

2015 Fantasy Baseball Guide



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Foreward

Hello reader. My name is Matt Commins and this is my third year writing the fantasy guide. I've grown a lot since I wrote the last year's fantasy guide. Last season I wrote the Fantasy Roundup five days a week for [Baseball Professor](#). I volunteered for this assignment because my goal is to eventually get a job writing about fantasy baseball and I thought it would be fun to simulate the experience of being a fantasy writer as a job. If you read everything I wrote you'll notice some articles were really good, some were average and some weren't so good (these were mostly towards the end of the year). Despite the variation in performance I can honestly say my recommendations and the quality of my writing got better as the year progressed. One of my best calls was saying **Jake Arrieta** [should be owned in all leagues](#) after he made his 2014 debut.

Towards the end of the year I ran out of gas. After the All Star Break I had two jobs not including the baseball writing but I still persevered. At the conclusion of the regular season ended I adopted my first dog. His name is Hardy and he's the cover of this year's fantasy guide. I choose the name Hardy because of my affection for Tom Hardy, the English actor who is best known for Inception and The Dark Knight. Back in 2011 I came across the Up and In Podcast from Baseball Prospectus and after listening to one episode I fell hard for them and they lit a fire under my butt ; I wanted to learn as much about baseball as possible. Hearing two extremely intelligent people discuss baseball in a funny, informative way without any clichés was so invigorating that I couldn't help but want to expand upon the ideas and topics they discussed.

I've been playing fantasy baseball for ten years, but it wasn't until I heard the Podcast where I became obsessed with learning as much as possible. In 2012 I started a blog and I've been writing about baseball ever since. If you listened the first podcast, aptly named 0.9, they discuss this little known art film called Bronson. The star of that movie was Tom Hardy. Based on their recommendation I saw the film and I was blown away by how good Tom Hardy was.

In July of 2011 I was fortunate enough to meet Tom Hardy at Comic Con. I only met him for 2-3 minutes he couldn't have been a nicer guy. I was so excited about my meeting with Tom Hardy I emailed the Podcast and they read on the air! After meeting him I watched all of his movies and TV shows. For my money he's the best actor in the world. So back to my dog, Hardy; when I got him I couldn't have thought of a better than Hardy.

If I never came across the Podcast that one random night I would never have written this fantasy guide or would have rescued a dog and named him Hardy. It's really funny how a podcast (or anything else that's relatively trivial) could have a major impact on the course of one's life.

I honestly believe this is by far the best analysis and writing I've ever done and I hope you enjoy it. Since I wrote and edited the entire thing by myself there are going to be errors. I apologize ahead of time. Please do not let that detract from what the overall points I'm making.

Why I Use Strikeout and Walk Rates

When you read my guide you'll notice I never mention K/9 or BB/9. Instead I refer to strikeout rate (K%) and walk rate (BB%). The reason why I do this is because rate based stats provide a pitchers true numbers because the percentages are determined by the number of batters faced. It also provides a better idea of how well a player pitched. In comparison, K/9 and BB/9 scale the game based on the number of innings a pitcher threw regardless of how many batters a pitcher faced.

For example, I'm going to illustrate how strikeout rate is a better statistic. Take a look at the table below. Both pitchers each had ten strikeouts in nine innings, but Player B was a more effective than Player A. If we use K/9 both players were just as dominate, but if you look at K% you'll notice Player B was a far more effective pitcher.

Splits	Innings	ABs	Hits	Walks	Strikeouts	K/9	K%
Player A	9	33	7	4	10	10	30.3%
Player B	9	27	5	1	10	10	37.0%

The tables below provide primers for strikeout and walk rates, which will make the fantasy guide more consumable. The data is based from the 2013 season.

Starting Pitchers	
Splits	K%
Elite	28.8%
Great	25.3%
Good	23.0%
Average	20.8%
Below Average	18.3%
Poor	15.7%

Relief Pitchers	
Splits	K%
Elite	38.0%
Great	30.3%
Good	25.4%
Average	22.0%
Below Average	17.6%
Poor	15.0%

Starting Pitchers	
Splits	BB%
Elite	3.7%
Great	5.0%
Good	6.3%
Average	7.5%
Below Average	8.9%
Poor	10.2%

Relief Pitchers	
Splits	BB%
Elite	3.5%
Great	5.5%
Good	6.9%
Average	8.5%
Below Average	10.5%
Poor	12.7%

Statistical/Sabermetric Baselines

Every fantasy owner should know the statistical baselines for player performance. In my player profiles I assume you'll know a hitter with a 25% HR/FB rate was extremely lucky or a hitter with a .370 BABIP was extremely lucky (**in most cases**).

Hitter Baselines

BABIP: This is the most misunderstood and misused baseball statistic in fantasy. It's widely used as a barometer for how lucky a player has been, but be careful because BABIP on its own does not tell the full story. It's important to **remember every player has their own baseline**. For example, Ichiro has a career BABIP of .347, which is 40 points higher than the Major League average (.290-.310). Last year he had a .300 BABIP, which appears normal, but in actuality was below average.

HR/FB: Shows how many fly balls turn into home runs

"Slash Line": AVG/OBP/SLG

Isolated Power (ISO): A measure of a hitter's raw power. Or, to look at it another way, it measures how good a player is at hitting for extra bases.

A little background about **ground balls, fly balls** and **line drives**; ground balls are a hitter's worst friend. Ground balls create 0.05 runs per out, fly balls create 0.13 runs per out and line drives create 1.26 runs per out.

HR/FB	
Excellent	20%
Great	15%
Above Average	12.5%
Average	9.5%
Below Average	7.5%
Poor	5%
Zima	1%

League Averages	
LD% (Lind Drive)	20%
GB% (Ground Ball)	44%
FB% (Fly Ball)	36%
IFFB% (Infield Fly Ball)	10%

ISO	
Excellent	.250
Great	.200
Above Average	.180
Average	.145
Below Average	.120
Poor	.100
Zima	.080

BABIP	
Normal	.290-.310

Batting Average of Hit Types	
LD	.670
GB	.236
FB	.288

Rating	K%	BB%
Excellent	10.00%	15.00%
Great	12.50%	12.50%
Above Average	15.00%	10.00%
Average	18.50%	8.50%
Below Average	20.00%	7.00%
Poor	25.00%	5.50%
Awful	27.50%	4.00%

Pitcher Baselines

Left On Base Percentage (LOB%): Measures the percentage of base runners a pitcher stranded on base over the course of a season.

Fielding Independent Pitching (FIP): Converts a pitcher's three true outcomes into an earned run average-like number. The formula is $(13*HR+3*BB-2*K)/IP$, plus a constant (usually around 3.2) to put it on the same scale as earned run average.

Expected Fielding Independent Pitching (xFIP): Calculated in the same way as FIP, except it replaces a pitcher's home run total with an estimate of how many home runs they should have allowed. This estimate is calculated by taking the league-average home run to fly ball rate (~9-10% depending on the year) and multiplying it by a pitcher's fly ball rate.

BB/9: Shows how many batters a pitcher is walking per nine innings. Usually, you want to refrain from drafting pitchers who walk a lot of hitters because it increases the likelihood those runners are going to score.

K/9: Shows how many batters a pitcher is striking out per nine innings. Usually, you want to draft pitchers who strike out a lot of pitchers because they help you in the strikeout category and most importantly, increase the likelihood they'll allow fewer runs, which will increase the opportunity of winning games.

K%: Shows the percentage of batters a pitcher is striking out. I find this statistic to be a more accurate than K/9. For example, suppose a pitcher strikes out two batters and allowed no hits or walks in three innings. His K/9 would be 6, but his K% would be 33%. The K% provides a more detailed story about the pitcher's dominance.

BB%: I feel the same about BB% as I do about K%. Please read K% for more information.

Fair Run Average (FRA): Scaled to run average and measures not only what a pitcher did, but also when he did it. Adjustments are made for defensive quality. Pitchers receive credit for good sequencing, thus rewarding pitchers who seem to work out of jams more often than usual.

HR/FB	
Excellent	5.0%
Great	7.0%
Above Average	8.5%
Average	9.5%
Below Average	10.5%
Poor	11.5%
Zima	13.0%

LOB%	
Excellent	80.0%
Great	78.0%
Above Average	75.0%
Average	72.0%
Below Average	70.0%
Poor	65.0%
Zima	60.0%

FIP	
Excellent	2.17
Great	3.36
Above Average	4.00
Average	4.56
Zima	5.68

Starting Pitchers		
Rating	BB/9	BB%
Excellent	1.54	4.2%
Great	2.05	5.0%
Above Average	2.48	6.5%
Average	2.99	7.8%
Below Average	3.64	9.3%
Zimal	4.27	10.8%

FRA	
Excellent	2.17
Great	3.36
Above Average	4.00
Average	4.56
Zima	5.68

Starting Pitchers		
Rating	K/9	K%
Excellent	9.63	26.0%
Great	8.95	23.5%
Above Average	7.82	20.4%
Average	6.76	17.3%
Below Average	5.79	14.5%
Zima	4.90	12.4%

Relief Pitchers		
Rating	BB/9	BB%
Excellent	.54	2.0%
Great	1.54	4.2%
Above Average	2.61	6.8%
Average	3.65	9.4%
Below Average	4.91	12.4%
Zima	6.95	16.0%

BABIP	
Normal	.300

Starting Pitchers	
Rating	Whiff%
Excellent	27.1%
Great	24.9%
Above Average	22.4%
Average	19.8%
Below Average	17.0%
Zima	14.6%

Relief Pitchers		
Rating	K/9	K%
Excellent	14.28	37.5%
Great	10.80	28.2%
Above Average	9.26	24.1%
Average	7.67	19.5%
Below Average	5.58	13.8%
Zima	3.60	9.1%

Player Correlations for Pitchers and Hitters

The table below is **pitching** correlation metrics from year to year (thanks to [Matt Klaassen](#)). These metrics try to show which ones are more repeatable than others and based on the table pitchers have the highest opportunity of maintaining their hit distribution (i.e. ground balls, fly balls, line drives).

