

The main strength of this team is the pitching. Not only has the trio of aces Stephen Strasburg, Jordan Zimmermann, and Gio Gonzalez rocked a combined 3.08 ERA over the past three seasons, but they're each just now entering their primes. Strasburg is 25, Zimmermann is 27, and Gonzalez is 28. Swap out Haren and his distended 4.67 ERA for the ever-underrated Doug Fister and his 13.3 WAR over the past three seasons, and you've got potentially the best rotation in the league.

But it's not just the starting pitching that's phenomenal: the bullpen is loaded too. With Rafael Soriano, Tyler Clippard, and Drew Storen, the Nats have three qualified closers. They even have a solid lefty in Ross Detwiler, who switched over from the rotation. A lefty was desperately needed after trading Ian Krol and a bag of balls to Detroit for Fister.

Washington's bevy of young talent continues into the lineup, where they have the most room for improvement this year. Five of the eight starters are under 30 years old, and Werth is harkened back to his days with the

Phillies, scoring a .403 wOBA in his age-34 season last year.

Ian Desmond has established himself as one of the premier shortstops with consecutive 20-20, 5-WAR seasons. Denard Span provided his consecutive 3.5 WAR season, and Ryan Zimmerman is still mashing, although his defense is not the same since he had shoulder surgery. But then come the youngsters. Bryce Harper should be healthy for a full season and stands to make big improvements with his bat, especially in the power department. Anthony Rendon and Wilson Ramos still have room left to improve and should hit for much higher averages as they continue to gain experience.

As was said last year, this team is just about too talented to fail. 2013 was an aberration. With four top-of-the-rotation starters and a deep back of the bullpen, it's hard not to be competitive, and if you add in an above-average offense, you've got a great team. If the young hitters take a step up, this offense has a chance to be special, and then this team will be capable of scary things. If that doesn't make the rest of the NL East at least a little nervous, this is just the beginning. The core Nationals will be in their prime and primed to win for at least the next four years.

Strengths of the System

The strength of the Nationals' farm system is actually the same as the strength of the major league team: big, hard-throwing righties. Giolito and Cole project to be top-of-the-rotation starters, although they're several years apart on the development path.

Cole will probably reach the majors at the end of this season or early 2015, but Giolito is about two years behind him. The strange thing is that there may not even be room at the inn for those two because Stephen Strasburg, Jordan Zimmermann, Gio Gonzalez, and Doug Fister look like long-term building blocks. Regardless, the Nationals have plenty of pitching on their hands.

Weaknesses of the System

After their two top prospects, the Nats don't have much more in the way of impact arms. They traded off Alex Meyer and Robby Ray for Denard Span and Fister, which has left them low on pitching, but some of their recent draft picks haven't panned out either.

Matt Purke has been a disaster—he can't stay healthy and hasn't shown great command because of his cross-fire delivery. However, one rival scout thinks the Nationals should give him one last shot at starting because he has the track record being a starter in college and has a plus fastball and curve. Otherwise, he'll head to the bullpen, where most of the Nats' pitching prospects' futures lie.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Lucas Giolito	RHP	A-
1.96 ERA, 9.6 K/9, 3.4 BB/9	19	Low-A
Fulfilling huge promise post-Tommy John surgery. Fastball, curve both outstanding.		
A.J. Cole	RHP	B+
3.60 ERA, 9.5 K/9, 2.1 BB/9	22	AA
Already up to 97, can still fill out his frame. Slurve, changeup are good but need work.		
Brian Goodwin	CF	B+
.252/.355/.407, 10 HR, 19 SB	23	AA
Flashes 5 tools, but likely ends up a speed-defense player with great plate discipline.		
Felipe Rivero	LHP	B
3.40 ERA, 6.5 K/9, 3.7 BB/9	22	High-A
Durable with a low-90s fastball, potentially plus curve. Command needs improvement.		
Sammy Solis	LHP	B
2.94 ERA, 7.3 K/9, 2.6 BB/9	25	High-A
Solis was a fairly highly-touted prospect after 2011 but missed all of 2012 because of Tommy John surgery. He only had 13 starts last year, but his velocity is back up to 94 with a plus changeup, good control.		
Michael Taylor	RF	B
.263/.341/.428, 10 HR, 51 SB	23	High-A
Plus plus defense and speed tools but just strong gap power. He needs to add weight.		
Matt Skole	3B	B
.185/.380/.426, 3 HR, 0 SB	24	AA
Plus power; average range at third. Missed most of last year from Tommy John surgery.		
Drew Vettleson	RF	B-
.274/.331/.388, 4 HR, 5 SB	22	High-A
Good bat speed and controls the zone well. Every tool is average, has the arm for right.		
Jake Johansen	RHP	B-
1.92 ERA, 8.9 K/9, 4.0 BB/9	23	A
Fastball into the upper-90s, but all three of his off-speeds are fringy. Possible reliever.		
Drew Ward	3B	B-
.292/.402/.387, 1 HR, 2 SB	19	Rookie
Shows nice lefty power and plate discipline. Big frame, will only be average defender.		



LOS ANGELES DODGERS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Yasiel Puig						RF
.319	.391	.534	19	11	4.0	
Carl Crawford						LF
.283	.329	.407	6	15	2.9	
Hanley Ramirez						SS
.345	.402	.638	20	10	5.1	
Adrian Gonzalez						1B
.293	.342	.461	22	1	2.8	
Andre Ethier						CF
.272	.360	.423	12	4	2.9	
Juan Uribe						3B
.278	.331	.438	12	5	5.1	
A.J. Ellis						C
.238	.318	.368	10	0	2.2	
Dee Gordon						2B
.234	.314	.298	1	10	0.0	
Matt Kemp						OF
.270	.328	.395	6	9	-0.4	
Alex Guerrero						IF
.290	.402	.547	21	2	..*	
Tim Federowicz						C
.231	.275	.356	4	0	0.0	

*2012 Cuban National Series Statistics

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Clayton Kershaw						LHP
1.83	2.39	0.92	236.0	232	6.5	
Zack Greinke						RHP
2.63	3.23	1.11	177.2	148	2.9	
Hyun-Jin Ryu						LHP
3.00	3.24	1.20	192.0	154	3.1	
Dan Haren						RHP
4.67	4.09	1.24	169.2	151	1.5	
Paul Maholm						LHP
4.41	4.24	1.41	153.0	105	0.7	
Kenley Jansen						RHP
1.88	1.99	0.86	76.2	111	2.2	
Brian Wilson						RHP
0.66	2.02	0.88	13.2	13	0.4	



Gary A. Vasquez - USA TODAY Sports

All the pitching money can buy

The Dodgers are out to out-spend the rest of the league, and they've collected an absurd amount of pitchers to go with plenty of hitting.

The Dodgers didn't add \$447 million in future payroll this past winter, so it was pretty much a disappointment. Instead, they spent just \$289 million to extend All-World pitcher Clayton Kershaw and bring in five middling free agents—none for more than \$10 million annually. But despite not spending much in the way of acquiring new talent—at one point they reportedly said they wouldn't be out-bid for Masahiro Tanaka—they are still in prime position to win the National League pennant.

Even without Tanaka—or any other top-line free agent starter available this past winter—one of the big strengths of

this Dodgers team will be the pitching. Of course, as long as Kershaw is around—until at least 2018—it's hard for this rotation not to be good.

This rotation is both incredibly deep and talented. Zack Greinke is consistently dominant with a 3.24 ERA over the past five seasons. Unless he plans on getting in another brawl and breaking his collarbone again, Greinke has a track record of perfectly good health that bodes well for his future. Hyun-Jin Ryu looked just as dominant as Greinke last year with great control, a high groundball rate, and a reasonable strikeout rate.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS



The rest of the spots in the rotation are up for grabs, but that's not to say they'll be filled by replacement-level players. Some combination of Dan Haren, Chad Billingsley, Josh Beckett, and Paul Maholm will round out the rotation, and each as had an ERA under 3.70 at least once in the past three seasons. Injuries have played a role for each of them, but the seven-deep rotation will net five very good starters at minimum.

As star-studded as the rotation is, the lineup may fit in even better on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. The lineup has 15 All-Star appearances between the nine starters, and that seems incredibly light. They already have too many outfielders to handle between Matt Kemp, Carl Crawford, and Andre Ethier, plus rookie sensation and crime-fighting superhero Yasiel Puig.

The Dodgers were fourth in the majors in offensive WAR last year, but the scary thing is they did that despite missing large chunks of time from key contributors. Puig didn't make his major league debut until June, and he should play a full season this year, considering he's never had any health problems. Hanley Ramirez had the fourth-highest wRC+ of all time for any shortstop last year, and he missed significant portions of the seasons with thumb and

hamstring injuries. Imagine what he can do if he's healthy for most of the year.

Puig and Ramirez lighting the world on fire in their combined 190 games last year is what propelled the Dodgers to a 62-28 finish, but the rest of the lineup really stepped up too. Adrian Gonzalez and Carl Crawford aren't back to their peak forms, but Crawford returned from the dead to become a very serviceable outfielder (albeit at over \$20 million per year) and Adrian Gonzalez continues to mash. Add in Juan Uribe's sudden resurgence, especially in the field, and this lineup is just unfair. At this point, whatever LA gets out of Cuban Alex Guerrero is just gravy.

The bottom line is the Dodgers faced a deluge of injuries on offense—and didn't have Puig for the first two months of the year—and didn't nearly have the pitching depth that they had this year yet still managed to win 92 games and come within two games of the World Series. With a revamped bullpen that includes three once-time closers and several other good arms, it's hard to conceive of this team failing. And if they are failing by the time the trade deadline rolls around, you can bet they'll be willing to pony up even more money to increase their league-leading \$217 million payroll a few more shekels.

Strengths of the System

The Dodgers' main advantage is that they're able to out-spend almost everyone else. They've used it to their advantage in international free agency, where there are fewer restrictions on how you can acquire talent.

We've already seen them score big time when they signed Cuban Yasiel Puig to a \$42 million deal, and they're at it spending again. They dropped \$53 million on Cuban infielders Alex Guerrero and Erisbel Arruebarrena this off-season. Their top pitching prospect, Julio Urias, was signed out of Mexico for just \$450,000, but one rival scout was heavily impressed by his body control for his age and how advanced his against older competition.

Weaknesses of the System

The Dodgers are pretty light on bats after their top two prospects, Seager and Pederson. While they both profile as above-average starters, there isn't another hitting prospect for the Dodgers who projects to be an every-day starter at all.

Valentin flashes a great glove but may not have the bat to start, and then the hitting prospects really start looking shaky. There are also concerns about whether or not Seager will be able to stick at shortstop, considering he would be the largest starting shortstop ever at 6'4" 215, but one rival scout thinks his instinctive jumps will make up for his big size, unless his lower half really thickens up.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
----------------------------------	-----	-------

Corey Seager

Pos	Grade
-----	-------

.269/.351/.473, 16 HR, 10 SB	20	High-A
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Mechanics, big frame lead to power. Good hands and arm strength, may shift to third.

Joc Pederson

Pos	Grade
-----	-------

.278/.381/.497, 22 HR, 31 SB	22	AA
------------------------------	----	----

Has all five tools, but none are huge. Power, speed, and arm strength are his best tools.

Julio Urias

Pos	Grade
-----	-------

2.48 ERA, 11.1 K/9, 2.7 BB/9	17	A
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He's already throwing 95 mph at age 16 with time to still grow. He already has plus control and a plus curve, although he may become fly ball prone if he doesn't outgrow his small frame. Has ptosis in his left eye.

Zach Lee

Pos	Grade
-----	-------

3.22 ERA, 8.3 K/9, 2.2 BB/9	22	AA
-----------------------------	----	----

Athletic, 4 average pitches, plus command. Gets ground balls but lacks one out pitch.

Chris Anderson

Pos	Grade
-----	-------

1.96 ERA, 9.8 K/9, 4.7 BB/9	21	A
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Plus fastball with a big, durable frame. His slider, change, command have a ways to go.

Tom Windle

Pos	Grade
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2.68 ERA, 8.6 K/9, 3.4 BB/9	22	A
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Plus fastball and slider with a workhorse frame. Delivery can be a bit herky-jerky.

Chris Reed

Pos	Grade
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3.86 ERA, 6.9 K/9, 4.1 BB/9	24	AA
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Gets ground balls with fastball; off-speeds need work. Has the command of a reliever.

Ross Stripling

Pos	Grade
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2.82 ERA, 8.3 K/9, 2.1 BB/9	24	AA
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He has four average or better pitches, but he'll miss 2014 with Tommy John surgery.

Jesmuel Valentin

Pos	Grade
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.264/.364/.367, 4 HR, 15 SB	20	A
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Premium defender and switch hitter who should get on base at a good clip. Son of Jose.

Onelki Garcia

Pos	Grade
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3.08 ERA, 9.7 K/9, 5.6 BB/9	24	MLB
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Fastball and curve look good, but command needs work. Can help in the pen right now.



ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Matt Carpenter						3B
.318	.392	.481	11	3	7.0	
Kolten Wong						2B
.153	.194	.169	0	3	-0.3	
Matt Holliday						LF
.300	.389	.490	22	6	4.5	
Allen Craig						RF
.315	.373	.457	13	2	2.6	
Yadier Molina						C
.319	.359	.477	12	3	5.6	
Jhonny Peralta						SS
.303	.358	.457	11	3	3.6	
Matt Adams						1B
.284	.334	.503	17	0	1.7	
Peter Bourjos						CF
.274	.333	.377	3	6	1.1	
Jon Jay						OF
.276	.351	.370	7	10	1.9	
Pete Kozma						MI
.217	.275	.273	1	3	0.0	
Mark Ellis						2B
.270	.323	.351	6	4	1.8	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Adam Wainwright						RHP
2.94	2.55	1.07	241.2	219	6.2	
Michael Wacha						RHP
2.78	2.92	1.10	64.2	65	1.1	
Lance Lynn						RHP
3.97	3.28	1.31	201.2	198	3.3	
Shelby Miller						RHP
3.06	3.67	1.21	173.1	169	2.1	
Joe Kelly						RHP
2.69	4.01	1.35	124.0	79	0.4	
Trevor Rosenthal						RHP
2.63	1.91	1.10	75.1	108	2.2	
Jason Motte						RHP
2.75	3.12	0.92	72.0	86	0.9	



Doug Pensinger - Getty Images

How much pitching is too much?

If you couldn't keep track of which hard-throwing rookie was pitching for St. Louis in the playoffs it's because they have too many to count.