Pitching Metric	Year-to-Year Correlation 2002-2012
GB/FB	0.871
GB%	0.839
FB%	0.817
SwStr%	0.804
SO/TBF	0.803
SO/9	0.803
Contact%	0.789
O-Contact%	0.782
Swing%	0.747
Zone%	0.744
O-Swing%	0.730
uBB/TBF	0.711
Z-Swing%	0.701
xFIP	0.699
BB/9	0.692
Z-Contact%	0.664
F-Strike%	0.663
K/BB	0.630
tRA	0.589
FIP	0.584
WP/TBF	0.458
WHIP	0.430
IFFB%	0.422
HBP/TBF	0.404
HR/TBF	0.390
HR/9	0.390
ERA	0.373
IBB/TBF	0.358
HR/(TBF-BB-HBP-SO)	0.349
LOB%	0.238
BABIP	0.235
LD%	0.088
HR/FB	-0.029

Below is list of correlation metrics for **hitters** from [Matt Klaassen](#). A lot of these make sense, but what stands out to me the most is batting average, BABIP and ground ball rates.

Hitting Metric	Year-Year Correlation 2002-2012
Contact%	0.896
SwStr%	0.886
SO/(AB+SF)	0.870
SO/PA	0.861
Swing%	0.851
O-Contact%	0.848
Z-Swing%	0.845
O-Swing%	0.826
Z-Contact%	0.821
GB%	0.793
HR/(AB-K+SF)	0.775
Zone%	0.768
uBB/(PA-HBP-IBB)	0.765
FB%	0.759
HR/FB	0.740
HR/PA	0.737
iBB/PA	0.734
ISO	0.722
HBP/(PA-IBB)	0.627
OBP	0.611
3B/(2B+3B)	0.606
SLG	0.605
IFFB%	0.605
F-Strike%	0.593
3B/PA	0.590
wOBA	0.581
AVG	0.427
(3B+2B)/(H-HR)	0.407
BABIP	0.373
2B/PA	0.315
LD%	0.293

Are All Strikeouts the Same?

A couple of months ago I was listening to an episode of the [Up and In Podcast](#)¹ (yes, I still re-listen to them) and one of the questions they were asked was, “Are all strikeouts valued the same in the eyes of a scout?” Are strikeouts earned via swing and miss worth more valuable than strikeouts where the batter is looking? They both said they preferred strikeouts that come from the swing and miss.

I sought out to see if starting pitchers with higher WHIFF (swing and miss) rates are more likely to have higher strikeout percentages.

Math / Primer

When I evaluate pitchers I look at strikeout percentage rather than K/9 because it provides a clearer picture a pitcher’s true ability to strikeout batters. K/9 is a flawed statistic because it uses a static number in innings to determine the strikeout percentage and does not take into an account the actual numbers of hitters he faced.

Pitchers who allow a lot of base runners will benefit from K/9 while pitchers who minimize the hitters who reach base will get the short end of the stick. Not every pitcher will face the same number of batters in an inning so it’s important to understand what percentage of batters he is striking out. That is what strikeout percentage accomplishes; it divides strikeouts by plate appearances.

For example, suppose a pitcher walks the bases loaded and strikes out the side in one inning. His K/9 for that inning would be three and his strikeout percentage would be 50 percent. However, suppose instead of walking the bases loaded he strikes all three of the batters he faced. The K/9 would still be three, but his strikeout percentage would be 100 percent.

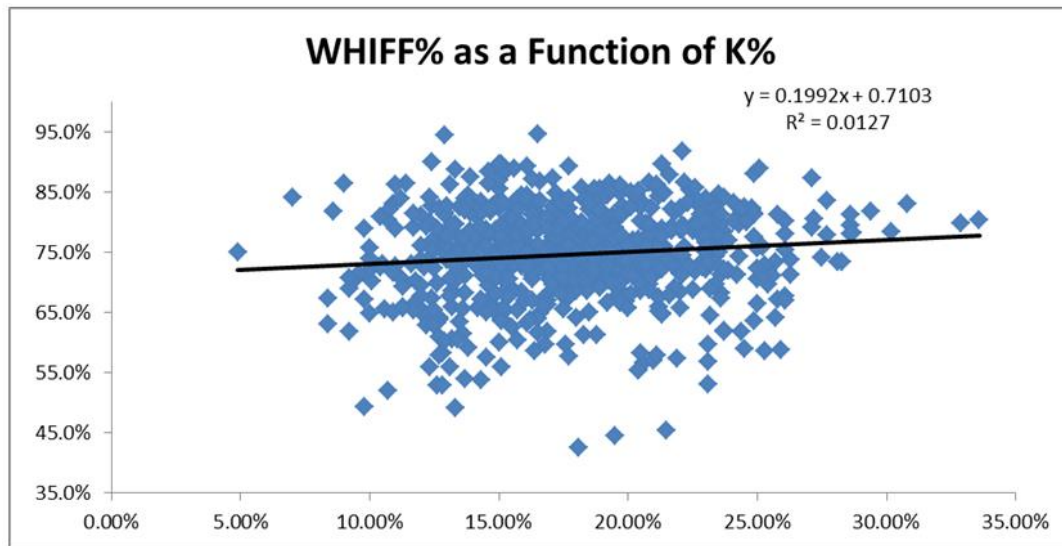
*A high-level introduction into regression: Regression describes the strength between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables, or, in other words, **how strongly do the variables correlate to one another?** R-squared is the numerical representation of the strength between the variables. R-squared is measured on a scale of zero to one with one representing a 100% correlation and zero representing no correlation. When observations are scattered randomly (on a scatter plot) around the data’s best-fit line, the R-squared will be closer to zero. When the values are close to the best-fit line, the R-squared will be closer to one. A best-fit line is a straight line on a graph showing the general direction that a group of points seem to be heading.*

In short this was my method:

1. Look at the strikeout percentage (K%) of pitchers from 2010-2013 with at least 10 starts in a given year (725 pitchers)
2. Break down the strikeouts by type: looking and WHIFF
3. Plot each pitcher’s WHIFF% (WHIFFs divided by total strikeouts) and K%

Analysis

Note: **K%** is on the x-axis and **WHIFF%** is the y-axis. The black line is the line of the best fit.



The graph suggests there is a slight positive correlation between a starting pitcher's K% and WHIFF rate, but with an R-squared of 0.012, there's barely any relationship.

With an R-squared that low, I refined my analysis to look only at starting pitchers with at least 100 strikeouts to see what effect this would have. The sample size was 434 pitchers (versus 725 pitchers in the first sample). The R-squared of this new sample decreased to 0.010, which confirmed the trend of the larger sample size.

When evaluating a pitcher's strikeout percentage, WHIFF% should be one of the last statistics used. That begs the question, what statistics should fantasy owners use to forecast and evaluate K%? In my next article, I'll attempt to provide metrics that correlate more to strikeout percentages for starting pitchers.

What effect does a decrease in fastball velocity have on pitcher performance?

When a pitching prospect makes his major league debut the first attribute evaluated is fastball velocity. Fastball velocity is the foundation of any future scouting report or fantasy evaluation that will be associated with him. A common assumption is more fastball velocity is better than less. As the graph below shows, in general, higher fastball velocities are more conducive to the generation of swing and miss (WHIFF) rates.

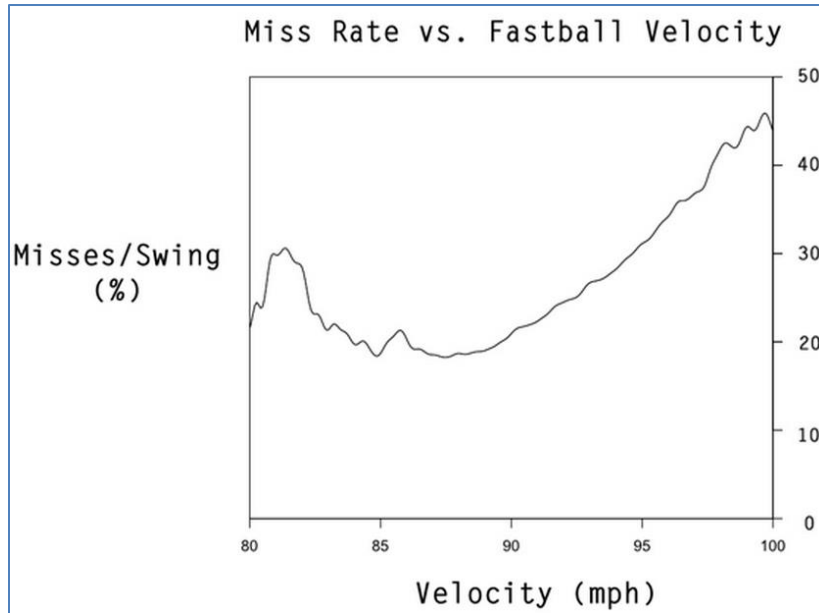


Image source: BaseballProspectus.com

However, fastball velocity is not the end-all-be-all for starting pitchers because there are a myriad of factors required to have sustained success. Does the fastball have movement? Does the pitcher have command? Is he throwing quality strikes? Is he changing sight lines? Is he able to successfully mix his pitches? Is he hitting his spots? How early is the ball coming out of the hand? Without all of these attributes major league hitters will eventually time a pitcher's fastball regardless of how fast it is.

One of the best current examples of fastball velocity not being essential for long term success is **Tim Hudson**. Since 2008 his fastball has been 89-91 mph, but he has consistently been able to get batters out and has almost built a Hall of Fame career¹.

As pitchers age a loss in fastball is usually, unwelcomely and unexpectedly (from the pitcher's point of view) accompanied². Any time a pitcher loses a tick on his fastball there's always a lot of hubbub how his performance will also decline³. The two most recent and biggest examples of this manifestation is last year's performances of **Roy Halladay** and **CC Sabathia**, both of whom lost 1-1.5 mph off their fastball from the previous year and 2.5-3.5 mph decrease from two years ago. Based on these the two performances it's easy to quickly validate this belief and move on. However, **Felix Hernandez's** fastball velocity has been in steady decline since 2007 and he's been as good as he's ever been. The goal of this

¹ If you don't believe, check out his career stats and compare them to **Roy Halladay**.

² A simple analogy is suppose it is Friday night and you're about to leave your apartment to play board games with your friends but as you leave your girlfriend asks if she can join. You're befuddled because you know she does not like board games and most likely does not like your friends, but you let her play because the ramifications are more severe than the provost will ever be ([Caylus](#) reference).

³ I will admit I've been guilty of this. I've been using generalizations like these in my player evaluations without ever questioning them.

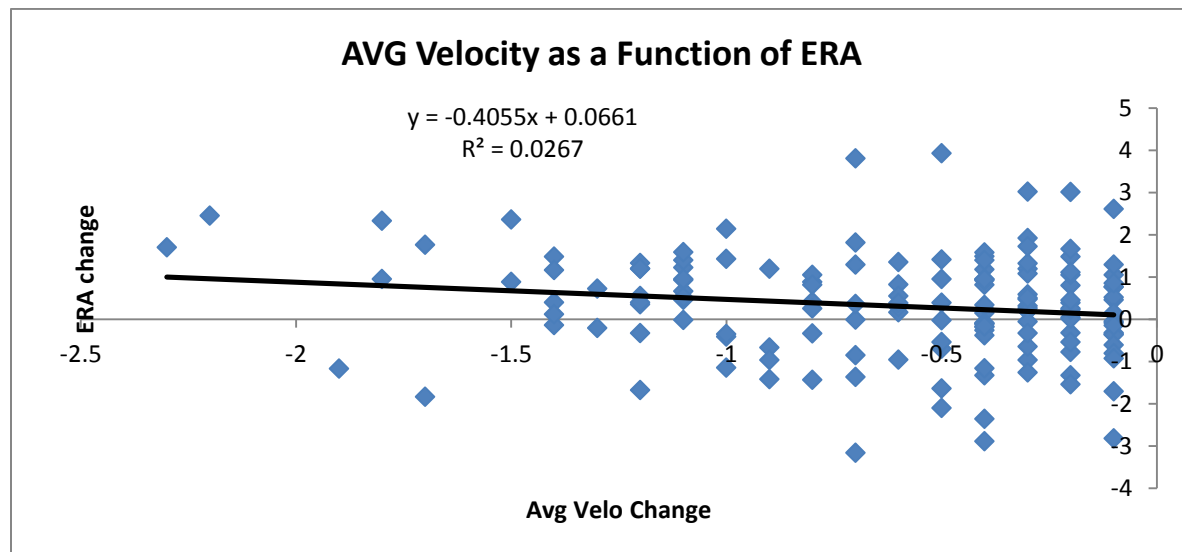
piece is to provide more clarity on what effect, if any, does a decline in fastball velocity have on a starting pitcher's performance, specifically ERA and strikeout rate.

Primer

I used the same data set for my [first article](#) which looked at the relationship between swing and miss (WHIFF) rates and strikeout rates. I looked at pitchers with at least ten starts (per year) from 2008 to 2013. I used regression to test the strength of the relationship of the variables I was measuring. R-squared is numerical representation of this relationship. The scale of R-square is from zero to one with zero representing no relationship and one representing 100 percent positive correlation. Lastly the change in data from year to year was determined by subtracting the more current year from the previous year. For example, if a pitcher had an ERA of 4.00 in 2012 and it went to 3.00 in 2013 the result would be -1.

One Year Average Fastball Velocity Decline

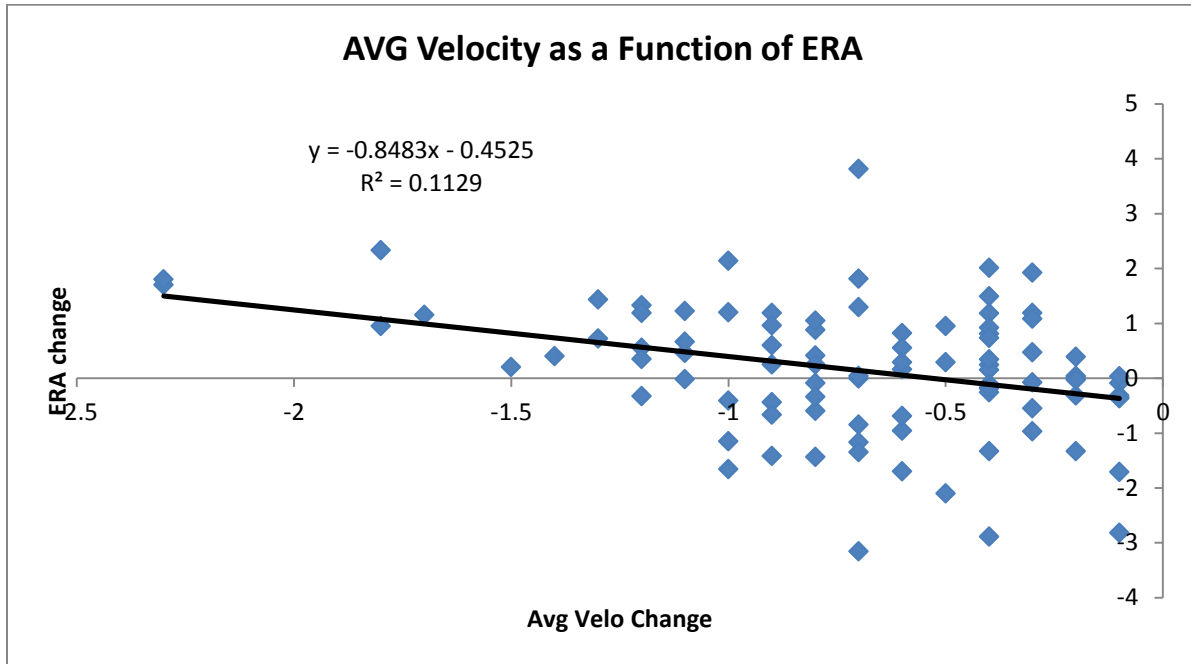
The first question I wanted to research was what effect does a one year decline in average fastball velocity have on ERA and strikeout rates? The R-squared for ERA and strikeout rates were 0.027 and 0.071 respectively, which indicates there is very low correlation of a decrease in fastball velocity resulting in a pitcher's poor performance. The graph below shows the effect the decrease in average fastball velocity has on ERA. The change in average fastball velocity is the x-axis and the change in ERA is the y-axis. The black line is the line of best fit. The sample size consisted of 150 pitchers who had a decline in fastball velocity only from the year prior.



Year-Over-Year Average Fastball Velocity Decline

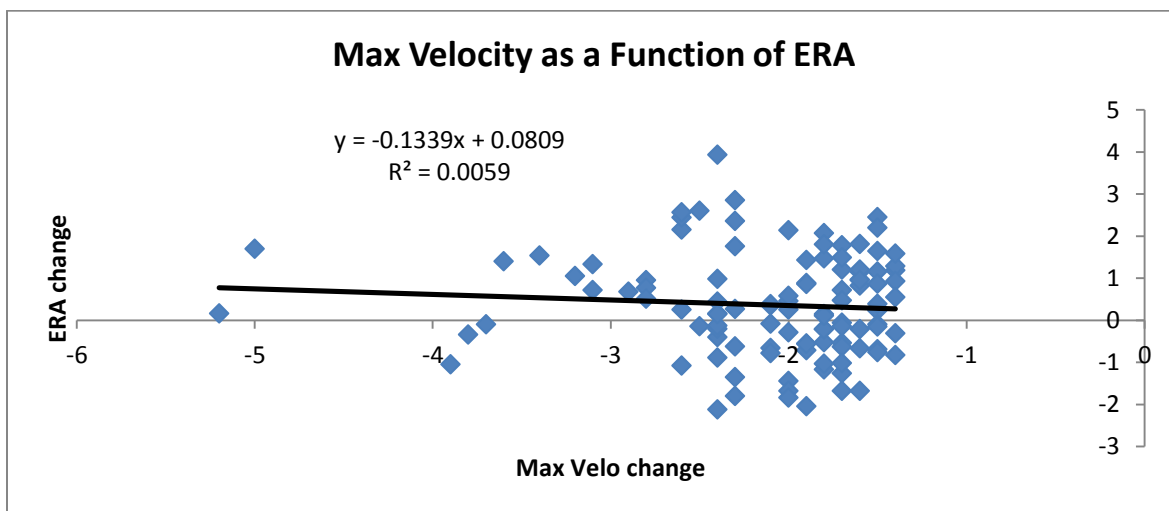
To come back to Halladay and Sabathia, I wanted to look at pitchers who had their fastball velocity decrease year-over-year for three or more straight years. In my sample I identified 29 players so small sample caveat. I plotted all the changes in their ERA (y-axis) and average fastball velocity (x-axis). Even though the R-squared is much higher (0.11) than only a one year decline in

average fastball velocity, the R-squared value is still very low and therefore, there is little correlation to fastball velocity affecting a pitcher's ERA. In terms of strikeout rate the R-squared was only 0.004, which indicates a decline in average fastball velocity has no effect on a pitcher's ability to strike batters out.