It's pretty easy to see why the Cardinals have been successful for the past five seasons, winning the second-most games in the National League after Atlanta. Develop a bunch of young, talented players, including too many hard-throwing pitchers than it's possible to use. They used that same strategy last year, leading the majors in wins and falling two games short of a 12th World Championship.

What's odd about last season is that it was very abnormal statistically. Although they had the best Pythagorean record in the league (101-61), they had just the tenth-best team WAR in the league, falling

behind the 86-76 Royals.

Now what does this mean? At the surface, it means that the Cardinals as a team outperformed (run differential) the sum of the contributions of their players (WAR). Now, the Cardinals whole being greater than the sum of its parts sounds nice, but baseball is largely an individual sports disguised as a team sport, so these sort of discrepancies can be more largely explained by luck than magic chemistry fairy dust.

The main red flag for the Cardinals last year was their outrageous ability to hit well with runners in scoring position. They

ST. LOUIS CARDINALS



had a 138 wRC+, .402 OBP, and .377 BABIP with runners in scoring position, led by Allen Craig, Destroyer of Worlds, and his 218 wRC+, .500 OBP, and .474 BABIP. The next closest teams in each category had a measly 116 wOBA, .362 OBP and .321 BABIP.

There's a large debate as to whether hitting in clutch situations is actually a skill, and studies have shown that there is no correlation between past and current clutch performance. David Grabiner's study found a correlation of .01, and typically a correlation coefficient of at least .30 is needed to have any real relationship.

Even in 2013, major league hitters had a 95 wRC+, .336 OBP, and .295 BABIP with runners on base compared to a 96 wRC+, .309 OBP, and .295 BABIP with the bases empty. They're essentially the same numbers, although the difference in on-base percentage can be explained by pitchers being easier to hit a pitcher out of the stretch than out of the windup and needing to throw more strikes when there are runners on.

The Cardinals' two big issues last year were defense and the black hole at shortstop, and both have been mostly fixed. David Freese and Jon Jay were both below-average defensively and nothing special with the bat, so the Cards

shipped Freese to Anaheim for defensive wiz Peter Borjous. With third base open, breakout star Matt Carpenter can shift back to his natural position and give prospect Kolton Wong a starting role, meaning big defensive boosts at both positions. Finally, St. Louis signed Jhonny Peralta, whose .356 wOBA last year was a whopping 115 points higher than incumbent shortstop Pete Kozma's.

But for all the improved hitting, the Cardinals are a near-playoff lock because of their young pitching. They have eight pitchers who could realistically start on most teams, and five of them are 25 or younger and regularly throw in the upper-90s.

Adam Wainwright is the anchor of the rotation, and he's only seen his ERA rise above 3.00 once in the last four years. After "veterans" Lance Lynn, 26, and Jaime Garcia, 27, the last few spots of the rotation is up for grabs between Michael Wacha, Shelby Miller, and Joe Kelly, although Carlos Martinez and Trevor Rosenthal will likely stay put in the bullpen.

With an absurd amount of pitching and discernably improved offense—just wait for Oscar Taveras to get the call—the World Series runners-up are as good of bets to make the Fall Classic as anyone else in the NL.

Strengths of the System

The Cardinals have so many young pitchers that can throw hard it's almost absurd. Shelby Miller, Carlos Martinez, Trevor Rosenthal, and Michael Wacha all graduated last year (Martinez didn't throw 50 innings but was on the 25-man roster for more than 45 days, so he lost his rookie eligibility) and should make a huge impact this year in the majors.

Only Reyes and Jenkins can come close to matching those major leaguers' velocity, but the Cards still have a wealth of pitching. Gonzalez and Cooney should move quickly to the majors, and Kaminsky looks like a future mid-rotation pitcher despite his ordinary velocity.

Weaknesses of the System

St. Louis isn't lacking for bats, especially in the outfield where they have potentially three future starters, but they don't have a lot of talent in the middle infield. Wong is in line to start for the Cardinals at second base, but they could definitely use more infield depth.

Shortstop could be an issue moving forward, especially as Jhonny Peralta nears the end of his four-year deal, since he's not the best defensive shortstop to begin with. They did bring in 23-year old Cuban shortstop Aledmys Diaz, who is known for his defensive acumen, but the jury is still out on if he'll hit enough to be an everyday regular.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Oscar Taveras	CF	A
.310/.348/.471, 5 HR, 5 SB	22	AAA
Plus power, bat; rarely Ks, walks. 2013 lost with ankle injury. Tools all at least average.		
Kolten Wong	2B	B+
.284/.348/.429, 10 HR, 23 SB	23	MLB
Plus bat, but all other tools are just average. Puts balls in play instead of working counts.		
Stephen Piscotty	RF	B+
.295/.355/.464, 15 HR, 11 SB	23	AA
Former third baseman with a strong arm. Plus bat, frame would suggest more power.		
Alex Reyes	RHP	B
3.39 ERA, 10.5 K/9, 4.3 BB/9	19	Rookie
Impressive fastball, curve, but command, change need work. High upside, good frame.		
Marco Gonzales	LHP	B
2.70 ERA, 9.3 K/9, 3.2 BB/9	22	High-A
Fringy fastball with two solid off-speeds. Close to the majors but lacks projection.		
Rob Kaminsky	LHP	B
3.68 ERA, 11.5 K/9, 3.7 BB/9	19	Rookie
Hurt by lack of size and projection, but still gets whiffs on plus curve with deception.		
Carson Kelly	C	B-
.257/.322/.357, 6 HR, 1 SB	19	A
Shifting from third to catcher, which is tougher defensively, boosted Kelly's stock. His numbers don't reflect his potential because his competition was older than him. He has a good arm, projectable power.		
Tim Cooney	LHP	B-
3.56 ERA, 8.6 K/9, 1.3 BB/9	23	AA
Durable, plus control, but just a tick above average stuff. High floor, can be hittable.		
James Ramsey	CF	B-
.265/.373/.440, 16 HR, 9 SB	23	AA
Fairly average tools across the board with improved defense, power. K's too much.		
Tyrell Jenkins	RHP	B-
4.70 ERA, 6.1 K/9, 3.8 BB/9	21	High-A
Ultra athletic with plus fastball, curve, nice ground ball rates. Injuries hurt durability.		



ATLANTA BRAVES

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Jason Heyward						RF
.254	.349	.427	14	2	3.4	
B.J. Upton						CF
.184	.268	.289	9	12	-0.6	
Freddie Freeman						1B
.319	.396	.501	23	1	4.8	
Justin Upton						LF
.263	.354	.464	27	8	3.2	
Evan Gattis						C
.243	.291	.480	21	0	0.9	
Chris Johnson						3B
.321	.358	.457	12	0	2.8	
Dan Uggla						2B
.179	.309	.362	22	2	0.5	
Andrelton Simmons						SS
.248	.296	.396	17	6	4.7	
Jordan Schafer						OF
.247	.331	.346	3	22	0.9	
Ramiro Peña						IF
.278	.330	.443	3	0	0.5	
Ryan Doumit						C
.247	.314	.396	14	1	0.1	



Hyosub Shin - Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Julio Teheran						RHP
3.20	3.69	1.17	185.2	170	2.4	
Mike Minor						LHP
3.21	3.37	1.09	204.2	181	3.4	
Ervin Santana						RHP
3.24	3.93	1.14	211.0	161	3.0	
Alex Wood						LHP
3.13	2.65	1.33	77.2	77	1.6	
David Hale						RHP
0.82	0.78	1.09	11.0	14	0.6	
Craig Kimbrel						RHP
1.21	1.93	0.88	67.0	98	2.2	
Luis Avilan						LHP
1.52	3.28	0.95	65.0	38	0.5	

A young core for the ages

The dynastic Braves of the '90s and 2000s were great because of home-grown talent. This budding dynasty is no different.

The Atlanta Braves just had their best off-season in years. No, they didn't spend nine-figures on any splashy free agents or pull off a blockbuster trade; instead they spent \$267.4 million on five of their own players, highlighted by long-term extensions for Freddie Freeman, Andrelton Simmons, Craig Kimbrel, and Julio Teheran.

Although the Braves roster is essentially the same—given they did lose Brian McCann and Tim Hudson while adding Ryan Doumit and Gavin Floyd—this past off-season was still especially successful. And the reason that's the case is the same reason Atlanta will be back

playing October baseball in 2014: they've got an incredibly talented young core that will be around for a long time.

The same day the Braves gave Jason Heyward a two-year deal, avoiding arbitration, they gave Freeman the largest deal in Braves' history: eight years and \$135 million. Five of those years are free agent years, where he will be making \$106.5 million, likely under market value for a first baseman who will hit for a high average and moderate power.

Ten days later, the Braves extended Teheran for six years and \$32.4 million, which would pay him just \$23 million over

ATLANTA BRAVES



two years of free agency, should they pick up his team option. Unless his elbow falls off, this will be an absolute heist, considering he had a 3.20 ERA in his first full season.

Two days later, Atlanta struck again, signing All-World closer Craig Kimbrel to a four-year, \$42.3 million deal. While closers are typically overpaid, Kimbrel is probably the exception, with by far the highest strikeout rate for anyone with at least 200 innings—43.2% of batters go down on strikes against him, and no one else whiffed more than 40% of their batters. With veteran closers like Joe Nathan making six figures, Kimbrel making \$13 million annually in his two free agent years looks like a bargain.

The final move, just four days later, was locking up Simmons for seven years and \$58 million. Although this is the largest AAV deal for any player with one-plus year of service, it looks like the fourth steal of a deal. His defense alone—clearly the best in the game at shortstop—outweighs his average of \$14 million salary during his free agent years, and he should have OBP's above last year's .296 going forward.

Atlanta is left with one of the best young cores in baseball—those four plus Heyward, Justin Upton, and a band of pitchers. All that youth makes the team

that much more scary because the team won 96 games last year and it's easy to see the young players improving.

Not only that, but it's hard to see the centerfield and second base positions playing any worse than they did last year. Dan Uggla needed LASIK surgery for most of the season, which he got last August, leading to hit hitting an appalling .179 and his having his worst season by 1.7 WAR. B.J. Upton's swing went into a funk, he lost all his power, and only hit .184, giving him his worst full season by 2.8 WAR. Don't necessarily expect those two to go back to their career averages of 3.3 and 3.7 WAR, respectively, but if they continue to hit below the Mendoza Line, the Braves will find suitable replacements who will finish above their combined -0.1 WAR last season.

Yes, there are some reasons to be nervous about this team. Can Evan Gattis stick as an every day catcher? Will a rotation of young 20-something year olds hold up over a full year? (Probably and yes, unless they keep getting bitten by the injury bug). RAWs indicates that they won nearly two more games than they should have last year. But this team is way too talented at the moment with upside still left in many of the players to miss the playoff for the first time in three years.

Strengths of the System

Before Tommy John surgery befell Kris Medlen and Brandon Beachy, it looked like the Braves' rotation was going to be entirely comprised of homegrown talent that was 28 years or younger. That makes the fact that the strength of Atlanta's farm system is hard-throwing righty starters even more impressive.

Sims and Cabrera profile as number three starters at worst with upper-90s velocity and intriguing off-speeds. Graham and Hursh throw just about as hard but both have a stronger chance of ending up in the bullpen for various reasons. It's just amazing to think how much young pitching this team has developed in a short time.

Weaknesses of the System

As a consequence of drafting so much pitching—Matt Lipka is their only hitter they've taken in the first round since 2008—the system is a big short on impact bats. Bethancourt and Peraza should eventually become starters on the merit of their plus plus gloves, but neither is expected to reach base at a very high clip.

It's not exactly as if the major league Braves are hurting for power, but in case they have to let Justin Upton walk when he reaches free agency after the 2015 season, it would be nice to have a power bat waiting to replace him. That could be Caratini down the road, but he'll take more than two years to develop.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Lucas Sims	RHP	B+
2.62 ERA, 10.3 K/9, 3.6 BB/9	20	A
Already plus fastball and curve, improving change. May add velocity as frame fills out.		
Christian Bethancourt	C	B
.277/.305/.436, 12 HR, 11 SB	22	MLB
Best defensive catcher in the minors, but he will not walk. Growing into some power.		
Jose Peraza	SS	B
.288/.341/.371, 1 HR, 64 SB	20	A
Has just two great tools (defense, speed). Future depends on his ability to reach base.		
Mauricio Cabrera	RHP	B
4.18 ERA, 7.3 K/9, 4.9 BB/9	20	A
Up to 100 with nice ground ball rates and change, but control and curve need work.		
J.R. Graham	RHP	B
4.04 ERA, 7.1 K/9, 2.5 BB/9	24	AA
Very good stuff despite 5'10" frame, but shoulder issues may bump him to the pen.		
Jason Hursh	RHP	B-
0.67 ERA, 5.0 K/9, 3.3 BB/9	22	A
Throws hard and gets nice sink, but off-speeds nice refining. Big, physical frame.		
Victor Caratini	3B	B-
.290/.415/.430, 1 HR, 0 SB	20	Rookie
Great eye with gap power that should be HR power soon. Moved to catcher for now.		
Tommy La Stella	2B	B-
.356/.444/.492, 5 HR, 8 SB	25	AA
Value tied entirely to his bat, which is very good. Age, durability are slight concerns.		
Wes Parsons	RHP	B-
2.63 ERA, 8.3 K/9, 1.7 BB/9	21	A
Curious case since he went undrafted, but has a great frame (6'5" 190) and excellent command. With a solid sinking fastball and above-average slider too, he's a solid bet to be a back-of-the-rotation starter.		
Josh Elander	LF	C+
.293/.365/.463, 15 HR, 9 SB	23	High-A
Value hurt by his move off of catcher, but he can flat-out hit. More power left in bat.		