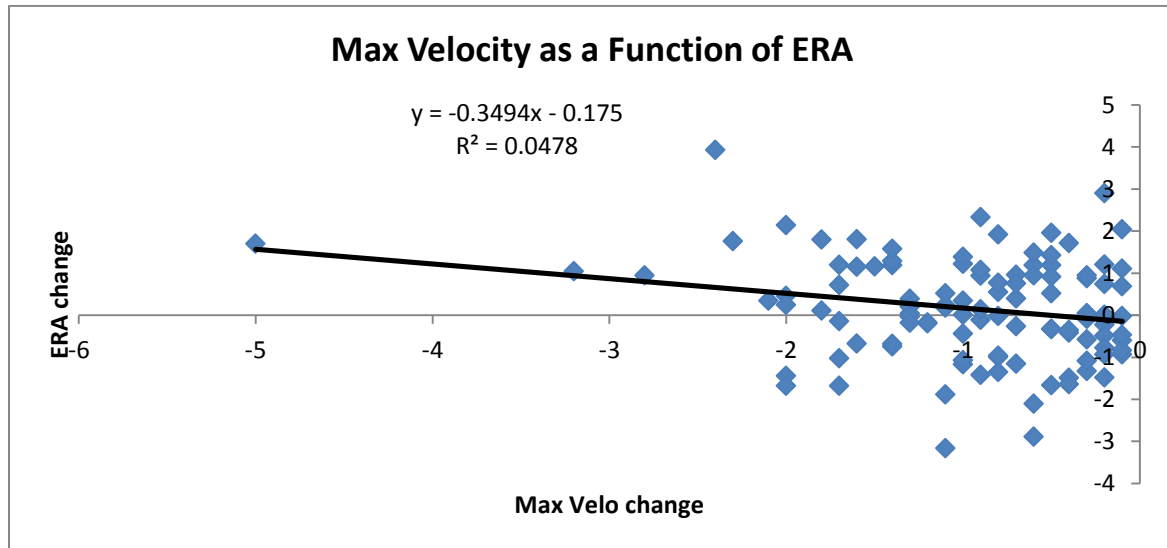
One Year Max Fastball Velocity Decline

So far I've shown a decline in average fastball velocity does not have any significant effect on a starting pitcher's ERA or strikeout rate, but what about maximum fastball velocity. Some baseball writers put more weight on maximum velocity as a better indicator of a pitcher's true velocity. The sample size consisted of 210 players. Similar to the results with average velocity there appears to be no correlation with a decrease in maximum velocity and ERA and strikeout rates with R-squares of 0.006 and 0.007 respectively.



Year-Over-Year Max Fastball Velocity Decline

Again, similar to the results found with average velocity there appears to be no correlation as ERA had an R squared of 0.05 and strikeout rate had an R squared of 0.001. The sample size was 30 pitchers.

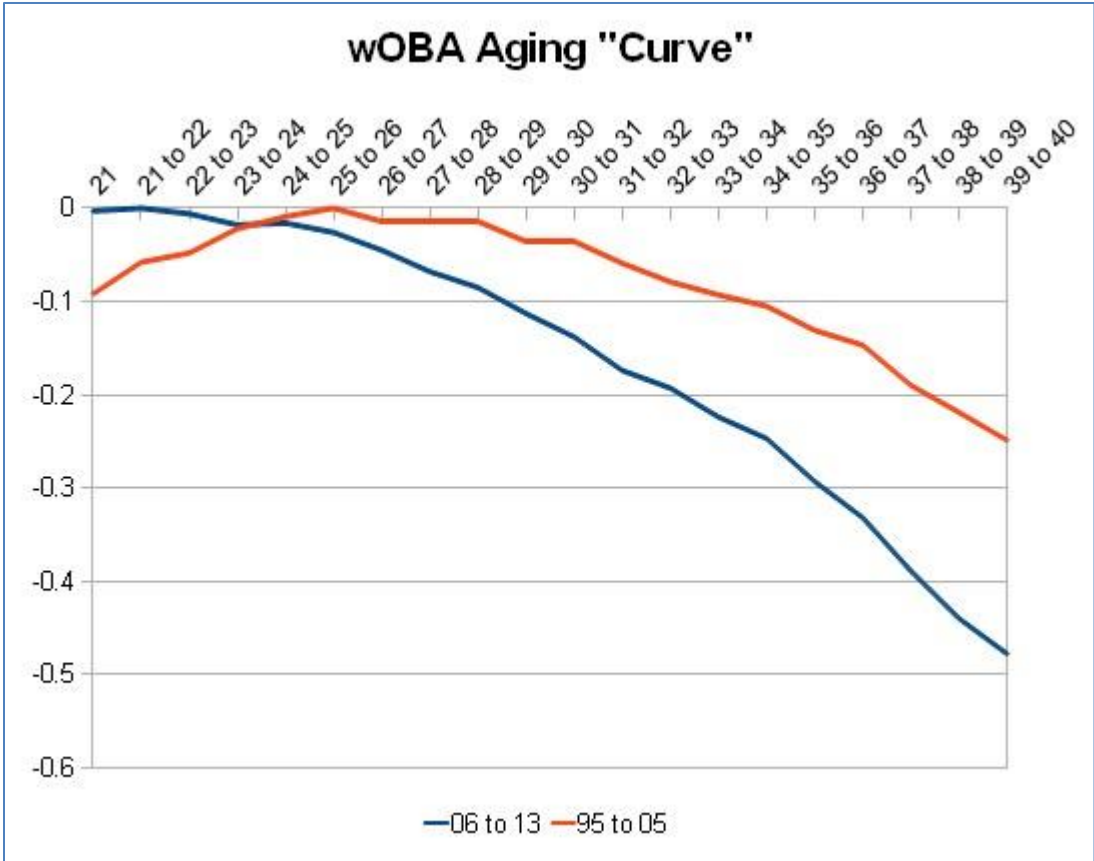


Conclusion

There are myriad of factors why a pitcher's performance will improve or decline. Is fastball velocity one of those factors? Yes, but do not give that fact a lot of credence as there appears to be little to no correlation between a decline in fastball velocity and pitching performance. Any time a fantasy analyst cites a loss in fastball velocity as a major reason why not to roster that player call them out it.

Are Aging Curves Changing?

This is a [great piece by Jeff Zimmerman](#) and I highly recommend reading it. Zimmerman's overall takeaway is, "In the past few seasons, hitters no longer improve once they arrive in the majors. Instead, their performance is constant until they begin to decline, which, on average, is at 26 years old." The reason why included this is because if you believe his takeaways to be true then you should expect better numbers from rookies and players who will be playing their first year in the majors.



Player Evaluation

How I Evaluate Pitchers

First and foremost I watch the pitcher. Usually I watch **at least** 15-20 innings before I have fairly good understanding the pitcher's raw stuff and what he's capable of. The first thing I notice is the delivery. Is it simple? Can he repeat it consistently? I prefer pitchers with simple compact deliveries because there's a higher percentage of repeatability. However, that doesn't mean I dislike pitchers with a lot of moving parts. I'm not a fan of **Cliff Lee's** delivery but he's able to repeat his delivery every time.

The next thing I notice is the velocity of the fastball and the movement of the rest of his pitches. I want to see if he has pitches he can get batters out on both sides of the plate. Some pitchers only throw two pitches, which makes them a liability against either righties or lefties.

At the same time I'm looking at the secondary offerings I'm also looking at the fastball command. Fastball command is the backbone of pitching. If a pitcher doesn't have that it doesn't matter how fast he throws or how devastating the secondary offerings are. The trick I use to monitor fastball command is to look at the catcher's glove. If the glove is a lot that's an indicator the pitcher doesn't have good command. I use the same methodology for all pitch types.

The last thing I look at, usually after seeing 30-plus innings, is how is he sequencing his pitches the second and third time through the batting order. I want to see if he's making adjustments on the adjustments the hitters are making against him. Once I've reviewed all of these things is when I look at his statistics because it's imperative to put a pitcher's numbers into context of his talent level.

The first statistic I look at is how many bats does he miss (i.e. strikeouts). Then I look at his walk rate. The reason why I look at these first is because those are the two true outcomes the pitcher entirely controls. If both those statistics are above average then that is a player I want on my team. Strikeout rate is the most important of the two because strikeouts are one of the statistics used in most scoring formats and the more strikeouts a pitcher has the less likely a player will allow runs to score. Higher strikeout rates allow pitchers to get away with more walks and/or hits than lower strikeout players. However, there is a walk rate threshold that will always be too high for me. For example, **Ubaldo Jimenez** fall into this category. Usually that threshold is roughly 10%. The reason why I avoid high walk and strikeout pitchers is they're always playing with fire more often than not and are subjectable to blow up starts.