CINCINNATI REDS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Billy Hamilton						CF
.368	.429	.474	0	13	0.6	
Brandon Phillips						2B
.261	.310	.396	18	5	2.6	
Joey Votto						1B
.305	.435	.491	24	6	6.2	
Jay Bruce						RF
.262	.329	.478	30	7	4.1	
Ryan Ludwick						LF
.240	.293	.326	2	0	-0.8	
Todd Frazier						3B
.234	.314	.407	19	6	3.3	
Zack Cozart						SS
.254	.284	.381	12	0	2.1	
Devin Mesoraco						C
.238	.287	.362	9	0	0.4	
Chris Heisey						OF
.237	.279	.415	9	3	1.2	
Skip Schumaker						Util
.263	.332	.332	2	2	-1.0	
Jack Hannahan						CI
.216	.317	.288	1	0	-0.2	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Johnny Cueto						RHP
2.82	3.81	1.05	60.2	51	0.6	
Mat Latos						RHP
3.16	3.10	1.21	210.2	187	4.4	
Homer Bailey						RHP
3.49	3.31	1.12	209.0	199	3.7	
Mike Leake						RHP
3.37	4.04	1.25	192.1	122	1.6	
Tony Cingrani						LHP
2.92	3.78	1.10	104.2	120	1.3	
Aroldis Chapman						LHP
2.54	2.47	1.04	63.2	112	1.6	
J.J. Hoover						RHP
2.86	3.47	1.11	66.0	67	0.6	



Andy Lyons - Getty Images

Time is ticking on this talent

Few teams have been as successful lately in the Reds, but they need to make noise in the playoffs soon before division rivals pass them.

The Reds are in the midst of their most successful four-year stretch since the 70s on the backs of a lot of homegrown talent. They broke the 90-win barrier three times and gave up the fewest runs in the league the last two seasons, one of two teams to surrender less than 600 runs both years. Yet they've been ultimately fruitless with no World Championships.

But it's not just that the Reds haven't won a World Series yet, they've been downright dreadful in the playoffs. They're just 2-7 in their three appearances, having been outscored 37-28. Those October struggles are much of the reason Dusty

Baker is no longer in Cincinnati.

Last year seemed like the perfect opportunity for the Reds with so much of the team in its prime. The entire rotation was a revelation with their six starters throughout the year all posting ERAs under 3.80. Shin-Soo Choo had an unbelievable contract season going 20-20 with a .423 OBP, only outdone by Joey Votto's .435 OBP and fourth straight season over 5.5 WAR.

But cracks showed at the end of the season. Cincy ended 17-17, including losing their last five games, and exited the playoffs as soon as they started. The season set up for success ended up just an afterthought.

CINCINNATI REDS



So now that Choo has gone to Texas, Bronson Arroyo is off to Arizona, and every player is a year older, the Reds are forced to think about what could have been. Sure, they're still extremely young, but they may not be set up for as much success as they were last year for a very long time.

The core players—Joey Votto, 30, Jay Bruce, 26, Johnny Cueto, 28, Mat Latos, 26, and Aroldis Chapman, 26—are all still in its prime. Those five players alone will make the team competitive. What's worrisome about the team is the ancillary players.

Brandon Phillips is still one of the ten-best second basemen in the league, but he's seen his power, speed, and on-base skills deteriorate to the point that his wOBA fell 20 points last year to .307. Five years younger, both Todd Frazier and Zack Cozart regressed offensively from a .354 and .298 wOBA to a .319 and .289 wOBA, respectively.

Probably the biggest concern for the Reds is that they'll be replacing Choo with Billy Hamilton. It's not necessarily that Hamilton is bad—he's incredibly talented—but he'll be trying to replace Choo's incredible 2013 season. The Reds were certainly right to not pay Choo the \$130 million Texas gave him this winter, especially with \$350 million already

invested in their top three hitters, but 5.2 WAR is hard to replace nonetheless.

To his credit, Hamilton is one of the most talented players on Cincy's roster. He has 356 steals over the past three seasons from A-Ball to the Majors—likely the fastest player in baseball history—but he has a long way to go at the plate. Hamilton will need to hit better than the .256/.308/.343 line he had against Triple-A pitchers last year if he wants to leverage his speed into actual production.

Losing someone of Choo's caliber makes it look like Cincinnati's window is closing more quickly than they would like. So much of the past four seasons feels like a waste of good talent, all the way down to using Aroldis Chapman as a 60-inning closer instead of a 200-inning starter.

But as little as this talented roster has had to show in past Octobers, they're still in a great position to win. With Cueto, Latos, and Homer Bailey atop the rotation and so much talent hitting 1-5, it's hard not to give this team a chance. As long as young players like Frazier and Cozart don't continue to regress offensively, this team should make the playoffs, and anything can happen in October. Then maybe we won't have to wonder what this talented core could have been.

Strengths of the System

Aside from having a top-20 prospect, the Reds' big strength is in the outfield. Hamilton will take over in center field for the Reds, and there's reason for optimism with his bat because he took much better at-bats as last season went on. Even though last year was his first year in center, one NL executive thinks he already has the chance to win a Gold Glove.

After Hamilton, two of the team's recent first-rounders (Ervin and Winker), both look like future major league regulars. Rodriguez is finally seeing his tools translate to production and is another potential regular. That's a lot of depth at a position they already have Jay Bruce and Chris Heisey.

Weaknesses of the System

Part of the reason the Reds have so much young talent in the majors is because they traded off some of their upper-level prospects to get them. Mat Latos cost the team Yonder Alonso, Yasmani Grandal, and Brad Boxberger, and they also traded away All-Star Travis Wood. The team is still working to replenish that talent, which is part of the reason the system lacks depth.

Another reason for the lack of depth is pitchers like Corcino and Travieso having down years. That duo, especially Corcino, could be in line for a demotion to extended spring training or A-Ball to iron out the mechanics of his command, a la Edinson Volquez with the Rangers in 2007.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Robert Stephenson	RHP	A-
2.99 ERA, 10.7 K/9, 3.9 BB/9	21	AA
Plus plus fastball and curve. Despite funky delivery, has great command. Future ace.		
Billy Hamilton	CF	B+
.260/.313/.348, 6 HR, 88 SB	23	MLB
The fastest to ever play baseball. Improving bat hasn't fared well against top pitching.		
Phillip Ervin	CF	B+
.331/.425/.564, 9 HR, 14 SB	21	A
All his tools are above-average, but his bat has the chance to be plus. May stick in CF.		
Jesse Winker	LF	B+
.281/..379/.463, 16 HR, 6 SB	20	A
Disciplined with emerging power and high upside with the bat. Speed, arm are limited.		
Yorman Rodriguez	RF	B
.256/.324/.427, 13 HR, 10 SB	21	AA
High-risk high-reward with big power and a strong arm but discipline, contact problems.		
Michael Lorenzen	RHP	B-
6.81 ERA, 5.6 K/9, 5.9 BB/9	22	AA
Reached 99 in relief, but is being converted to a starter. Off-speeds, control need work.		
Nick Travieso	RHP	B-
4.63 ERA, 6.7 K/9, 3.0 BB/9	20	A
Has lost velocity since high school, but off-speeds are promising. Still has high upside.		
Daniel Corcino	RHP	B-
5.86 ERA, 6.3 K/9, 5.1 BB/9	23	AAA
He went from a borderline top-50 MLB prospect to a potential AAA fizzle-out in a year when his command disappeared. His 5'11" frame leaves him HR-prone, but a shift to the 'pen may help his stuff play up.		
David Holmberg	LHP	B-
2.85 ERA, 6.5 K/9, 3.0 BB/9	22	MLB
None of his pitches are above-average, but he's durable and has good command. Safe.		
Ben Lively	RHP	B-
0.88 ERA, 12.3 K/9, 2.9 BB/9	22	A
Covers up fringy fastball with 3 solid off-speeds, deception. Dominates every level.		



PITTSBURGH PIRATES

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Starling Marte						LF
.280	.343	.441	12	41	4.6	
Neil Walker						2B
.251	.339	.418	16	1	2.7	
Andrew McCutchen						CF
.317	.404	.508	21	27	8.2	
Pedro Alvarez						3B
.233	.296	.473	36	2	3.1	
Russell Martin						C
.226	.327	.377	15	9	4.1	
Gaby Sanchez						1B
.254	.361	.402	7	1	0.8	
Jose Tabata						RF
.282	.342	.429	6	3	1.1	
Jordy Mercer						SS
.285	.336	.435	8	3	1.4	
Travis Snider						OF
.215	.281	.333	5	2	-0.6	
Josh Harrison						IF
.250	.290	.409	3	2	0.1	
Chris Stewart						C
.211	.293	.272	4	4	0.5	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Francisco Liriano						LHP
3.02	2.92	1.22	161.0	163	3.1	
Gerrit Cole						RHP
3.22	2.91	1.17	117.1	100	2.3	
Charlie Morton						RHP
3.26	3.60	1.28	116.0	85	1.3	
Wandy Rodriguez						LHP
3.59	4.42	1.12	62.2	46	0.2	
Edinson Volquez						RHP
5.71	4.24	1.59	170.1	142	0.4	
Jason Grilli						RHP
2.70	1.97	1.06	50.0	74	1.5	
Mark Melancon						RHP
1.39	1.64	0.96	71.0	70	2.5	



Justin K. Aller – Getty Images

Down but not for long

Don't expect a repeat appearance this October for the Pirates, but their massive haul of young talent will keep them good for a long time.

I'm not usually one to brag, but when I hit on a prediction so perfectly, I'll take one for the team and toot my own horn. Last year, I predicted—get this—that 2013 would be “the year the Pirates finally do it. I think the Pirates are going to break a .500 record.”

And boy was I right beyond my wildest imagination.

Not only did the Pirates have a winning record for the first time since 1992, they led the division for 51 games and finished with a wild card spot 94 wins later. It was a 15-win improvement no one saw coming. And maybe for good reason.

Even over a 162-game season, teams often play above (and sometimes below) their talent level. For instance, the 2012 Orioles weren't quite as good as their 93-69 record would indicate because of their unsustainable 29-9 record in one-run games and 16-2 record in extra innings. According to my retrospective analysis system, the Pirates' production last year should have led to a 87.5-74.5 record.

The Pirates' difference between their projected and true record is an astonishing 6.5 wins—the third largest negative difference after the Yankees (-7.3 wins) and Phillies (-7.5 wins).

PITTSBURGH PIRATES



Now, the Pirates don't have any obvious red flags like the Orioles did. Their 29-23 record in one-run games and 9-9 record in extra innings are not out of the ordinary. But regardless of how they out-played their talent level—likely through league-leading rates of defensive shifts, focusing on groundball and strikeout pitchers, and our good friend random variation—the Pirates are a candidate for regression to the mean.

Will Francisco Liriano stay healthy enough for 161 innings of 3.02 ERA ball again? Can Jason Grilli and Mark Melancon sustain a 1.93 ERA again? Is Russell Martin 4.1 WAR good or is he the player who grossed 8.1 WAR over the previous four seasons? There's a chance all of those seasons were legit, but it's unlikely the whole team will repeat their high level of production.

The bad news doesn't end yet; their pedestrian off-season does not look like it equipped the Bucs with players to make up for their impending regression. Gone are A.J. Burnett, Justin Morneau, and Garrett Jones. Their only acquisition was Edinson Volquez, who had a 5.71 ERA last year in San Diego, albeit with good strikeouts and ground ball rates.

But as unlikely as the Pirates are to repeat their massive degree of success in—especially with Washington looking

like a juggernaut—their future is brighter than ever.

The Pirates are overflowing with talent, owning seven of baseball's top 100 prospects—and that doesn't count promising youngsters Gerrit Cole and Starling Marte or stars Andrew McCutchen and Pedro Alvarez. That young talent—especially the prospects on the brink of the majors—could be the reason Pittsburgh avoids sinking back to obscurity.

Flamethrowing Texan Jameson Taillon (their top prospect) and five-tool outfielder Gregory Polanco (2nd) both carved up Double-A last year before moving up to Triple-A, and pitcher Nick Kingham (4th) and shortstop Alen Hanson (6th) are right on their heels in Double-A Altoona. All four could very likely be playing in PNC Park late in the year.

It's not healthy to depend on so many young players—since veterans supply far more steady production—but they give this version of the Pirates a much higher upside (and lower downside).

Whether rookies fill Pittsburgh's current holes in the majors (right field, shortstop, rotation) or the Pirates trade them to fill a hole at first base, they have a promising future. 2014 won't be 2013, but there also won't be another 20-year losing streak coming any time soon.

Strengths of the System

What isn't a strength for the Pirates farm system? Even after graduating Gerrit Cole and Starling Marte, they have an incredible amount of talent across the board.

If power pitching is what you like, Taillon, Glasnow, and Kingham all have the makings of top-of-the-rotation starters.

The hitting prospects are the very impressive group, though. You get speed (Hanson), power (Bell), defense (McGuire), and upside (Ramirez) along with players with speed, power, defense, and upside (Polanco and Meadows). There are just not enough good things you can say about this system.

Weaknesses of the System

If you really want to nitpick about the Pirates farm system, they lack any sort of left-handed pitching. All the young pitching in the majors is righty, although a rotation of all hard-throwing right-handers isn't the worst thing in the world.

Personally, I'm a big fan of Bell's upside, but he didn't look perfect last year coming off knee surgery. According to a rival scout, he didn't look as athletic as you'd want a corner outfielder to look, although he was trying to slowly work back up to pace last year. Still, his power and plate discipline are intriguing enough that he projects as an above-average starter.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Jameson Taillon	RHP	A-
3.73 ERA, 8.8 K/9, 3.2 BB/9	22	AAA
Great size, plus velocity, curve, and control. Lacks deception, overthrows his changeup.		
Gregory Polanco	CF	A-
.285/.356/.434, 12 HR, 38 SB	22	AAA
At 6'4" 230, Polanco is a physical beast with all five tools, headlined by plus plus defense and speed. His shortened swing still has the same power, and he has an excellent approach, maintaining high contact rates.		
Tyler Glasnow	RHP	B+
2.18 ERA, 13.3 K/9, 4.9 BB/9	20	A
Velocity into the upper 90s with a pair of strong breaking balls. Control lags behind.		
Austin Meadows	CF	B+
.316/.424/.554, 7 HR, 3 SB	19	Low-A
Big and athletic with shocking speed for his size. Plus bat should grow into big power.		
Alen Hanson	SS	B+
.274/.329/.427, 8 HR, 30 SB	21	AA
Quick wrists but average power and plus speed. Iffy defense may shift him to second.		
Josh Bell	RF	B+
.279/.353/.453, 13 HR, 1 SB	21	A
Big raw power with nice plate coverage and discipline. Switch hitter is stronger lefty.		
Nick Kingham	RHP	B+
2.89 ERA, 9.0 K/9, 2.8 BB/9	22	AA
Big, durable command pitcher with 3 solid pitches out of a below-three-quarters slot.		
Reese McGuire	C	B
.323/.380/.380, 0 HR, 6 SB	20	Low-A
Premium defender. Bat progressed faster than expected; may only have gap power.		
Harold Ramirez	LF	B
.285/.354/.409, 5 HR, 23 SB	19	Low-A
Hit well against older competition. Above-average speed, solid pop. Average defender.		
Luis Heredia	RHP	B
3.05 ERA, 7.6 K/9, 5.1 BB/9	19	A
Bad body shape and hasn't pitched much, but 2 off-speeds have a chance to be plus.		



ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
A.J. Pollock						CF
.269	.322	.409	8	12	3.6	
Aaron Hill						2B
.291	.356	.462	11	1	2.0	
Paul Goldschmidt						1B
.302	.401	.551	36	15	6.4	
Martin Prado						3B
.282	.333	.417	14	3	2.4	
Miguel Montero						C
.230	.318	.344	11	0	0.9	
Mark Trumbo						LF
.234	.291	.453	34	5	2.5	
Gerardo Parra						RF
.268	.323	.403	10	10	4.6	
Didi Gregorius						SS
.252	.332	.373	7	0	1.4	
Cody Ross						OF
.278	.331	.413	8	3	1.8	
Chris Owings						IF
.291	.361	.382	0	2	0.4	
Eric Chavez						CI
.281	.332	.478	9	1	0.7	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Wade Miley						LHP
3.55	3.98	1.32	202.2	147	2.0	
Trevor Cahill						RHP
3.99	4.26	1.42	146.2	102	0.9	
Brandon McCarthy						RHP
4.53	3.75	1.35	135.0	76	1.8	
Bronson Arroyo						RHP
3.79	4.49	1.15	202.0	124	0.8	
Randall Delgado						RHP
4.26	4.99	1.19	116.1	79	0.1	
Addison Reed						RHP
3.79	3.17	1.11	71.1	72	1.7	
Brad Ziegler						RHP
2.22	3.40	1.14	73.0	44	0.6	



Dilip Vishwanat - Getty Images

All that grits is not gold

The Diamondbacks have stripped their team of raw talent for hard-nosed players. That lack of talent may come back to haunt them.

General Manager Kevin Towers has a certain way he likes his roster. He likes a lot of good relievers, he doesn't like spending a lot of money, and he likes gritty players.

Towers has slowly been changing the Diamondbacks' roster in his three years at the helm. In his first off-season, he traded away Dan Haren and Mark Reynolds for young pitching, leading to a 29-win improvement and a NL West crown.

By his second off-season, Towers began his trend of trading off young talent, sending Jarrod Parker and prospects to Oakland for Trevor Cahill. But things didn't go so well, and Arizona took a dive to a .500 record.

Unhappy with his roster construction, Towers finally got a chance to get rid of his "problem players" in his third off-season and replace them with "scrappy" mentality players he loves. Trevor Bauer? Talented, but high-maintenance. Justin Upton? Great, but doesn't always put in full effort.

Arizona sold low on two of their most talented players, getting back just Martin Prado, Didi Gregorius, and a handful of prospects—twelve cents on the dollar—and putting more of an emphasis on hard work and grit than pure baseball talent. And at the end of the season, we saw the true impact of all that grit: nothing. The

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS



Diamondbacks went 81-81 for the second straight season.

But despite the downward trend in wins the more changes Towers makes, he's sticking to his guns. He's continuing to trade off young talent, add bullpen arms, and go for grit over talent.

The strength of the Diamondbacks organization has been plenty of young pitchers, between Wade Miley and Pat Corbin (who is now out for the season because of Tommy John surgery) tossing a combined 411 innings of 3.48 ERA ball and top prospects Archie Bradley and Tyler Skaggs looking future top-of-the-rotation starters. It was reasonable to trade one of them, but the return Towers got for Skaggs was a bit puzzling.

Arizona's big acquisition this winter was Mark Trumbo, whose 34-home run power will go great in Chase Field's hitter-friendly confines. But besides the power—which will be intimidating behind Paul Goldschmidt in the lineup—he's a terrible fit for the D-Backs. Trumbo's natural position is first base, where Arizona already has the NL MVP runner-up, and he's a definitively bad defender in the outfield due to a lack of mobility. Add in the fact that he's only managed a .300 OBP over the past three seasons, and it almost negates his nearly 80-grade power (on a 20-80 scale).

And not only did they trade Skaggs for three years of Trumbo, they also gave up promising center fielder Adam Eaton. Forgetting Skaggs, there's a good chance Eaton posts a better WAR this year than Trumbo, plus the White Sox get an extra two years of control.

Towers again struck less than a week later, shipping promising third baseman Matt Davidson to the same White Sox for Addison Reed. To his credit, nearly all of his reliever acquisitions not named Heath Bell have worked out, but a power bat like Davidson has way more value than a "proven closer" like Reed. Furthermore, Reed's tendency to give up fly balls is not a good match in Arizona, where Chase Field sits 1,090 feet above sea level.

Towers deserves credit for sticking by his guns and pushing in all his chips on his plan. However, it's hard to believe that a team can consistently leave so much value on the table in trades and cover it up by adding middling veterans like Cody Ross, Bronson Arroyo, and Eric Chavez. The Diamondbacks could be bailed out by the next wave of prospects coming through Phoenix like Bradley and Chris Owings, but the young talent they really could use is off in Chicago, LA, Cleveland, Atlanta; long since traded away. But, hey, at least this team is gritty. They've got that going for them.

Strengths of the System

The Diamondbacks just keep cranking out pitching prospects year after year. They've had so many, in fact, that they've been able to leverage a few of them into veteran players (Jarrod Parker and Tyler Skaggs were traded for Trevor Cahill and Mark Trumbo respectively). I didn't love the returns they got for the highly-touted prospects, but the trades go to show how much depth they've had if pitching is still a strength for Arizona.

Bradley has all the attributes of an ace—part of the reason he's the top pitching prospect in baseball—and Shipley is only a year or so behind him. Martinez is an upside prospect with the stuff of a top-of-the-rotation pitcher.

Weaknesses of the System

Arizona doesn't lack depth of hitting, but each of their prospects is warted enough that it's hard to see many of them as starters. Owings should have no problem starting, and Strahan has the bat to start, but it's disappointing to see him move off catcher, where he would have more value.

Teams in the lower minors don't have many quality bats, though, according to a rival scout. Drury put up great numbers but is stiff in the field and has to rely on a cerebral approach, grinding at the plate. Williams is more of an athlete than a baseball player and has along way to go in developing his baseball skills.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Archie Bradley	RHP	A
1.84 ERA, 9.6 K/9, 4.1 BB/9	21	AA
Athletic ace with a huge fastball, curve. His change, command could use sharpening.		
Braden Shipley	RHP	B+
4.99 ERA, 9.1 K/9, 3.2 BB/9	22	A
Great athlete with a solid three-pitch mix. Still new to pitching, untapped potential.		
Chris Owings	SS	B+
.326/.359/.473, 12 HR, 22 SB	22	MLB
Won't hit for average or take a walk, but power, speed, defense make him a starter.		
Stryker Trahan	LF	B
.254/.328/.462, 10 HR, 1 SB	20	Rookie
Plus power and arm, but defensive skills and bat need polish. Strikes out a bit much.		
Aaron Blair	RHP	B
3.14 ERA, 7.6 K/9, 3.1 BB/9	22	A
Workhorse frame with solid velocity, but relies on movement, location over whiffs.		
Jake Lamb	3B	B-
.302/.413/.517, 14 HR, 0 SB	23	High-A
Showed good power despite wrist injury. Plus defender with an advanced approach.		
Brandon Drury	3B	B-
.302/.362/.500, 15 HR, 1 SB	21	A
Gap power continues to develop into home run power. Defense is a work in progress.		
Justin Williams	LF	B-
.351/.397/.452, 1 HR, 0 SB	18	A
He fell to Arizona in the 2nd round despite the huge raw power because he doesn't have a position he's even average at defensively. His aggressive approach leads to few walks, but he can flat-out rake.		
Jose Martinez	RHP	B-
4.03 ERA, 7.1 K/9, 5.9 BB/9	20	Low-A
Huge upside with upper-90s fastball and plus curve. Stuff ahead of control, results.		
Sergio Alcantara	SS	B-
.243/.398/.320, 0 HR, 3 SB	17	Rookie
Strong arm and great instincts in the field and at the plate. Lacks any present power.		



SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Angel Pagan						CF
.282	.334	.414	5	9	1.3	
Brandon Belt						1B
.289	.360	.481	17	5	4.0	
Pablo Sandoval						3B
.278	.341	.417	14	0	2.3	
Buster Posey						C
.294	.371	.450	15	2	4.8	
Hunter Pence						RF
.283	.339	.483	27	22	5.4	
Mike Morse						LF
.215	.270	.381	13	0	-1.6	
Marco Scutaro						2B
.295	.357	.369	2	2	2.7	
Brandon Crawford						SS
.248	.311	.363	9	1	2.2	
Gregor Blanco						LF
.265	.341	.350	3	14	2.8	
Joaquin Arias						IF
.271	.284	.342	1	1	0.6	
Hector Sanchez						C
.248	.300	.349	3	0	0.0	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Matt Cain						RHP
4.00	3.93	1.16	184.1	158	1.3	
Madison Bumgarner						LHP
2.77	3.05	1.03	201.1	199	3.7	
Tim Lincecum						RHP
4.37	3.74	1.32	197.2	193	1.6	
Tim Hudson						RHP
3.97	3.46	1.19	131.1	95	1.7	
Ryan Vogelsong						RHP
5.73	4.91	1.56	103.2	67	-0.6	
Sergio Romo						RHP
2.54	2.85	1.08	60.1	58	1.1	
Santiago Casilla						RHP
2.16	3.67	1.28	50.0	38	-0.1	



Charles Rex Arbogast - AP Photo

Don't stay at the party too long

The Giants won two World Series in three years but haven't changed their roster since. In San Francisco's case, that's not a good thing.

The Giants have had a good thing going for a while now. They've won two of the last four World Series, yet somehow stumbled to a 76-86 record last year. But the explanation for their collapse is simple: they held onto core players for too long.

The key to the 2010 and 2012 World Series champion teams was pitching. In 2010, they were 7th in baseball in pitching WAR, and in 2012 they had three starters with ERAs under 3.40. But things drastically changed on the mound last season, much of the reason for their 19-win downswing.

Madison Bumgarner emerged as an ace when he held a 2.77 ERA over 200 innings,

but the rest of the rotation took a turn for the worse. Matt Cain's strange knack for keeping fly balls in the park suddenly disappeared, and he couldn't keep his ERA below 4.00. Tim Lincecum lost velocity for the second straight year, giving up three or more runs in over half his starts, and finishing with the second-highest ERA of his career. Even guys like Barry Zito and Ryan Vogelsong just didn't look like they belonged in a major league rotation with ERAs over 5.70.

Things weren't helped all that much this winter, either. The Giants rewarded Lincecum's 4.76 ERA over the last two

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS



seasons with a two-year, \$35 million deal, and they brought back Vogelsong for another year too. Their one saving grace is that they brought in Tim Hudson for two years and \$23 million, who, even at age 38, should be more effective than most Giant starters were last year.

The offense has similar problems. While their players are very talented—guys like Buster Posey and Brandon Belt will be very good for a long time—the Giants tend to hold onto guys they won with for too long. They're already feeling the effects of extending 2012 champions Marco Scutaro and Angel Pagan, owing them a combined five more years and \$40 million. At this point their offense has stagnated with guys like Pablo Sandoval and Brandon Crawford not improving.

And like their rotation, their offense wasn't helped at all by their off-season. Hunter Pence was a non-tender candidate last winter and suddenly was gifted a \$90 million contract one season later after raising his OBP 20 points and stealing 22 bases. The Giants then dropped another \$6 million on left fielder Mike Morse, who at this point is just a glorified DH that hits like a pitcher. Let's just say that's not a great combination or a great investment.

The Giants are in trouble because

they failed to adapt; they failed to alter their blueprint as pieces slowly fell apart. It hurt that they haven't produced a player of note from their farm system since Posey in 2010 other than Crawford—if you even want to consider him noteworthy. But it also stings that they've shown an inability to spend money properly.

Instead of dropping \$125 million on Pence and Lincecum, the Giants could have spent their money a whole lot more efficiently, even if it meant shaking up the names on the roster. Ubaldo Jimenez, Matt Garza, and Ricky Nolasco all signed for much less than Lincecum's \$17.5 million AAV and will likely out-perform him. While Carlos Beltran or Curtis Granderson may not out-perform Pence, they would be much cheaper alternatives and could open up more money to spend on an extra pitcher.

But instead, the Giants are left with an aging roster that hasn't changed since they won the title. If Cain and Lincecum return to 80% of their old forms, they will have a chance to succeed with two top-of-the-rotation pitchers, but that just doesn't seem likely. Instead this team seems destined for mediocrity, unless management builds up the courage to shake up the roster and build a new core around Posey and Bumgarner.

Strengths of the System

The Giants have a good number of pitching prospects, although there aren't many ones with big upside. Crick has been absolutely dominant but still needs to sharpen his command and changeup. After that, it's a lot of depth, which is nothing to bat an eye at.

Escobar, Mejia, Stratton, and Blackburn all are potential starters, and although none of them have Crick's stuff yet, you figure that at least one of them will improve enough in the near future to join Crick as a potential mid-rotation starter. As the old saying goes, for every three pitching prospects, one succeeds, one fails, and one gets hurt.

Weaknesses of the System

The Giants just don't have many high-upside players, especially hitters, which is the product of not drafting well and trading off talented players.