Pitchers can be very successful without missing a lot of bats. Another type of pitcher is the high ground ball and low strikeout pitchers can still be successful. **Tim Hudson** has been consistently effective for most of their careers for being barrel missers and not bat missers. That may sound like the same thing, but it's not. By barrels I'm referring to hard contact; when a batter squares up a ball the hitter is putting the barrel, the sweet spot of the bat, to the ball. If a pitcher can induce a lot of weak contact (i.e. missing barrels) he can still be extremely effective. The only problem with barrel missers is their margin of error is smaller than a bat misser, which means they have to have better command and they will be at the

mercy of the defense. Therefore, they're not going to be as consistent from start to start strikeout pitchers.

The next statistic I look at is the batted ball profile (fly ball%, ground ball%, line drive% and etc). I prefer ground ball pitchers because ground balls have the lowest batting average among the three hit types (ground balls, fly balls and line drives). When a pitcher generates a lot of ground balls they're inducing a lot of weak contact and are less subjectable to allowing home runs. In general I try to avoid fly ball pitchers because they tend to be more homer prone. That said, pitchers who are fly ball pitchers can survive if they pitch in a good ballpark, have a good outfield defense and/or do not walk a lot of hitters. A perfect example of a player like this is **Phil Hughes**. The first year he started playing in a bigger ballpark he thrived.

Again it's important to restate this. It's important to put a pitchers numbers into context. It's a very flawed strategy to purely look at pitcher's ground ball rate and presume he's a good pitcher. That's why I watch him pitch before I make any definitive conclusion on his statistics.

The next two statistics I look at are the BABIP and strand rate (LOB%). I'll ask myself was he unlucky with the BABIP? Was the BABIP a lot higher than his career norm? I ask the same questions in regards to strand rate.

Then I look at the pitcher's lefty-righty splits. Does he struggle against lefties? Righties? If so, why did he struggle? Was it a one year fluke or has this been a consistent problem? If it's been a consistent problem then I try to identify why he is struggling. More often than not the pitcher does not have a good secondary pitch that's conducive to getting out those batters. For example, suppose a righty has consistently struggled against left handed batters. The first thing I do is look at what types of pitches he throws and try to identify how good each pitch is. Some pitches are better at generating outs against lefties than righties and vice versa. For example, sliders and curveballs are more effective against right handed batters (from right handed pitchers) because, in general, those pitches are moving away from the hitter; specifically, the hitter's bat. The slider and curveball are least effective against left handed hitters (in general) because those pitches move in, towards their bats. However, changeups and splitters work far better against lefties (from a right handed pitcher). This is not universally true because some pitches are effective against both left and right handed hitters. For example, **Chris Sale's** slider.

After that I'll do some research to see if the pitcher had any minor injuries that could have contributed to the poor season (if he had a poor season). Then I'll look at home-road splits. How they performed with runners in scoring position, men on-base among others. I'll try to find out if the pitcher made a mechanical change, added a new pitch or some other adjustment that contributed to their performance.

Lastly, when I'm projecting a pitcher's win totals I look at the quality of team and bullpen. This process has the highest variance because there are a ton of factors that determine how many wins a player receives, but I do my best. It is very important to not overlook this process because it could cause you inflate or deflate a pitcher's performance. For example, if you do not project wins then you could

potentially rate **Chris Sale** or **Adam Wainwright** the same, but in fact Wainwright has a higher likelihood of winning more games. My numbers are my best guess of what the player will actually do and not what his ultimate upside. For example, if the 2014 season was played 100 times what would the average season look like.

When evaluating young prospects without much of a sample size in the majors I rely heavily on scouting reports from Baseball Prospectus, Baseball America, Jim Callis and Keith Law in order to generate my projections. These people are paid to be talent evaluators and they know a lot more than I do. I recommend subscribing to all of these publications because they'll make a better and smarter fantasy player.

How I Evaluate Hitters

Other than the five traditional statistics (runs, batting average, RBI, batting average, stolen bases) I look at ratios and percentages because they provide a better indicator how often a player is doing something. The two most important percentages is strikeout rate and ground ball rate. Those stats tell me two things: 1) how often is the hitter putting the ball in play and 2) what type of contact is he making? Obviously, if a player is striking out a lot that means he's not putting the ball in play, which means he could be a batting average risk and/or there isn't a lot of upside with home runs, RBIs and runs. Ground ball rates are more important with power hitters because if a player is hitting more ground balls the less likely he'll hit home runs because the sheer number of opportunities (fly balls) is lower.

Ground balls have lower batting averages compared to fly balls and line drives because more luck is needed to record hits. Therefore, if a player hits more ground balls his batting average will be more BABIP dependent, thereby making their batting averages more likely to be influx from year to year. It's very important to look at a hitter's career batting averages, BABIP rates when determining if a player was lucky or not. Some hitters have high career BABIPs than the normal .290-300 range.

Next I look at contact rates, the percentage of extra base hits and HR/FB rates. This importance of these three numbers depends on the type of player I'm evaluating. For example I will care more about the contact rates of a **Ben Revere** type player more than **Chris Carter**. The opposite would be said when I'm looking at the extra base hit percentage. What I love about extra base hit percentage is gives me a glimpse into how much hard contact a hitter is making. If a player has a low HR/FB rate but the extra base hit percentage is still relatively normal I feel better about predicting positive regression of the HR/FB rate. Overall, I want players who are making more hard contact than soft contact because hard contact either go out of the ballpark or find more holes in the defense more often.

I always look at home-road splits because sometimes the home ballpark inflates or deflates power numbers. For example, Miller Park and Coors may inflate home run totals while AT&T Park and Petco will deflate power numbers. Contact rates are extremely important (I go to FanGraphs for this data). I want to see how often the player makes contact in general and on pitches in the strike zone. If a player dramatically increases or decreases their contact rates that raises my eyebrow and I did deeper to find

the cause. Maybe the contact rates dropped only against left handed pitchers? Then I research for information and I read he is dropping his front shoulder to quickly which is causing him to be out in front too much. If that's the case then this type of adjustment can be fixed, which means maybe last year's low contact rates were an anomaly and positive regression is expected.

Basically, I'm trying to paint a picture in my head of how the player is trending. In general, I prefer players that are trending upward than downward. Usually this refers to young versus old players. However, not every older player is necessarily trending downward. A common misconception is older players have less upside which can be true, but it's never absolute. It's because of this misconception really good older players with no signs of slowing down, like **Matt Holliday**, are always drafted lower than they should be. If you paint a picture as to what the player is doing you have better opportunity to identify which players should be bought or not. My numbers are my best guess of what the player will actually do and not what his ultimate upside. For example, if the 2014 season was played 100 times what would the average season look like.

When evaluating young prospects without much of a sample size in the majors I rely heavily on scouting reports from Baseball Prospectus, Baseball America, Jim Callis and Keith Law in order to generate my projections. These people are paid to be talent evaluators and they know a lot more than I do. I recommend subscribing to all of these publications because they'll make a better and smarter fantasy player.

Scouting Primer

This information is very important to understand some of the quotes I reference and some of the language I use. For each tool (hitter) or individual offering (pitcher), a scout assigns a grade on a numerical scale from 20 to 80 where an increase in ten represents one standard deviation from the mean. A 50 grade is that mean, representing major-league average. A 80 grade, the highest score possible, represents elite skill that a few players achieve. Sometimes modify scores are used to describe the strength/weakness of a particular grade. For example, a 55 grade represents solid-average and a 45 grade represents fringe-average. Lastly, the tables I used in this section are from [Baseball Prospectus Extra Innings](#).

20 = Poor; Zima

30 = Well below-average; Budweiser

40 = Below-average; Heineken

50 = Average; major-league regular; Guinness

60 = Above-average (plus); first-division; Racer 5

70 = Well above-average (plus-plus); all-star; Pliny the Elder

80 = Elite; Victoria

I interchangeably use scouting grades in my evaluations so please refer to these tables if you have any questions.

Fastball Velocity	Grade
97+ mph	80; Elite
94-96 mph	70; Well above average; plus-plus
92-94 mph	60; Above average; plus
89-91 mph	50; Average
87-89 mph	40; Below average
85-87 mph	30; Well below average
82-84 mph	20; Poor; Zima

The hit tool is the measure of how often a ball is properly squared up, driven with authority, and deposited into the field of play.

Hit Tool	Batting AVG at the MLB Level
.320+	80; Elite
.300-.320	70; Well above average; plus-plus
.285-.300	60; Above average; plus
.270-.285	50; Average
.250-.270	40; Below average
.225-.250	30; Well below average
<.225	20; Poor; Zima

Home Run Power	Home Runs at the MLB Level
39+	80; Elite
32-38	70; Well above average; plus-plus
25-32	60; Above average; plus
17-25	50; Average
11-17	40; Below average
5-11	30; Well below average
<5	20; Poor; Zima

The table below show how long it takes for the batter to get from home plate first base after he hits the ball. The best (fastest) times you can get is what's called a jail break, where the runner sprints to first base. For example, to avoid a double play the hitter will run the fastest to first base.