Since 2009, San Francisco has drafted six players, and only one of them—Crick—projects to be an above-average regular for the Giants. Stratton doesn't have the secondary pitches to be anything more than a back-end starter, and Arroyo doesn't have any plus tools. Gary Brown and Joe Panik have fizzled out in the upper minors, and the most successful of their draft picks is pitching in New York: Zach Wheeler. But hey, at least they got two months of Carlos Beltran in exchange for the future ace.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Kyle Crick	RHP	B+
1.81 ERA, 12.7 K/9, 5.3 BB/9	21	High-A
Great stuff highlighted by a plus fastball and breaking ball. Command does have issues.		
Edwin Escobar	LHP	B
2.80 ERA, 10.2 K/9, 2.1 BB/9	22	AA
Three average or better pitches with good control. Dominating numbers, high floor.		
Adalberto Mejia	LHP	B
4.13 ERA, 8.6 K/9, 2.7 BB/9	21	AAA
Projectable with good control, needs polish. Oblique injury hurt production last year.		
Mac Williamson	RF	B
.292/.375/.504, 25 HR, 10 SB	23	High-A
Big power with whiffs to match. Numbers are inflated because he was old for High-A.		
Chris Stratton	RHP	B
3.27 ERA, 8.3 K/9, 3.2 BB/9	23	A
He has the pedigree as a 2012 first-round pick and put up very solid numbers, but his scouting report doesn't match. His off-speeds took a step back last year; he looks like a quality innings eater at this point.		
Clayton Blackburn	RHP	B
3.65 ERA, 9.3 K/9, 2.4 BB/9	21	High-A
High floor and consistently good production. Filled out frame means he lacks projection.		
Christian Arroyo	SS	B-
.326/.388/.511, 2 HR, 3 SB	19	Rookie
Lacks plus tools, but has hit well for average so far. May eventually shift to second base.		
Andrew Susac	C	B-
.256/.362/.458, 12 HR, 1 SB	24	AA
Finally starting to tap into his power and improving defense. Hit tool is a question.		
Ty Blach	LHP	B-
2.90 ERA, 8.1 K/9, 1.2 BB/9	23	High-A
Plus control makes up for average arsenal. Another likely back-of-the-rotation starter.		
Kendry Flores	RHP	C+
2.73 ERA, 8.7 K/9, 1.1 BB/9	22	A
Velocity ticked up as season went on, but off-speeds look average. Lacks much upside.		



COLORADO ROCKIES

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Charlie Blackmon						CF
.309	.336	.467	6	7	0.8	
Michael Cuddyer						RF
.331	.389	.530	20	10	2.5	
Carlos Gonzalez						LF
.302	.367	.591	26	21	4.9	
Troy Tulowitzki						SS
.312	.391	.540	25	1	5.6	
Justin Morneau						1B
.259	.323	.411	17	0	0.8	
Wilin Rosario						C
.292	.315	.486	21	4	2.2	
Nolan Arenado						3B
.267	.301	.405	10	2	2.7	
D.J. LeMahieu						2B
.280	.311	.361	2	18	0.8	
Drew Stubbs						OF
.233	.305	.360	10	17	0.8	
Josh Rutledge						IF
.235	.294	.337	7	12	-0.4	
Jordan Pacheco						CI
.239	.276	.312	1	0	-1.4	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Jorge de la Rosa						LHP
3.49	3.76	1.38	167.2	112	2.9	
Jhoulys Chacin						RHP
3.47	3.47	1.26	197.1	126	4.3	
Brett Anderson						LHP
6.04	3.85	1.61	44.2	46	0.3	
Tyler Chatwood						RHP
3.15	3.66	1.43	111.1	66	2.0	
Juan Nicasio						RHP
5.14	4.25	1.47	157.2	119	2.2	
LaTroy Hawkins						RHP
2.93	3.06	1.15	70.2	55	0.8	
Rex Brothers						LHP
1.74	3.36	1.29	67.1	76	1.1	



Brian Kersey - Getty Images

Building around Coors Field

The Rockies' recent efforts to build a team that exploits their unique park's features may give them a shot to win in a weak NL.

No job in baseball may be more challenging than constructing the roster of the Colorado Rockies. Half their games are in the game's most unique ballpark—Coors Field—a place where warning track power becomes home run power.

Stadium designers thought Coors Field would give up more home runs because it is located a mile above sea level, so they made the outfield walls very far back. 347 and 350 feet down the lines. 420 and 424 feet in the power alleys. But that hasn't solved Colorado's home run problem; Coors Field still gives up by far the most home runs. In fact, the spacious dimensions

also led Coors Field to allow by far the most doubles and triples in the league.

The only thing that's slowed down offenses in Coors Field has been the addition of a room-sized humidifier to store baseballs that combats the effects of dry air, which leaves the ball more elastic to the impact of the bat. There still isn't much of an answer to combat the thin air, though, which makes breaking balls spin less and allows balls to fly farther.

The way the Rockies can combat these harsh conditions is by using pitchers with high ground ball rates—to lower the chance of a normally easy fly ball drifting

COLORADO ROCKIES



into the stands—and using good defensive outfielders—to track down fly balls in the spacious outfield.

Slowly but surely, the Rockies have been making those changes. They've hovered around 70 wins the last three seasons, but improvement is on the way. And if it's any consolation, RAWS thought the Rockies' 10-win improvement from 2012 should have been closer to a 15-win improvement, as their production last year should have led to a 78.7-83.3 record.

The pitching aspect of the Rockies' ideal plan has worked out well so far. While the league-average ground ball rate is 44.5%, Rockies starters had a 48% ground ball rate last year. Tyler Chatwood overcame his small frame to post a 58.5% ground ball rate and 3.15 ERA, and Jhoulys Chacin and Jorge de la Rosa also posted above-average ground ball rates and sub-3.50 ERAs.

GM Dan O'Dowd bolstered the ground ball-heavy rotation this winter by trading for Brett Anderson and Jordan Lyles. Anderson cost the team Drew Pomeranz, a former top prospect who busted when he couldn't keep his walks down or pitches in Coors Field, and hasn't been the same since undergoing Tommy John Surgery in 2011. But despite his 5.09 ERA in the past two years, he's managed

a 3.35 FIP and 61.5% ground ball rate in that same period, not to mention 3.56 and 54.9% career averages. Lyles cost the team Dexter Fowler in a puzzling trade, but despite his career 5.35 ERA, Lyles fits the Chatwood mold of a former top prospect who generate ground balls.

The Rockies made smaller changes in the field, although most of the team's improvements should come from young players like Nolan Arenado and Wilin Rosario developing. With Fowler off to Houston, Colorado turns to Drew Stubbs, who is a much better fielder and should benefit from a shift back to a hitter-friendly National League park, even if he never sniffs Fowler's career .365 OBP. Colorado also saw the Todd Helton Era come to a merciful end, after the 40-year old created -0.7 WAR in his final two seasons. Although Justin Morneau hasn't been much better recently, he dealt with concussion symptoms that should be mostly gone now.

But for all their improvements, and even though they have two of the best players at their respective positions in Troy Tulowitzki and Carlos Gonzalez, the Rockies are still a far cry from a Wild Card Spot with a mess of similarly average NL teams like Milwaukee, San Francisco, Arizona, and San Diego. But at least they're headed in a good direction.

Strengths of the System

The Rockies have an interesting farm system because their best two prospects are potential aces, but the rest of their notable prospects are almost all hitters.

Colorado is incredibly deep at up-the-middle positions, the most crucial to develop, with two potential starters at both shortstop and center field with another at catcher. Story was the team's second-ranked prospect last year, although he struck out too much last year and his bat tool disappeared. However, according to a rival scout, as he matures, he should be able to dial back his big, aggressive swing when he needs to, and he has the athleticism to make those changes.

Weaknesses of the System

After Gray and Butler, who both have ace upsides, the Rockies don't have another pitcher who profiles as a starting pitcher. Bettis doesn't have the durability to stick as a starter, and Tyler Matzek is still searching for some semblance of control.

Additionally, because the Rockies have such a unique situation with their fly ball-heavy ballpark, the Rockies could really use more ground ball pitchers. Butler and Bettis definitely fit that profile, but Gray can get very fly ball prone, which may be a concern down the road. Maybe the Rockies can salvage something out of former first-rounder Tyler Anderson, but the Rockies just need more pitching depth.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Jonathan Gray RHP A-

1.93 ERA, 12.3 K/9, 1.9 BB/9 22 High-A

Up to 100 with a nasty slider. Great size, stride, arm action; command needs work.

Eddie Butler RHP A-

1.80 ERA, 8.6 K/9, 3.1 BB/9 23 AA

Up to 98 with sink and tail. Plus slider, hard change, three-quarters slot tough to hit.

Rosell Herrera SS B+

.343/.419/.515, 16 HR, 21 SB 21 A

Every tool is above-average. Finally played up to his tools last year. May move to third.

David Dahl CF B+

.273/.310/.425, 0 HR, 2 SB 20 A

Potential five-tool guy; his development was slowed by torn hamstring. Bat is best tool.

Raimel Tapia CF B

.357/.399/.562, 7 HR, 10 SB 20 Rookie

Plus speed and above-average power could flip if he fills out his frame. Has a plus bat.

Trevor Story SS B

.233/.305/.394, 12 HR, 23 SB 21 High-A

Formerly one of the Rockies' top prospects, Story's stock plummeted when he struck out in one third of his at-bats. He still has good gap power and nice speed. Defensively, he's got a strong arm but average range.

Kyle Parker LF B

.288/.345/.492, 23 HR, 6 SB 24 AA

Above average power, even though he can struggle with breaking balls. Also plays 1B.

Tom Murphy C B

.289/.376/.571, 22 HR, 4 SB 23 AA

Power, arm tools are nice, but he's old for his level. Receiving skills are just average.

Chad Bettis RHP B

4.51 ERA, 8.2 K/9, 2.8 BB/9 25 MLB

Velocity down since missing 2012 with a shoulder injury. Change gets ground balls.

Ryan McMahon 3B B-

.321/.402/.583, 11 HR, 4 SB 19 Rookie

Biggest tool is left-handed power. Athletic with strong arm, average range. Still raw.



SAN DIEGO PADRES

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Everth Cabrera						SS
.283	.355	.381	4	37	3.1	
Will Venable						RF
.268	.312	.484	22	22	2.9	
Chase Headley						3B
.250	.347	.400	13	8	3.6	
Carlos Quentin						LF
.275	.363	.493	13	0	2.1	
Yonder Alonso						1B
.281	.341	.368	6	6	0.6	
Yasmani Grandal						C
.216	.352	.341	1	0	0.6	
Jedd Gyorko						2B
.249	.301	.444	23	1	2.5	
Cameron Maybin						CF
.157	.232	.235	1	4	-0.6	
Chris Denorfia						OF
.279	.339	.395	10	11	3.9	
Seth Smith						OF
.253	.329	.391	8	0	1.1	
Nick Hundley						C
.233	.290	.389	13	1	1.9	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Andrew Cashner						RHP
3.09	3.35	1.13	175.0	128	2.2	
Ian Kennedy						RHP
4.91	4.59	1.40	181.1	163	0.6	
Tyson Ross						RHP
3.17	3.20	1.15	125.0	119	1.6	
Josh Johnson						RHP
6.20	4.62	1.66	81.1	83	0.5	
Eric Stults						LHP
3.93	3.53	1.27	203.2	131	2.6	
Huston Street						RHP
2.70	4.92	1.02	56.2	46	-1.0	
Joaquin Benoit						RHP
2.01	2.87	1.03	67.0	73	1.6	



Norm Hall - Getty Images

Addition by subtraction

Despite PETCO Park's pitcher-friendly confines, San Diego had an awful pitching staff last year. It will improve just by losing those pitchers.

If there's one sure-fire way to derail a season, it's to have a pitching staff that just can't get outs. That was exactly the case for the Padres last year, who managed to do that in the most pitcher-friendly ballpark in baseball.

With the second-worst pitching staff in the league—in terms of pitching WAR—San Diego struggled to a 76-86 record for the second year in a row. My retrospective analysis system wasn't any kinder to the Padres, saying that they had the production of a 71.4-90.6 team.

But while there are all sorts of reasons to be down on the Padres, there are plenty

of reasons to be optimistic about them. Specifically because they were able to stay somewhat relevant—finishing third in the NL West—despite such terrible pitching.

Gone are guys like Jason Marquis, Clayton Richard, and Edinson Volquez. Those three pitchers made 59 starts last year with a combined 5.44 ERA and 5.14 FIP. Two large reasons for Marquis and Richard's struggles (leading to their net -2.8 WAR) were their low strikeout rates and a complete inability to keep fly balls in the ballpark; their combined 23.24 home run per fly ball rate is more than twice the league average of 10.5.

SAN DIEGO PADRES



Instead, the Padres will be working with Josh Johnson and a (hopefully) healthier Tyson Ross and Ian Kennedy.

Johnson had a similar season to the trio of starters listed above with a 6.20 ERA, 4.62 FIP, and 18.5 HR/FB rate in Toronto, only to see his season cut short after 81 1/3 innings when he needed a bone spur removed from his elbow. But, like the Padres rotation as a whole, despite the poor overall numbers, Johnson's peripheral numbers hint at a big turnaround.

Just 30 years old, Johnson didn't lose any velocity from 2012 and actually had the highest strikeout rate of his career. Much of his high ERA can be explained by his abnormally high BABIP, a stat that does not have a high carryover rate year-to-year; his 2013 BABIP was .356, much higher than his career .302 BABIP.

Additionally, there's a track record of veteran pitchers having career resurgences in the friendly confines of PETCO Park. Take Aaron Harang for example, who had a 4.71 ERA from 2008-2010 in Cincinnati, only to have a 3.64 ERA at age 33 in San Diego. Conversely, Heath Bell had a 2.36 ERA from 2009-2011 in San Diego, only to have a 4.59 ERA in his last two seasons in Miami and Arizona.

And besides Johnson, the Padres will

get a boost to the rotation with Andrew Cashner, Ross, and Kennedy pitching more innings. Cashner and Ross only combined to start 42 games last year—between injuries and pitching out of the bullpen—but they combined to have a 3.12 ERA. Kennedy saw his ERA drop nearly an entire run when he was acquired from Arizona, and his rising strikeout rate also hints at a stronger season ahead.

The Padres have even re-stocked their bullpen with the additions of Joaquin Benoit and Alex Torres—two guys who combined to have a 1.87 ERA over 125 innings last year.

With the boosted pitching, the Padres could be borderline competitive this year. Young batters like Yonder Alonso, Jedd Gyorko, and Everth Cabrera have the potential to get much better as they gain experience, and Cameron Maybin can't possibly play any worse than his -0.6 WAR 2013 season, even if he'll miss the first two months of the year with a torn bicep tendon. But the Padres will still need a 14-win improvement to crack the 90-win barrier, the usual standard for making the playoffs, and that's a tall order for a team that is banking on improved health and production from the entire rotation and several hitters.

Strengths of the System

The Padres have an incredible collection of pitching, and a lot of the prospects are coming up at the same time, which could lead to a big wave of pitching hitting the majors at once. Fried, Ross, Eflin, and Walker Weickel all pitched in Fort Wayne together as tall, broad-shouldered high school draftees with three-pitch mixes.

Fried is clearly the best of the four with the best stuff and best control—even after it regressed from 2012. One rival scout likes Eflin the best out of the remaining three as a guy whose competitive juices keep allow him to get through six or seven innings even on bad days. When he's on, his stuff allows him to run through lineups.

Weaknesses of the System

Not so long ago, the Padres had one of the strongest farm systems in the league. Now, many of those prospects have graduated with varying levels of success (Yasmani Grandal, Yonder Alonso, and Jedd Gyorko are still developing). However, two of those top prospects—Liriano and Kelly—fell victim to Tommy John surgery.

Liriano and Kelly didn't play at all last year and had very high upsides before the surgeries. It's not fair to assume that either will come close to their ceiling this year, since the first year back—at least for pitchers—is often just used to set up for a successful season two years down the road.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Austin Hedges	C	B+
.260/.333/.390, 4 HR, 8 SB	21	AA
As strong defensively as anyone. Shows big raw power that hasn't appeared in games.		
Max Fried	LHP	B+
3.49 ERA, 7.6 K/9, 7.6 BB/9	20	A
Stuff improved but command regressed as he nibbled too much. Polished for his age.		
Matt Wisler	RHP	B+
2.78 ERA, 8.7 K/9, 2.2 BB/9	21	AA
Plus fastball, slider, and control, despite off delivery. Doesn't leverage height enough.		
Rymer Liriano	RF	B+
Did not play in 2013	23	AA
Liriano looked like a potential five-tool player but had his development stunted by Tommy John surgery last year. Power is the slowest tool to come around, but he has one of the highest upsides in the system.		
Hunter Renfro	RF	B
.271/.308/.459, 6 HR, 2 SB	22	A
Classic power-arm strength right fielder with good athleticism. Doesn't walk much.		
Casey Kelly	RHP	B
Did not play in 2013	24	MLB
Athletic with a nice sinking fastball and plus curve. Missed last season with TJ surgery.		
Joe Ross	RHP	B
3.75 ERA, 5.8 K/9, 2.9 BB/9	21	A
Fastball is plus, but he needs to add strength to avoid losing command late in the year.		
Zach Eflin	RHP	B
2.73 ERA, 6.5 K/9, 2.4 BB/9	20	A
Stuff is exciting. He should take advantage of his size more since he pitches to contact.		
Jace Peterson	SS	B-
.303/.382/.454, 7 HR, 42 SB	24	High-A
Great instincts lead to lots of walks, steals. After his bat, the rest of his tools are average.		
Dustin Peterson	3B	B-
.293/.337/.344, 0 HR, 3 SB	19	Rookie
Could be a nice hitter with above-average power, but his defense will never be great.		



MILWAUKEE BREWERS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Carlos Gomez						CF
.283	.338	.506	24	40	7.6	
Jean Segura						SS
.294	.329	.423	12	44	3.4	
Ryan Braun						RF
.298	.372	.498	9	4	1.7	
Aramis Ramirez						3B
.283	.370	.461	12	0	1.4	
Jonathan Lucroy						C
.280	.340	.455	18	9	3.6	
Mark Reynolds						1B
.220	.306	.393	21	3	0.4	
Rickie Weeks						2B
.209	.306	.357	10	7	-0.3	
Khris Davis						LF
.279	.353	.596	11	3	1.2	
Logan Schafer						OF
.211	.279	.322	4	7	0.0	
Scooter Gennett						IF
.324	.356	.479	6	2	1.9	
Martin Maldonado						C
.169	.236	.284	4	0	-0.4	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Yovani Gallardo						RHP
4.18	3.89	1.36	180.2	144	1.7	
Matt Garza						RHP
3.82	3.88	1.24	155.1	136	2.2	
Kyle Lohse						RHP
3.35	4.08	1.17	198.2	125	1.8	
Wily Peralta						RHP
4.37	4.30	1.42	183.1	129	1.0	
Marco Estrada						LHP
3.87	3.86	1.08	128.0	118	1.6	
Jim Henderson						RHP
2.70	3.58	1.13	60.0	75	0.3	
Francisco Rodriguez						RHP
2.70	3.65	1.20	46.2	54	0.3	



Mike McGinnis - Getty Images

It all comes down to the draft

For small markets like Milwaukee, drafting well can make great teams, like they had from 2008-2011. Otherwise, you end up with this mess.

The Milwaukee Brewers were one of the most successful NL teams from 2008 to 2011, winning 86 games per season and reaching the playoffs twice. Only the Phillies and Cardinals had more wins over that stretch. Since then? Not so much.

Much of the success of those Brewers teams came from homegrown talent. Corey Hart, J.J. Hardy, Prince Fielder, Rickie Weeks, Yovani Gallardo, and Ryan Braun—six of their top seven players in WAR—were taken in consecutive drafts from 2000-05, and GM Doug Melvin was able to leverage talented youngsters like Matt LaPorta and Brett Lawrie into impact

players like CC Sabathia and Shaun Marcum.

But Hart got hurt, Hardy was traded, and the supporting cast in Milwaukee quickly deteriorated. And as well as the Brewers drafted from 2000 to 2005, they were equally bad moving forward.

Eric Arnett. Dylan Covey. Jeremy Jeffress. Kentrail Davis. Evan Frederickson. Those names are almost certainly unrecognizable and it's because they're just five of the 14 first-round picks the Brewers have selected in the past eight years who have either not signed, been traded, busted, or just lie in the lower

MILWAUKEE BREWERS



minors.

With so little talent coming up through the minors and without an enormous budget, it's hard to stay very competitive. The Brewers have seen that lately with 13- and nine-win drop-offs in the past two seasons.

Now the Brewers are left with one of the most barren farm systems in baseball, which has led them to construct their roster in less-than-ideal ways. Last season, they spent \$33 million on 34-year old Kyle Lohse—ultimately forfeiting their first round pick that would have been 17th overall. They were back at it this winter, singing 30-year old Matt Garza to a four-year, \$50 million deal.

It's not that spending lots of money on free agents is a bad idea necessarily. But uncompetitive teams spending big money on pitchers in their decline years is not always the best allocation of money. A team like the Blue Jays or Angels pursuing Garza makes sense, since adding a player of his quality could push them right in the middle of the playoff picture. But adding Garza pushes Milwaukee from a bottom feeder team to a borderline middling team. There's not much difference.

Signing Lohse was more egregious, since they had to forfeit a draft pick and

furthered the dearth of young talent, but the Garza move indicates that this team wants to compete when its roster looks in need of a rebuild.

Last season, the Brewers only produced 24.6 total WAR, 23rd in the majors. Although the return of Braun from suspension, departure of Yunesky Betancourt to Japan, and addition of Garza will certainly raise that number, this isn't a team built for the playoffs, let alone competitiveness.

But they may not have had much of an option other than to go all-in on this heavily-warted roster. There are clear building blocks in Jean Segura, Carlos Gomez, Braun, and Jonathan Lucroy, but there isn't much after that. A full-scale rebuild would take five to six years, something many teams can't afford to do.

Ultimately, this team is doomed because it is trying to spend its way out of non-contention, which has clearly shown in the past doesn't work. The best way to have a winning team is by collecting a lot of young talent. Draft well (look at the Brewers drafts from 2000 to 2005), and the team will likely turn out successful. Draft poorly (those same Brewers from 2006 to 2013), and it's incredibly difficult to win. It's just that simple.

Strengths of the System

There are no high-probability prospects in this system besides Nelson, but they do have a solid bit of upside in the low-probability players they do have.

The Brewers gambled on great athletes with their last two second-round picks, who are now their top-two prospects: Taylor and Williams. Arcia isn't a spectacular athlete like the previous two, but he has as good of tools, especially on defense, as anyone else in the system.

Gambling on high-risk high reward players won't yield a lot of major league players, but it at least gives the Brewers a shot at having one or two above-average regulars out of this group.

Weaknesses of the System

Where to start? Well Milwaukee has been one of the least-active teams in international free agency—Arcia is the only non-draftee to crack their top ten prospects—which isn't helped by the fact that they've been pretty terrible at drafting lately too.

There's a pretty depressing list of Milwaukee draft busts since 2005, and they didn't even get a chance to blow another first-rounder in 2013 because they forfeited their top selection after foolishly signing Kyle Lohse.

The Brewers' top ten list doesn't feature a single player who projects to be even an average regular, so you could say their farm system's weakness is just everything.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)

Tyrone Taylor

.274/.338/.400, 8 HR, 19 SB

Elite athlete with good defensive instincts and plus speed. Bat will be average at best.

Devin Williams

3.38 ERA, 10.1 K/9, 5.7 BB/9

Athletic, projectable with fastball up to 95. Raw; off-speeds and command need work.

Jimmy Nelson

3.10 ERA, 9.5 K/9, 3.9 BB/9

Strong frame capable of eating innings, but his skillset likely limits him to relief.

Mitch Haniger

.264/.348/.431, 11 HR, 9 SB

Does everything decently well but nothing exceptionally well. Raw power may play up.

Victor Roache

.248/.322/.440, 22 HR, 6 SB

Tremendous power hampered by injuries. Poor defender, Ks too much, too aggressive.

Orlando Arcia

.251/.314/.333, 4 HR, 20 SB

Strong overall defender. Flashes speed and contact tools coming off major ankle injury.

Johnny Hellweg

3.82 ERA, 5.7 K/9, 6.0 BB/9

He can crank his fastball into to the upper-90s, but he doesn't use it well as a putaway pitch. His 6'9" frame leads to some funky mechanics, and his total lack of command or control likely leaves him as a reliever.

Nick Delmonico

.232/.346/.423, 13 HR, 7 SB

Shows above-average power at times. Low upside, has also played third, second base.

Taylor Jungmann

4.60 ERA, 5.5 K/9, 4.9 BB/9

Innings eater with solid ground ball rates. Off-speeds need work, way too many walks.

Clint Coulter

.207/.299/.345, 3 HR, 1 SB

Disastrous year after being demoted to rookie ball. First-rounder tools still there.



PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Ben Revere						CF
.305	.338	.352	0	22	0.9	
Jimmy Rollins						SS
.252	.318	.348	6	22	1.6	
Chase Utley						2B
.284	.348	.475	18	8	3.9	
Ryan Howard						1B
.266	.319	.465	11	0	0.4	
Marlon Byrd						RF
.291	.336	.511	24	2	4.1	
Domonic Brown						LF
.272	.324	.494	27	8	1.6	
Carlos Ruiz						C
.268	.320	.368	5	1	1.4	
Cody Asche						3B
.235	.302	.389	5	1	0.0	
John Mayberry						OF
.227	.286	.391	11	5	-0.4	
Freddy Galvis						IF
.234	.283	.385	6	1	0.1	
Darin Ruf						1B
.247	.348	.458	14	0	0.1	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Cole Hamels						LHP
3.60	3.26	1.16	220.0	202	4.2	
Cliff Lee						LHP
2.87	2.82	1.01	222.2	222	5.1	
A.J. Burnett						RHP
3.30	2.80	1.21	191.0	180	4.0	
Kyle Kendrick						RHP
4.70	4.01	1.40	182.0	110	1.7	
Roberto Hernandez						RHP
4.89	4.63	1.34	151.0	113	0.2	
Jonathan Papelbon						RHP
2.92	3.05	1.14	61.2	57	1.0	
Mike Adams						RHP
3.96	5.25	1.36	25.0	23	-0.4	



Andy Lyons - Getty Images

Age is only a (crucial) number

The Phillies have a lot of players who were great. Were being the key word. But now this is just an old, overpaid, not-so-talented team.

Typically, managers want to hang on to players for too long and GMs want to get rid of players too soon. Oftentimes, these opposing views work out through compromise because the truth almost always lies somewhere in the middle. However, Phillies GM Ruben Amaro Jr. also wants to hold onto players for too long. And that's where the Phillies ran into trouble.

The Phillies were absolutely great from 2007 to 2011, winning five division titles and an average of 94.6 games per season. They even increased their win total every year—an average of 3.3 wins per season—to top out at 102 wins in 2011.

The core of Chase Utley, 28, Jimmy Rollins, 28, Ryan Howard, 27, Shane Victorino, 26, Jayson Werth, 28, Carlos Ruiz, 28, and Cole Hamels, 23, formed one of the best teams in 2007. Adding Cliff Lee, 30, in 2009 and Roy Halladay, 33, in 2010 made them a true juggernaut. But now that Victorino and Werth signed elsewhere, Halladay retired, and the remaining five players average 34 years of age, the Phillies are one of the worst teams in the league.

Amaro created something good but couldn't let go of it. He loved his core so much that he locked it up and made it immovable, impossible to trade off players

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES



to ignite a rebuilding stage.

Howard is owed \$85 million over the next three years. Lee is owed \$87.5 million over the next three years. Hamels is owed \$118.5 million over the next five years. Utley is owed \$27 million over the next two years. Jonathan Papelbon is owed \$26 million over the next two years.

We saw Amaro's failure to adapt his roster come to fruition last year when the team won just 73 games, its lowest total since 2000. But the really bad news is that the team may have even overachieved to get to that measly .451 winning percentage. According to RAWS, the Phillies should only have managed a 65.5-96.5 record, based off their production. Their 7.5-win gap between actual and projected record was the largest gap in baseball last season.

Between the strong likelihood that the Phillies had to overachieve to get to their terrible record, lack of meaningful additions, shrinking window before most of the team is eligible for AARP membership, and lack of impact prospects—mostly thanks to trading for so many veterans—the Phillies seem prime for a rebuild. But that's the opposite of what Amaro did.

Amaro seems to think his team is primed for a playoff push, as he locked

up Ruiz for three more years and \$26 million, signed Marlon Byrd, 36, for two years and \$16 million, and signed A.J. Burnett, 37, for one year and \$16 million. One would think Amaro learned his lesson last year after trading for 37-year old Michael Young and his -0.2 WAR, but he seems content to keep digging his own grave.

To his credit, Amaro has made some progress on acquiring young talent. Last winter he traded for Ben Revere—at the cost of two young pitchers—who played well before breaking his right foot. The team played (relative) youngsters Domonic Brown, Cody Asche, and Darin Ruf for over 1000 plate appearances, but Brown couldn't field, Asche couldn't hit for average, and Ruf couldn't do either.

The signing of 27-year old Cuban Miguel Gonzalez will certainly help a roster bereft of young talent, but it's not nearly enough to make up for years of not planning well for the future. Philly is off on a downward spiral that they may not be able to get out of because they are locked into long-term contracts with aging, regressing players and have no safety net with a lackluster farm system. Amaro won it all in 2008 with much of this same roster but held onto his players for too long, paying for it with this \$174 million disaster of a team.