Speed (Left/Right)	Grade
3.9 (L)/ 4.0 (R)	80; Elite
4.0 (L)/ 4.1 (R)	70; Well above average; plus-plus
4.1 (L)/ 4.2 (R)	60; Above average; plus
4.2 (L)/ 4.3 (R)	50; Average
4.3 (L)/ 4.4 (R)	40; Below average
4.4 (L)/ 4.5 (R)	30; Well below average
4.5 (L)/ 4.6 (R)	20; Poor; Zima

Hitting Abbreviations

2B - Doubles

3B - Triples

AB - At Bats

AB/GIDP - At-Bats per Grounded Into Double Play

AB/HR - At-Bats per Home Run

AB/RBI - At-Bats per Runs Batted In

AO - Fly Outs

AVG - Batting Average

BB - Bases on Balls (Walks)

CS - Caught Stealing

FB - Fly Ball

G - Games Played

GB - Ground Ball

GIDP - Ground into Double Plays

GO - Ground Outs

GO/AO - Ground Outs/Fly Outs

GSH - Grand Slam Home Runs

H - Hits

HBP - Hit by Pitch

HR - Home Runs

IBB - Intentional Walks

LD - Line Drive

LIPS - Late Inning Pressure Situations

LOB - Left On Base

NP - Number of Pitches

OBP - On-base Percentage

OPS - On-base Plus Slugging Percentage

PA/SO - Plate Appearances per Strikeout

R - Runs Scored

RBI - Runs Batted In

SAC - Sacrifice Bunts

SB% - Stolen Base Percentage

SB - Stolen Bases

SF - Sacrifice Flies

SLG - Slugging Percentage

SO - Strikeouts

TB - Total Bases

TP - Triple Play

TPA - Total Plate Appearances

XBH - Extra Base Hits

Pitching Abbreviations

AO - Fly Outs

APP - Appearances

AVG - Opponents Batting Average

BB - Bases on Balls (Walks)

BB/9 - Walks per Nine Innings

BF - Batters Faced

BK - Balks

BS - Blown Save

CG - Complete Games

CGL - Complete Game Losses

CS - Caught Stealing

ER - Earned Runs

ERA - Earned Run Average

FB - Fly Ball

G - Games Played

GF - Games Finished

GB - Ground Ball

GIDP - Grounded Into Double Plays

GO - Ground Outs

GO/AO - Ground Outs/ Fly Outs Ratio

GS - Games Started

GSH - Grand Slams

H - Hits

H/9 - Hits per Nine Innings

HB - Hit Batsmen

HLD - Hold

HR - Home Runs

I/GS - Innings Per Games Started

IBB - Intentional Walks

IP - Innings Pitched

IRA - Inherited Runs Allowed

K/9 - Strikeouts per Nine Innings

K/BB - Strikeout/Walk Ratio

L - Losses
LD - Line Drive
LIPS - Late Inning Pressure Situations
LOB - Left on Base
MB/9 - Baserunners per 9 Innings
NP - Number of Pitches Thrown
OBA - On-base Against
PA - Plate Appearances
P/GS - Pitches per Start
P/IP - Pitches per Innings Pitched
PK - Pick-offs
R - Runs
RW - Relief Wins
SB - Stolen Bases
SHO - Shutouts
SLG - Slugging Percentage Allowed
SO - Strikeouts
SV - Saves
SVO - Save Opportunities
TB - Total Bases
TJ – Tommy John Surgery
TP - Triple Plays
UR - Unearned Runs
W - Wins
WHIP - Walks + Hits/Innings Pitched
WP - Wild Pitches
WPCT - Winning Percentage
XBA - Extra Base Hits Allowed

Overall Draft Strategy

Another name for fantasy baseball is asset evaluation. There is a pool of assets (players) which every fantasy owner gets an opportunity to acquire. The fantasy owner who acquires the most valuable assets wins the game. The question is how do I get the most valuable assets?

Every fantasy player should create their projections because it will give you the ability to see who you're higher and lower on. The projections I provide are based on what's most likely to happen in a season. Another way to put it is if the 2015 season was played 100 times what would be the average of all those seasons. If a player is consistently hurt (i.e. **Troy Tulowitzki**) then your projections should not expect him to play in 155 games.

If you read my player profiles I look at each player through the lens of a detective. I want to know how his statistics were accumulated. Did he deviate from his statistical mean? For example, if a pitcher struck out more batters than ever before then how did he do it? If a hitter hit more home runs than ever before then how did he do it? The idea behind my approach to player evaluation is to think for myself and remove myself from ill-conceived narratives.

You have to know your strengths and weaknesses and create a strategy based on that. If you think you're good at identifying good pitchers on the waiver wire then maybe focus more on hitting in your draft. If you're a casual player and do not make a lot of moves on the waiver it makes more sense to draft an "ace" to anchor your pitching staff. Whatever strategy you choose go all-in with it. If you only go half way your team is going to be average.

If you do not have the time to create your own projections I recommend taking the average three or four sources you feel are really good. When you're evaluating sources to use I recommend you try to identify who wrote those projections. Usually they're written by one person or in the case of some sites, an average of all the writers on the staff, which is the worst version because the rankings will be generic.

Once you have your projections I recommend creating a value formula so you can numerically rank all of your players. If you're looking for a sample value formula and more in-depth information about this process I recommend reading *Winning Fantasy Baseball* by **Larry Schecter**. The book also goes into how to create player projections and how to get the most value possible during various draft styles.

Lastly, have fun! If you like a player and no one else likes him then so what! Draft the team you want.

Try Not Be Influenced by the Hosting Draft Sites Projections

Every website hosting draft use their own rankings and projections in draft rooms. Why is this important? Two reasons: 1) it's difficult not to be influenced by them during the draft. 2) This may be a shock to some of you, but there are always a good number of owners who did not prepare at all or only prepared for the first five rounds. What usually happens for these owners is they heavily rely on the hosting websites projections to make their draft decisions. Draft the team you want to have.

Position Scarcity

Other than catcher, I no longer believe this to be true. This is a myth that has plagued the industry for far too long. Regardless the size of your league the pool of players will be limited to the top X number of players and the stats show that value of the last player at each position is relatively the same. Larry Schechter proves this in his book *Winning Fantasy Baseball*. I highly recommend reading it.

A lot of times owners will overpay to get a player at a “scarce” position, but that does more harm than good. For example, if you play in 12-team league and there are 14 starting offensive positions for each team then the hitter player pool will consist of 168 players. Every player has a numerical number (or value) attached to them. The 168th player will have a specific value and so will the first player. Depending on when you draft that player you will either earn a profit or a loss. The 14th shortstop may not be as good as the second shortstop, but if you overpay for the second shortstop you’re losing value because you could have rostered another player for more value at the same cost. The table below provides a crude example of a player overpaying for player at a “scarce” position. The first fantasy owner (blue heading) overpaid for a shortstop and got a nice value on an outfielder, but since he/she overpaid for the shortstop he/she only broke even. However, the green player was able to make a profit on both his outfielder and a shortstop, which means the green team should outperform the blue team.

Pos.	Value	Cost	Profit	Value	Cost	Profit
SS	\$18	\$20	-\$2	\$5	\$2	\$3
OF	\$3	\$1	\$2	\$22	\$19	\$3
Total	\$20	\$21	\$0	\$27	\$21	\$6

Get As Much Value As Possible

“Get as much value as possible during your draft,” has become the biggest cliché in fantasy baseball. but you know what? It’s absolutely true. As I alluded to in the Position Scarcity section it’s very important to get as much value as possible. In that section I mentioned every draft has a specific number of players and each of those players have specific values. Your goal should be at the end of the draft is to have as much profit as possible. If you’re only at breakeven at the end of the draft you’ll likely finish the year with a mediocre, middle of the road team. If you create your own projections and use a good value formula you’ll be able to identify which players provide the most value during your draft (whether it’s an auction or snake draft). Obviously, you do not want to load on one category, say stolen bases, just because you’re able to get them at a good value. You want to be aware of how your team is looking and what type of players you need as the draft progresses. If you look at the table in the Position Scarcity section you’ll notice the green generated more value than the blue team, which will give him a leg up.

Catcher Preview

What you will find below are the fantasy tiers for catchers. The value of the catching position depends on whether you play with one or two catchers. If you play with one catcher I recommend waiting before drafting a player. I play in two catcher leagues and I always recommend trying to grab one of the four star or two of the three star catchers because after the three stars are gone it gets bad very quickly.

Four Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Buster Posey	540	.301	19	81	65	1
Jonathan Lucroy	540	.295	15	72	65	4
Yan Gomes	475	.290	20	71	63	0
Wilin Rosario	420	.280	18	70	63	1
Evan Gattis	520	.238	28	77	63	0

Four-Star Value Pick: Evan Gattis

I love catcher eligible players who don't have to play the position defensively. Before the trade to the Astros I was going to recommend staying away from Gattis, but since he got traded to the AL he's going to spend the majority of time at DH. He's going to swing and miss a lot, but when he makes contact he's going to hit for a lot of power.

Three Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Salvador Perez	550	.285	18	69	52	0
Devin Mesoraco	430	.252	20	74	54	1
Yadier Molina	480	.285	5	67	60	1
Russell Martin	420	.235	20	63	53	3
Yasmani Grandal	400	.241	17	60	60	1
Derek Norris	400	.265	12	59	50	3
Dioner Navarro	465	.275	12	68	40	0

Three-Star Value Pick: Yasmani Grandal

Yasmani Grandal's career road statistics, in 385 plate appearances, is a 15.5% HR/FB rate and a .802 OPS. Moving to the Los Angeles' ballpark doesn't mean he's going to be hitting in a hitters paradise, but moving out of Petco is an improvement. If he stays healthy and that's a big if, I wouldn't be surprised if he hits 20 home runs.

Two Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Stephen Vogt	420	.260	13	53	53	0
Brian McCann	480	.225	19	68	50	0
Travis d'Arnaud	400	.255	13	53	47	0
Mike Zunino	440	.206	22	60	53	0
Christian Bethancourt	420	.245	13	40	40	11
Miguel Montero	455	.245	12	62	44	0

Two-Star Value Pick: Stephen Vogt

If you sit in the right field bleachers you will hear this chant from the A's fans "[I believe in Stephen Vogt.](#)" Last year in a super utility role he hit nine home runs in 287 plate appearances. He has no competition for playing time. His closest competition is Josh Phegley and he wasn't good enough to beat Tyler Flowers for playing time. Vogt is going to get the majority of at-bats and makes a lot of contact.

One Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Wilson Ramos	355	.268	12	50	33	0
Jason Castro	400	.226	13	47	47	0
Tyler Flowers	380	.219	12	45	45	0
Christian Vazquez	400	.240	5	45	45	0
Rene Rivera	400	.235	10	40	40	0
Kurt Suzki	430	.232	5	40	40	0

One-Star Value Pick: Jason Castro

The acquisition of Hank Conger muddles my recommendation of Jason Castro because they're going to split the playing time, but Castro is only one year removed from a .276 batting average and 18 home runs.

First Base Preview

What you will find below are the fantasy tiers for first basemen. Even though David Ortiz and Chris Carter not eligible I included them in the list. Every player in the five and four star categories are no lock entering the season. There are two ways to interrupt that fact. Either you believe you need to get one of the five star players or you take 2-3 of the four star category and hope one breaks out. I want one of the elite players to anchor my hitting and then I'm taking flyers on 1-2 of the three star players. If you play with corner infield slot you want to fill that position with a first baseman.

Five Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Miguel Cabrera	585	.320	35	110	99	1
Paul Goldschmidt	600	.300	30	100	90	13
Victor Martinez	570	.308	25	98	88	0
Jose Abreu	560	.288	27	110	84	2
Edwin Encarnacion	500	.270	35	100	90	2

Five-Star Value Pick: Paul Goldschmidt

I rated all of these players as five star but I wouldn't be surprised if any of them do not finish the season in this category because all them have warts on their resumes. For three years in a row Paul Goldschmidt has contributed in all five categories and is the youngest. The biggest question is how much affect does the broken finger have on his power, if at all.

Four Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Joey Votto	545	.305	22	86	94	1
Albert Pujols	580	.272	26	110	86	2
David Ortiz*	520	.290	27	105	75	0
Adrian Gonzalez	590	.292	24	100	75	1
Anthony Rizzo	550	.279	24	90	90	4
Chris Davis	550	.248	32	100	90	2
Todd Frazier	580	.272	23	84	87	10
Freddie Freeman	575	.282	22	90	85	2

Four-Star Value Pick: Chris Davis

I love buying low on players who had high ADPs the previous year who have dramatically lower ADPs the following year. I never bought his 2013 numbers, but if you look at his season you'll notice in the last four months of the season he had a .252 batting average with 34 home runs. It's very possible I'm too aggressive with the batting average, but his power is real.

Three Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Adam LaRoche	500	.269	28	95	72	0
Prince Fielder	550	.275	25	90	75	0
Lucas Duda	520	.250	28	95	77	1
Brandon Moss	475	.259	27	87	73	1
Eric Hosmer	550	.283	17	75	75	6
Matt Adams	540	.282	19	85	70	2
Brandon Belt	510	.265	21	85	70	6
Chris Carter*	520	.235	35	85	67	3
Billy Butler	570	.282	16	90	69	0

Three-Star Value Pick: Billy Butler

I have feeling I'm going to own Billy Butler on a lot of my teams this year. His numbers were suppressed by a brutal April where .224/.285/.255 with zero home runs and only three extra base hits. After April he hit .282/.332/.406 with nine home runs and a 8.2% HR/FB rate. He's going to play every day and hit in the middle of an order of good lineup.

Two Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Carlos Santana	540	.245	26	83	70	3
Kendrys Morales	500	.275	20	83	65	0
Justin Morneau	480	.295	16	80	62	0
Mark Trumbo	540	.239	25	81	65	2
Mike Morse	480	.270	17	80	62	0

Two-Star Value Pick: Carlos Santana

At this point we know who Carlos Santana is. He has a great eye at the plate and he'll hit a lot of home runs. The reason why he's a two start player is because I do not believe the batting average fully regresses. He's striking out more, putting less balls in-play and his final average was a result of really good months in June and July. In April, May, August and September he had a .193 batting average. All that said he by far has the most upside of anyone in this category.

One Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
James Loney	570	.289	10	70	60	3
Joe Mauer	475	.288	6	75	60	2
Nick Swisher	400	.250	17	65	65	0
Mark Teixeira	470	.235	20	64	62	0
Ike Davis	450	.254	17	60	55	1
Mike Napoli	420	.247	16	61	51	1
Jon Singleton	550	.202	20	64	60	2

One-Star Value Pick: Joe Mauer

In an era where batting average is hard to come by it's hard not to like a player with a career .319 batting average. I was a huge believer in Joe Mauer last year, drafting him on all of my teams, but injuries derailed his season. If you already fulfilled your power early in the draft and you're looking for batting average Mauer could be the perfect candidate.

Second Base Preview

What you will find below are the fantasy tiers for second basemen. This is becoming a younger position, which means there are a lot of players with upside. I wouldn't be surprised if a player in the one star ends the year as a four star player. If you play with a middle infield slot you want to make sure you fill that spot with a second baseman because the shortstop position is very shallow. Unlike first base you do not necessarily need to draft one of the five elite players because there are many players who will either provide solid production and/or provide high upside.

Four Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Jose Altuve	650	.310	7	69	85	45
Anthony Rendon	580	.285	23	90	100	15
Jason Kipnis	560	.265	15	80	85	28
Robinson Cano	600	.303	17	84	85	5
Brian Dozier	570	.243	22	70	109	20

Four-Star Value Pick: Jason Kipnis

I love buying low on players who had a down season but has shown consistent performance before the down season. Therefore, you should not be surprised I'm buying Jason Kipnis. Anthony Rendon is getting a lot of hype and rightfully so, but Kipnis has similar upside and a longer track record.

Three Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Daniel Murphy	610	.289	13	68	89	13
Dee Gordon	590	.269	1	30	87	49
Kolten Wong	570	.272	15	60	69	21
Ben Zobrist	570	.272	9	72	94	9
Ian Kinsler	640	.255	13	70	91	13
Dustin Pedroia	585	.280	9	66	78	11

Three-Star Value Pick: Kolten Wong

In a shortened season Kolten Wong, very quietly, hit 12 home runs and stole 20 bases. What's even more impressive is he hit those 12 home runs after he called back up in the middle of May.

Two Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Martin Prado	570	.274	13	68	85	3
Brett Lawrie	490	.256	18	75	75	5
Howie Kendrick	550	.289	10	68	65	8
Neil Walker	480	.272	17	70	70	2
Chase Utley	450	.267	9	65	73	9

Two-Star Value Pick: Bret Lawrie

All Bret Lawrie needs to do is to stay healthy for 140-plus games. Moving away from artificial turf and a change scenery should increase the likelihood of him staying healthy. If he can stay healthy he could provide production in five categories. I wouldn't be surprised if he's a 15/15 player.

One Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Scooter Gennett	480	.288	10	60	60	7
Arismendy Alcantara	550	.235	14	50	55	25
Rougned Odor	500	.264	13	60	60	5
Asdrubal Cabrera	500	.250	14	60	60	9
Jedd Gyorko	470	.250	15	66	62	2
Javier Baez	550	.219	23	55	55	15
Aaron Hill	520	.261	15	60	60	1
Danny Espinosa	450	.220	15	60	60	15
Jonathan Schoop	500	.230	18	60	60	1

One-Star Value Pick: Arismendy Alcantara

Arismendy Alcantara is not a lock to begin the year in the majors, but if he does, he is one of the rare players who could provide production in every category. If Alcantara isn't on the major league roster then Aaron Hill would be my value pick. Hill's seasons in the majors have been bi-polar but I wouldn't be surprised if he hits 20-plus home runs.

Shortstop Preview

What you will find below are the fantasy tiers for shortstops. When you look at the projections for Troy Tulowitzki and Hanley Ramirez I haven't baked in the replacement level statistics yet. So in essence you're looking at the exact numbers I think they'll provide. This is the position where you want to get your stolen bases. If you got your stolen bases elsewhere you may be able to draft home run first players like J.J. Hardy, Jhonny Peralta, Xander Bogaerts and Wilmer Flores on the cheap.

Five Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Troy Tulowitzki	425	.311	28	70	70	1
Hanley Ramirez	450	.290	22	82	72	12
Ian Desmond	590	.265	20	85	74	21

Five-Star Value Pick: Ian Desmond

Ian Desmond has posted three consecutive seasons of 20/20 production so I'm not going on much of a limb here.

Four Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Jose Reyes	550	.289	9	53	90	30
Alexei Ramirez	620	.270	12	71	75	24

Four-Star Value Pick: Jose Reyes

Jose Reyes has a lower floor and higher ceiling while Alexei Ramirez has a higher floor and lower ceiling. When you're drafting it's all about preference.

Three Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Starlin Castro	650	.291	16	79	70	5
Elvis Andrus	620	.275	3	55	88	27
Danny Santana	580	.265	9	55	75	27
Jean Segura	530	.269	6	55	65	30
Erick Aybar	560	.275	7	70	65	18
Xander Bogaerts	550	.276	15	70	77	2
Jimmy Rollins	550	.240	11	65	70	22

Three-Star Value Pick: Xander Bogaerts

When evaluating any young player who struggled in his rookie season I always fall back on the tool set when projecting him the following year. Just one year ago Xander Bogaerts was a consensus top five prospect and when I read his scouting reports it's hard to believe he struggled as much as he did last year. This year the shortstop job is and he's not going to be moved to another position during the season.