Strengths of the System

Philly used to have one of the weaker farm systems because they kept plundering it to trade for more veterans. Now they've done a good job replenishing it with upside prospects.

One rival scout thought there were three players to be excited about: Gonzalez, Quinn, and Tocci. Gonzalez has an advanced feel for his age and is able to throw for a ton of strikes. Quinn has game-changing speed, but he's held back by a swing that keeps changing throughout the season. Defensively, he's got great tools but dumb mistakes may force him to center. Tocci displayed great defense and patience despite being the youngest player in the minors other than Julio Urias.

Weaknesses of the System

The Phillies have all sorts of toolsy hitters and a guy with a chance to be an All-Star in Crawford, but there's almost no pitching to be seen in this system. Biddle and Gonzalez both top out at a mid-rotation starter, and Morgan had that same projection until he blew out his shoulder last year.

Former first-rounder Shane Watson has struggled for the most part, but he's still on scouts' radars because of how he throws with guts. Watson is one in a line of many upside picks the Phillies have gone with that hasn't really panned out. That risky strategy and either bad luck or poor development skills on the part of coaches is not a good combination.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Maikel Franco	3B	B+
.320/.356/.569, 31 HR, 1 SB	21	AA
Excellent plate coverage, rarely Ks or walks. Huge power but largely immobile at third.		
J.P. Crawford	SS	B+
.308/.405/.400, 1 HR, 14 SB	19	A
Carl's cousin is a 4-tool talent (no power) with great athleticism and discipline. Raw.		
Jesse Biddle	LHP	B+
3.64 ERA, 10.0 K/9, 5.3 BB/9	22	AA
Curve and changeup look good, but fastball command needs to improve. Very durable.		
Severino Gonzalez	RHP	B
2.00 ERA, 10.3 K/9, 1.9 BB/9	21	AA
Command/control guy with a solid cutter and three iffy breaking balls. Slight frame.		
Roman Quinn	SS	B
.239/.323/.346, 5 HR, 32 SB	21	A
Quinn has plus plus speed and the tools to be an above-average defender. However, his bat has a long way to go, and he'll miss 2014 with a ruptured Achilles tendon after missing time with a fractured wrist.		
Cord Sanberg	LF	B-
.207/.313/.272, 2 HR, 4 SB	19	Rookie
Above-average power, bat speed. Turned down a chance to be Mississippi State QB.		
Kelly Dugan	RF	B-
.291/.352/.506, 20 HR, 1 SB	23	AA
Power is here, but he needs to improve his plate discipline against stronger pitching.		
Carlos Tocci	CF	B-
.209/.261/.249, 0 HR, 6 SB	18	A
Above-average defender, but his discipline is ahead of his bat. Needs to fill out frame.		
Cesar Hernandez	2B	C+
.308/.371/.389, 2 HR, 33 SB	24	MLB
Versatile defensively with plus speed, but he strikes out a lot for a guy with no power.		
Adam Morgan	LHP	C+
3.91 ERA, 6.6 K/9, 3.0 BB/9	24	AAA
A former top prospect, Morgan will miss most of 2014 because of shoulder surgery.		



NEW YORK METS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Chris Young						RF
.200	.280	.379	12	10	0.5	
Daniel Murphy						2B
.286	.319	.415	13	23	3.0	
David Wright						3B
.307	.390	.514	18	17	6.0	
Curtis Granderson						LF
.229	.317	.407	7	8	1.4	
Ike Davis						1B
.205	.326	.334	9	4	-0.1	
Travis d'Arnaud						C
.202	.286	.263	1	0	-0.1	
Ruben Tejada						SS
.202	.259	.260	0	2	-0.3	
Juan Lagares						CF
.242	.281	.352	4	6	2.9	
Eric Young Jr.						OF
.249	.310	.336	2	46	0.8	
Wilmer Flores						IF
.211	.248	.295	1	0	-0.2	
Lucas Duda						1B
.223	.352	.415	15	0	0.2	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Dillon Gee						RHP
3.62	4.00	1.28	199.0	142	1.2	
Bartolo Colon						RHP
2.65	3.23	1.17	190.1	117	3.9	
Zack Wheeler						RHP
3.42	4.17	1.36	100.0	84	0.6	
Jon Niese						LHP
3.71	3.58	1.44	143.0	105	1.6	
Jenrry Mejia						RHP
2.30	2.46	1.17	27.1	27	0.7	
Bobby Parnell						RHP
2.16	2.33	1.00	50.0	44	1.2	
Vic Black						RHP
3.71	3.46	1.35	17.0	15	0.1	



Kathy Willens - AP Photo

Breaking: Mets are unlucky

The Mets had something good going with Matt Harvey's magical year until he had Tommy John surgery. It's a nice metaphor for the team.

One step forward, two steps back. That's how it seems to be for the Mets these days.

Where there was once hope with Matt Harvey dominating the first half and starting the All-Star Game in Queens, his ERA rose an average of 0.35 runs each month until he was shut down in August with a partial tear of his UCL that would eventually need Tommy John Surgery.

Where there was once hope with young prospects on the brink of the majors like Travis d'Arnaud, they were only met with a variety of injuries (both shoulder and foot) and disappointment once he

actually reached the majors.

But that seems to be something Mets fans have been accustomed to lately: routinely getting let down. And with another year full of flawed—albeit much more talented—players, that tradition won't be changing quite yet.

One of the main problems for the Mets over the past decade has been their front office. Sandy Alderson has done a good job since he arrived in 2010, especially surrounding himself with bright minds like former top execs Paul DePodesta and J.P. Ricciardi, but the Mets pay attention to public criticism a little too much.

NEW YORK METS



Oftentimes, that manifests itself in the form of the Mets making short-term Band-Aid moves at the cost of their long-term success.

To the Mets' credit, they've done a very solid job of acquiring talent. After trading Marlon Byrd and generally lacking talented offensive players, the Mets brought in Curtis Granderson on a long-term deal and Chris Young on a short, low-risk deal. And after losing Harvey for the 2014 season, the Mets were able to bring in Bartolo Colon on a short-term deal.

But as well as that trio has done at times over the last few years, they are all equally wanted. Granderson strikes out too much and saw his power zapped last year by two separate arm injuries. Young has traces of his old 20-20 power and speed but can no longer hit for average or field especially well. Colon, well, is massively overweight—his generous 265-pound listing gives him a 37.0 BMI—and relies on a sub-90 mph fastball for 86% of his pitches.

Those three acquisitions represent the Mets' roster as a whole pretty well. At a very basic level, they are talented, but several key problems make them undesirable to most teams.

In the lineup, for instance, Juan Lagares tests off the charts defensively—

although defensive metrics can vary greatly year-to-year—and Ruben Tejada has the tools to be a good defender, but the young duo combined for a .228/.273/.320 hitting line. d'Arnaud was one of the top-two catching prospects in the game last year but can't for the life of him stay healthy. He's only made it to the 300 at-bat threshold twice in his seven years of pro ball.

Even in terms of pitching, the team has problems across the board; after Harvey, no pitcher on the Mets created more than 1.6 WAR last year. Jon Niese and Dillon Gee were very solid, but they have very low strikeout rates, and Gee has problems keeping the ball out of the air. Jenrry Mejia and Jeurys Familia are both very talented, but neither has shown the control or track record of health to stick as a starter.

There's still reason to be excited about this team as long as David Wright is in the lineup—although it's sad he'll never be on a contending team while in his prime. Once Harvey is healthy again, he, Zack Wheeler, and Noah Syndergaard should form an excellent top-of-the-rotation. But for now, you know the team's in trouble because Daisuke Matsuzaka is contending for a rotation spot, and there's just not enough space to point out the problems with that.

Strengths of the System

A couple years from now, we may look at the Mets and see the strongest top of the rotation in the league with Matt Harvey, Zack Wheeler, and Syndergaard. Add in Montero, and the Mets could have a really scary rotation.

But it's not just excellent pitching prospects near the majors that make the Mets' system strong, they have a few impact bats who could get major playing time too. d'Arnaud and Flores both have dynamic bats, and at least d'Arnaud should have a plus glove. The jury's still out on what position Flores will play, as he'll see time at third and second primarily and shortstop in brief stints as a backup.

Weaknesses of the System

There aren't any glaring holes in the Mets' farm system, although they could always use more pitching, especially left-handed pitching.

The team could also use more up-the-middle prospects, especially in the infield. Former first-rounder Gavin Cecchini looks fairly lost at the plate, and Rosario hasn't looked much better, although he's two years younger and far more raw. With Flores too big to play shortstop full-time and Tejada lacking the bat to be a full-time starter, New York is in search of a shortstop of the future. Dilson Herrera's in an interesting for one rival scout, who likes his ability to drive low-and-away pitches to the opposite field at his age.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Noah Syndergaard	RHP	A-
3.06 ERA, 10.2 K/9, 2.1 BB/9	21	AA
Up to 98 with two potential plus off-speeds. Good control but has some platoon issues.		
Travis d'Arnaud	C	B+
.245/.358/.392, 4 HR, 0 SB	25	MLB
Great defensively, intriguing power. Only issue is a complete inability to stay healthy.		
Rafael Montero	RHP	B+
2.78 ERA, 8.7 K/9, 2.0 BB/9	23	AAA
Plus command with three above-average pitches. Medium ceiling, but fairly low risk.		
Dominic Smith	1B	B
.301/.398/.439, 3 HR, 2 SB	18	Rookie
Great approach, solid defense. Sweet swing, but how much power has yet to be seen.		
Wilmer Flores	3B	B
.301/.337/.488, 16 HR, 1 SB	22	MLB
Too big to play shortstop, Flores is still looking for a position. He may wind up at first, second, or a corner outfield spot, but we know he can rake, even if his aggressive approach holds back his batting average.		
Brandon Nimmo	CF	B
.273/.397/.359, 2 HR, 10 SB	21	A
Raw coming out of Wyoming, but defense, bat tools, discipline are all above-average.		
Kevin Plawecki	C	B
.305/.390/.448, 8 HR, 1 SB	23	High-A
Should hit for average and is at least an average defender. No tool is spectacular.		
Amed Rosario	SS	B-
.241/.279/.358, 3 HR, 2 SB	18	Rookie
Bonus baby with the potential for all five tools to be plus, but so very raw right now.		
Cesar Puello	RF	B-
.326/.403/.547, 16 HR, 24 SB	23	AA
Final produced up to the level of his tools. Was suspended for Biogenesis connections.		
Michael Fulmer	RHP	B-
3.33 ERA, 8.2 K/9, 3.7 BB/9	21	High-A
Great stuff hampered by knee injury and questionable control. Has plenty of upside.		



CHICAGO CUBS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Starlin Castro						SS
.245	.284	.347	10	9	-0.1	
Darwin Barney						2B
.208	.266	.303	7	4	0.4	
Anthony Rizzo						1B
.233	.323	.419	23	6	1.6	
Nate Schierholtz						RF
.251	.301	.470	21	6	1.4	
Junior Lake						LF
.284	.332	.428	6	4	1.2	
Justin Ruggiano						CF
.222	.298	.396	18	15	0.9	
Wellington Castillo						C
.274	.349	.397	8	2	3.2	
Luis Valbuena						3B
.218	.331	.378	12	1	2.0	
Ryan Sweeney						OF
.266	.324	.448	6	1	1.1	
Emilio Bonifacio						Util
.243	.295	.331	3	28	0.6	
George Kottaras						C
.180	.349	.370	5	1	0.7	

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Jeff Samardzija						RHP
4.34	3.77	1.35	213.2	214	2.8	
Travis Wood						LHP
3.11	3.89	1.15	200.0	144	2.8	
Edwin Jackson						RHP
4.98	3.79	1.46	175.1	135	2.0	
Jake Arrieta						RHP
4.78	4.84	1.33	75.1	60	0.2	
Jason Hammel						RHP
4.97	4.93	1.46	139.1	96	0.7	
Jose Veras						RHP
3.02	3.62	1.07	62.2	60	0.7	
James Russell						LHP
3.59	4.45	1.22	52.2	37	0.0	



Ron Vesely - Getty Images

Relief is on the way

Theo Epstein and Co. have little to show in the majors, but there's a bevy of bats close to the majors that will change the arc of this franchise.

Since President Theo Epstein took over three winters ago, the Cubs have managed a .392 winning percentage, their worst mark over a two-year spread since 1980-81. But despite that lowly record, the Cubs are set up in a great position, better than they have been in years.

Yes, going 66-96 is not much to be proud of, even coming off a 61-101 season, but it's clear that the Cubs are improving. Looking at the raw numbers, that five-win improvement may even have been less than it should have been; RAWs had the Cubs last year as a team produced at the level of a 72.8-89.2 team.

That 6.8-win differential doesn't even take into account odd seasons for several key Cubs. Starlin Castro had a lost season, watching his career .330 wOBA drop to a measly .280. Edwin Jackson had the second-lowest FIP of his career (3.79), but his ERA ballooned to 4.98, his highest since 2007. Even Anthony Rizzo only managed a .233 batting average when most scouts consider his hitting tool to be plus at worst.

The underachieving players last year and peripheral team numbers hint that the Cubs are in line for a large swing in wins next year just by staying pat, which they largely did this winter. But like last year,

CHICAGO CUBS



the product at Wrigley Field doesn't matter much for the Cubs' plan. This team isn't talented enough to make the playoffs; a 60-win team or 80-win team will still be at home in October.

What does matter to the Cubs is the progression of their young players. The progression of guys like Castro, Rizzo, and Junior Lake—players who are part of Chicago's long-term plan—are essential, along with the constituents of one of the most loaded minor league systems in the game.

Epstein inherited an incredibly average farm system when he arrived in Chicago—Rizzo and Brett Jackson were both highly touted prospects, but the system lacked much of any depth. Through strong international spending and smart drafting, the Cubs are now overflowing with young talent, especially at the plate. Whereas two years ago, the Cubs had just two hitters with a good chance to be above-average regulars, they now have five prospects with that status or better.

Shorstop Javier Baez and third baseman Kris Bryant combined to hit 46 home runs last year over 723 plate appearances and should be staples in the middle of the Cubs' lineup for years to come. Outfielders Albert Almora and Jorge Soler have intriguing combinations

of defense and hitting versus power and speed. Even lower down in the minors, the Cubs are stocked with high upside players like Arismendy Alcantara and Jeimer Candelario, something the Cubs used to not be able to boast.

Although the Cubs are stocked with young bats, they do have a dearth of quality pitching prospects. C.J. Edwards, acquired for Matt Garza last trade deadline, had a breakout year, but other than him and Pierce Johnson, there's a severe lack of arms. Arodys Vizcaino has upper-90s velocity and a power curve, but his lack of a healthy track record leaves him more likely as a reliever.

The Cubs clearly have the pieces to build a championship team, even if few of them are in the majors. And while they'll need to find more pitching one way or another, we've seen they have the resources to go out and sign a player (see Jackson, Edwin), and they've got the resources to trade for a young pitcher.

Patience will be needed to watch this team improve. The success of the St. Louis Cardinals and Pittsburgh Pirates in vastly improving last year while maintaining top farm systems may be a small bump in the road for the Cubs, but there's no need to panic. We've seen Epstein build championship teams before, and he's going to build another great team soon.

Reasons for Optimism

The Cubs have so much hitting coming up the pipeline it's a little ridiculous. They have so much hitting, in fact, that it's hard to see how some of their pieces are going to fit together.

Starlin Castro and Anthony Rizzo are already cornerstone players at shortstop and first base, but Baez and Bryant will be knocking on the door soon as left-side infielders. Castro could shift over to second base, but then Alcantara wouldn't have a position. Candelario and Villanueva are already blocked too by Bryant and potentially Baez. To make things even crazier, there may not be much room for infielders to shift to the outfield either with Almora and Soler.

Reasons for Pessimism

Cubs fans can get excited for all the hitting coming their way, but pitching is still an issue for them. Edwards has the stuff of a top-line starter, but his frail frame leads many to wonder if he can stick as a starter long-term. Johnson is the only other prospect who clearly projects as a starter, but his four-pitch mix isn't much to write home about.

Although teams are usually reluctant to trade away young pitching, the good news for the Cubs is that they have the firepower to pull off a challenge trade that swaps good hitting prospects for a good young pitcher. That may be the best route to add more arms to this loaded system.

Top 10 Prospects	Pos	Grade
Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Javier Baez	SS	A
.282/.341/.578, 37 HR, 20 SB	21	AA
Incredible bat speed with big-time power and strong arm. Could use more patience.		
Kris Bryant	3B	A-
.336/.390/.688, 9 HR, 1 SB	22	High-A
Huge power and a nice bat too. Strong arm defensively. Not too far from the majors.		
Albert Almora	CF	B+
.329/.376/.466, 3 HR, 4 SB	20	A
Outstanding defender with great instincts. Plus bat but his power may develop later.		
Jorge Soler	RF	B+
.281/.343/.467, 8 HR, 5 SB	22	High-A
Very raw but possesses plus power and a plus arm. Tends to be aggressive to a fault.		
C.J. Edwards	RHP	B+
1.86 ERA, 12.0 K/9, 3.2 BB/9	22	High-A
Gets a lot of grounders and strikeouts with plus fastball and curve. Very slight frame.		
Arismendy Alcantara	2B	B
.271/.352/.451, 15 HR, 31 SB	22	AA
Flashes great speed, defense. Plus bat speed gives him plenty of pop, despite small size.		
Pierce Johnson	RHP	B
2.74 ERA, 9.4 K/9, 3.3 BB/9	23	High-A
Solid 4-pitch mix with good control, so-so command. Could be a mid-rotation starter.		
Jeimer Candelario	3B	B
.256/.346/.396, 11 HR, 1 SB	20	A
Held his own at a young age. Switch-hitter with nice power potential; still very raw.		
Dan Vogelbach	1B	B-
.285/.375/.449, 19 HR, 5 SB	21	High-A
That he's 6', 260 pounds and will always be a defensive liability is a major concern, but he can flat out hit. Big power from the left side and can hit for average with a great eye at the plate. But his body type is scary.		
Christian Villanueva	3B	B-
.261/..317/.469, 19 HR, 5 SB	23	AA
Excellent defender with increasing power. Aggressive approach hurts his average.		



MIAMI MARLINS

Lineup						Pos
AVG	OBP	SLG	HR	SB	WAR	
Rafael Furcal						2B
.264	.325	.346	5	12	0.8	
Christian Yelich						LF
.288	.370	.396	4	10	1.4	
Giancarlo Stanton						RF
.249	.365	.480	24	1	2.3	
Garrett Jones						1B
.233	.289	.419	15	2	-0.2	
Jarrod Saltalamacchia						C
.273	.338	.466	14	4	3.6	
Marcell Ozuna						CF
.265	.303	.389	3	5	1.6	
Casey McGehee						3B
.292	.376	.515	28	2	--*	
Adeiny Hechavarria						SS
.227	.267	.298	3	11	-1.9	
Brian Bogusevic						OF
.273	.323	.462	6	2	1.0	
Derek Dietrich						IF
.214	.275	.405	9	1	0.0	
Jeff Mathis						C
.181	.251	.284	5	0	-0.5	

*Japanese Pacific League Statistics

Pitchers						L/R
ERA	FIP	WHIP	IP	K	WAR	
Jose Fernandez						RHP
2.19	2.73	0.98	172.2	187	4.2	
Nate Eovaldi						RHP
3.39	3.59	1.32	106.1	78	1.5	
Henderson Alvarez						RHP
3.59	3.18	1.14	102.2	57	1.9	
Jacob Turner						RHP
3.74	4.43	1.44	118.0	77	0.3	
Tom Koehler						RHP
4.41	4.27	1.36	143.0	92	0.6	
Steve Cischek						RHP
2.33	2.52	1.08	69.2	74	1.4	
Mike Dunn						LHP
2.66	3.12	1.20	67.2	72	0.8	



Marc Serota – Getty Images

Fish out of water

Because they have so little talent, Miami has had to call up prospects to play in the majors when they're not especially close to contributing.

The Marlins are really bad. It doesn't take a lot of baseball knowledge to know that. But the extent to how bad they are is a bit striking.

Last season, Miami's offense posted a -0.7 WAR. Their batters were collectively below replacement level. In essence, they could have called up nine random players from Triple-A and fielded a better team.

To put that further in prospective, this is the first time a team has posted a negative offensive WAR since the 2004 Diamondbacks, who went 51-111, and the worst WAR since the 2003 Tigers, who went 43-119. Only eight players posted a

positive WAR—three of those were pitchers over a combined 99 plate appearances—while a whopping 22 players—just six of whom were pitchers—posted a negative WAR.

Put simply: the Marlins' offense is an eyesore. And what's worse, their franchise seems to have no sense of direction where it's headed.

The Marlins haven't been afraid to push their young guys, either. Jose Fernandez had only pitched 55 innings in High-A before starting last season as Miami's 5th starter. Christian Yelich, Jake Marisnick, and Marcell Ozuna only played a

MIAMI MARLINS



combined 163 games in Double-A before getting the call in their age 21, 21, and 22 seasons.

But while several of the young players called up have succeeded—Fernandez went on to win NL Rookie of the Year—several of them sank instead of swam, when there was no reason to toss them in the deep end in the first place. Marisnick squeaked out a .183/.231/.248 triple slash and Ozuna only managed a .303 OBP.

The cost of calling up a young player isn't just the potential for poor play and stunted development; it's also a money. By not letting the players normally develop in the minor leagues, the Marlins will have to pay these players more money sooner in arbitration, which is not what one would expect from a tightfisted team like the Marlins. Especially considering this team was never close to contention all year—they finished with the second-worst record in the league—it makes even less sense to prematurely start the players' arbitration clocks.

But again, despite the fact that they are mile from contention, the Marlins also went through the off-season like borderline contenders. They dropped \$21 million on Jarrod Saltalamacchia and brought in veterans Garrett Jones, Rafael Furcal, and Casey McGehee.

Bringing in veteran players isn't necessarily a bad thing, but that money could have been allocated in much better ways, considering an improvement from 62 wins to 65 wins is essentially meaningless in the grand scheme of things. Additionally, it takes away time from young players who are ready for their shot in the majors like Derek Dietrich, Rob Brantly, and J.R. Realmuto.

Many of these weird decisions can be chalked up to a front office that rivals the Cleveland Browns in dysfunction. Meddling owner Jeffrey Loria fired longtime exec Larry Beinfest last fall, but replaced him with Michael Hill as president and Dan Jennings as General Manager, two guys who have been around with Beinfest for the better part of the last decade. No real turnover, just churning the same defective pot.

What the Marlins really need to do is go all in in one direction. They either need to bottom out like the Astros and collect a lot of assets, or spend like crazy and hope their talented prospects all live up to their expectations to make one of their World Series runs that randomly happens once per decade. But if they half-ass it with one foot on either side of the fence, they'll get buried in no man's land at the bottom of the National League for years to come.

Strengths of the System

A lot of the Marlins' young talent has graduated because they've had to push top prospects to the majors out of necessity. Jose Fernandez, Christian Yelich, and Marcell Ozuna won't appear on prospect lists, but that trio has a bright future.

The real strength of the team in terms of prospects is pitching. Heaney and Nicolino are very polished and can help out the team this season, but then there's a glut of older pitching prospects who could make an impact soon either as a starter or out of the pen. Flynn has a chance to grab a rotation spot, and Conley could join him, or pitch out of the pen, where his stuff plays up in short stretches.

Weaknesses of the System

Miami is pretty low on impact bats after so many prospects graduated early. Many of them in the majors have warts but plenty of promise. Take Adeiny Hechavarria for example, who one NL executive considers a Gold Glove-caliber defender—one of the best in the game—but only managed a .267 OBP.

But in terms of actual prospects, Moran and Marisnick are the only notable prospects. Their 10th-ranked prospect Romero currently does not project as a major league regular. Even Moran has questions about how much power he'll post, and Marisnick hasn't quite been able to translate his plus tools into production yet.

Top 10 Prospects

Key Stats (over multiple levels)	Age	Level
Andrew Heaney	LHP	B+
1.60 ERA, 8.3 K/9, 2.5 BB/9	23	AA
Plus fastball, slider with a potentially plus changeup. Good command despite delivery.		
Colin Moran	3B	B+
.299/.354/.442, 4 HR, 1 SB	21	A
Extremely polished bat, but his plus power has yet to set in. Only average defensively.		
Jake Marisnick	CF	B
.259/.318/.422, 13 HR, 14 SB	23	MLB
Already has plus defense, speed, and arm tools, and power is almost there. Numbers don't match his potential because he was rushed to the majors last year. Needs to correct his overly-aggressive approach.		
Justin Nicolino	LHP	B
3.11 ERA, 6.0 K/9, 1.9 BB/9	22	AA
Lacks big upside, but plus change, control, command make him a fairly safe prospect.		
Anthony DeSclafani	RHP	B-
2.65 ERA, 8.0 K/9, 1.6 BB/9	24	AA
Converted reliever who's succeeded on the mound so far with better slider, velocity.		
Brian Flynn	LHP	B-
3.21 ERA, 8.1 K/9, 2.8 BB/9	24	MLB
6'8" frame and velocity up to 95 look good, but 3 off-speeds, command need refining.		
Adam Conley	LHP	B-
3.25 ERA, 8.4 K/9, 2.4 BB/9	24	AA
Solid velocity, plus changeup, improving slider. Keeps producing with solid control.		
Trevor Williams	RHP	B-
2.38 ERA, 6.4 K/9, 2.1 BB/9	22	A
Nice four-pitch mix, although he may ditch an iffy curveball. Mostly pitches to contact.		
Jose Urena	RHP	B-
3.73 ERA, 6.4 K/9, 1.7 BB/9	22	High-A
Didn't miss too many bats for nice fastball, change combo. Good command, durable.		
Avery Romero	2B	C+
.276/.341/.391, 3 HR, 3 SB	21	A
Will hit for average with solid gap power. Lacks much speed, is an average defender.		



PROSPECTS & PREDICTIONS

Earlier in the off-season, I published my Top 50 MLB Prospects list on my website, The Knuckle Blog. Here's the list again, and you can find scouting reports for each player on their team's page.

1. Byron Buxton, Twins CF
2. Xander Bogaerts, Red Sox SS
3. Carlos Correa, Astros SS
4. Javier Baez, Cubs SS
5. Oscar Taveras, Cardinals CF
6. Addison Russell, Athletics SS
7. Archie Bradley, D-Backs RHP
8. Francisco Lindor, Indians SS
9. Taijuan Walker, Mariners RHP
10. Kris Bryant, Cubs 3B
11. Miguel Sano, Twins 3B
12. Dylan Bundy, Orioles RHP
13. Jameson Taillon, Pirates RHP
14. Gregory Polanco, Pirates CF
15. George Springer, Astros CF
16. Mark Appel, Astros RHP
17. Lucas Giolito, Nationals RHP
18. Jonathan Gray, Rockies RHP
19. Robert Stephenson, Reds RHP
20. Kevin Gausman, Orioles RHP

21. Kyle Zimmer, Royals RHP
22. Eddie Butler, Rockies RHP
23. Noah Syndergaard, Blue Jays RHP
24. Corey Seager, Dodgers SS
25. Aaron Sanchez, Blue Jays RHP
26. Albert Almora, Cubs CF
27. Andrew Heaney, Marlins LHP
28. Kyle Crick, Giants RHP
29. Jorge Soler, Cubs RF
30. Maikel Franco, Phillies 3B
31. Yordano Ventura, Royals RHP
32. Tyler Glasnow, Pirates RHP
33. Jackie Bradley Jr., Red Sox CF
34. Nick Castellanos, Tigers 3B
35. Travis d'Arnaud, Mets C
36. Austin Meadows, Pirates CF
37. Kohl Stewart, Twins RHP
38. Joc Pederson, Dodgers CF
39. Garin Cecchini, Red Sox 3B
40. Henry Owens, Red Sox LHP

41. Austin Hedges, Padres C
42. Clint Frazier, Indians RF
43. Billy Hamilton, Reds CF
44. Raul Mondesi, Royals SS
45. Julio Urias, Dodgers LHP
46. Trevor Bauer, Indians RHP
47. Lucas Sims, Braves RHP
48. Jonathan Singleton, Astros 1B
49. Hunter Harvey, Orioles RHP
50. Taylor Guerrieri, Rays RHP

Postseason Predictions

WILD CARD ROUND

Braves over Reds Rays over Blue Jays

DIVISIONAL SERIES

Nationals over Braves Red Sox over Rays
Dodgers over Cardinals Rangers over Tigers

CHAMPIONSHIP SERIES

Nationals over Dodgers Red Sox over Tigers

Nationals over Red Sox in 6