Two Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
J.J. Hardy	540	.264	16	70	70	0
Chris Owings	500	.267	11	55	55	18
Jhonny Peralta	550	.260	18	70	62	2
Alcides Escobar	590	.255	3	50	68	24

Two-Star Value Pick: Chris Owings

Of the four players Chris Owings has the widest range of possibilities. He could be 15/15 player with a .290-plus batting average or he could be a 9/9 player with a sub-.260 batting average. When you're

picking this low in your draft it depends on what you need, but in a vacuum Owings is the only player who has the ability to provide production in all five categories.

One Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Javier Baez	550	.219	23	55	55	15
Wilmer Flores	470	.265	16	50	60	1
Jed Lowrie	480	.265	11	65	55	0
Andrelton Simmons	560	.249	10	55	60	5
Marcus Semien	500	.245	8	55	60	6
Didi Gregorius	510	.249	7	48	60	4

One-Star Value Pick: Wilmer Flores

If you got speed at other positions in the draft and you need power than look no further than Wilmer Flores. There are major question marks whether he can stay at the shortstop position, but there are little to no questions about his ability to hit a baseball. I'm projecting 16 home runs but I wouldn't be surprised if he hits 20-plus if given a full year of playing time.

Third Base Preview

What you will find below are the fantasy tiers for third basemen. This is a fairly shallow position where it's very important to grab someone in the top two tiers. If you do not get one of those players you're throwing a hail mary. If I were to wait for a third baseman I would draft two of them and hope one of them pans out.

Five Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Josh Donaldson	585	.280	30	102	95	5

Five-Star Value Pick: Josh Donaldson

Josh Donaldson has been a MVP caliber player the past two years and he should be able to continue to be great, but I have minor quibble about what kind of toll playing on artificial turf will have on his ability to stay healthy.

Four Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Adrian Beltre	575	.295	19	93	86	1
Nolan Arenado	550	.295	24	86	78	2
Ryan Zimmerman	530	.285	23	85	85	1
Kyle Seager	590	.264	22	90	74	5
Evan Longoria	575	.267	22	90	77	2
Pablo Sandoval	550	.285	18	90	74	0

Four-Star Value Pick: Nolan Arenado

It's really hard for me to not pick Kyle Seager because I've believed in him for years, but Nolan Arenado has the higher ceiling. If Seager played in a neutral ballpark I would take him, but it's too hard to pass on Arenado. He plays in the best hitters ballpark and has the tools to more than a product of Coors Field.

Three Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Matt Carpenter	600	.284	10	61	105	3
David Wright	500	.278	14	77	65	11
Alex Rodriguez	520	.245	23	72	72	9
Josh Harrison	500	.279	8	53	73	19
Manny Machado	500	.278	15	68	71	1

Three-Star Value Pick: Matt Carpenter

Alex Rodriguez made the list because the Yankees are saying he's going to be their everyday DH. A lot can change at Spring Training, but as of now he's on the list. If you're looking for 100-plus runs then look no further than Matt Carpenter. The Cardinals offense is going to be vastly improved with the addition of Jason Heyward and since Heyward has such a high OBP there are going to be many instances where Carpenter will be on second base a lot with zero outs.

Two Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Pedro Alvarez	400	.240	28	64	60	4
Chase Headley	500	.265	15	66	66	7
Kris Bryant	400	.242	20	66	66	5
Aramis Ramirez	500	.281	15	69	49	1

Two-Star Value Pick: Chase Headley

If I knew Kris Bryant was going to be in the majors to begin the season he would be my pick, but as of right now his playing time is up in the air. Chase Headley isn't going to hit 31 home runs again, but I wouldn't be surprised if he's a 15/15 player with a .280-plus batting average.

One Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Trevor Plouffe	500	.257	14	61	71	2
Matt Dominguez	550	.241	22	75	55	0
Nick Castellanos	550	.255	15	67	53	2
Lonnie Chisenhall	400	.260	12	55	60	2
David Freese	460	.261	9	60	55	1
Luis Valbuena	470	.240	15	50	55	1

One-Star Value Pick: Trevor Plouffe

I like Trevor Plouffe because I know what I'm going to be getting when I draft him. He's going to be unspectacular, but I can count on a solid batting average with 12-17 home runs.

Outfield Preview

The state of the position depends a lot on how deep your league is. Since there are so many high upside two star players you can wait to draft an outfielder in the later rounds in a 10-team mixed league. For example, if I drafted two outfielders early in my draft I would fill out my other positions before filling out the other three outfielders. If I was in a 12-team mixed league I want to make sure I have at least three players from the first four tiers. Lastly, when I look at the players in the Two Star category except for three players (Ben Revere, Denard Span and Nick Markakis) I can envision scenarios where all of them finish the year in the Four Star category.

Five Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Mike Trout	600	.293	36	113	115	16
Andrew McCutchen	575	.315	24	88	90	20
Carlos Gomez	560	.284	23	79	94	35
Giancarlo Stanton	520	.270	38	106	90	8

Five-Star Value Pick: Carlos Gomez

As of now I have Andrew McCutchen rated higher than Carlos Gomez but as it gets closer to draft time I may rate Gomez higher because Gomez may be safer in stolen bases. Also, I would be shocked if McCutchen only stole 10-15 bases, but at the same time I wouldn't be shocked if he hits 30-plus home runs too.

Four Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Michael Brantley	580	.301	16	92	92	21
Jacoby Ellsbury	575	.285	15	80	80	39
Adam Jones	640	.283	29	95	90	10
Carlos Gonzalez	450	.298	22	86	79	16
Yasiel Puig	560	.275	22	90	90	11
Starling Marte	530	.285	13	74	67	35
Jose Bautista	500	.265	29	89	89	5
Jayson Werth	520	.292	20	85	85	7
Jay Bruce	570	.253	30	93	85	8
Justin Upton	560	.259	25	85	90	12
Charlie Blackmon	570	.283	15	70	89	20
Corey Dickerson	550	.284	19	85	86	10
Jason Heyward	550	.283	16	85	70	21
George Springer	550	.232	28	84	84	22
Hunter Pence	625	.271	18	90	85	12
Shin-Soo Choo	550	.284	20	65	96	10
Melky Cabrera	560	.301	15	66	100	5
Bryce Harper	550	.265	27	88	79	7
J.D. Martinez	550	.285	23	95	70	4

Four-Star Value Pick: Starling Marte

I would have projected more runs and RBIs for Starling Marte, but I think he's going to bat fifth (he should be batting second) and the lineup after him is going to be really bad. If he played most other teams he would bat third because his offensive talents are that good.

Three Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Christian Yelich	600	.285	12	58	91	21
Matt Holliday	540	.290	19	97	84	2
Billy Hamilton	560	.245	6	45	79	55
Alex Gordon	570	.265	19	76	88	11
Nelson Cruz	580	.265	23	105	70	2
Yoenis Cespedes	500	.271	22	86	70	7
Rusney Castillo	500	.245	17	70	70	30
Gregory Polanco	520	.252	12	68	68	35
A.J. Pollock	540	.287	11	54	80	22
Alex Rios	550	.274	14	70	70	20
Josh Reddick	500	.265	20	80	80	7
Avisail Garcia	540	.262	18	85	65	15
Matt Kemp	540	.279	19	80	73	5
Michael Saunders	480	.258	22	75	75	11
Brett Gardner	550	.264	9	60	92	21
Adam Eaton	550	.275	4	55	94	23

Three-Star Value Pick: A.J. Pollock

What's not to like about A.J. Pollock? He's a five category producer who plays in very hitter friendly ballpark. If Paul Goldschmidt is fully healthy Pollock would score 90-plus runs.

Two Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Austin Jackson	580	.264	9	50	84	28
Marcell Ozuna	550	.257	23	85	68	5
Denard Span	590	.281	4	44	85	25
Kole Calhoun	525	.272	14	60	94	4
Steven Souza	500	.255	18	65	65	18
Ben Revere	550	.298	0	29	70	35
Ryan Braun	470	.274	15	70	70	9
Carlos Beltran	510	.255	20	84	76	1
Nick Markakis	630	.289	11	58	90	1
Joc Pederson	500	.259	14	65	65	20
Mookie Betts	500	.284	7	58	68	20
Yasmany Tomas	500	.248	24	70	70	7
Khris Davis	500	.252	24	75	68	4
Wil Myers	500	.266	17	75	69	4

Two-Star Value Pick: Marcell Ozuna & Steven Souza

Marcell Ozuna's power is legit and he has the speed to steal 10-plus bases if wanted to. Maybe this is the year he has a Todd Frazier season and starts stealing bases unexpectedly. Without looking at my projections what is the difference in upside between Kole Calhoun and Steven Souza? For me, there isn't much of a difference, Calhoun is going to go far earlier before Souza.

One Star

Player	AB	AVG	HR	RBI	R	SB
Oswaldo Arcia	500	.259	23	78	62	1
Lorenzo Cain	500	.261	6	65	65	23
Curtis Granderson	530	.238	23	70	70	8
Torii Hunter	530	.281	15	77	66	2
Desmond Jennings	500	.250	12	46	78	20
Dayan Viedo	520	.254	21	75	65	0
Dexter Fowler	500	.275	10	45	75	13
Leonys Martin	510	.270	8	53	38	32
Coco Crisp	460	.255	8	60	68	19
Jorge Soler	500	.251	20	77	62	2
Carl Crawford	400	.283	8	45	68	16
Michael Cuddyer	400	.270	15	59	59	10
Dalton Pompey	500	.255	9	55	55	25
Dustin Ackley	520	.262	13	60	65	10
Colby Rasmus	440	.220	26	65	65	4
Norichika Aoki	540	.279	3	40	70	17
Alejandro De Aza	460	.263	10	49	60	16
Domonic Brown	480	.259	14	66	52	7
Michael Bourn	500	.254	2	44	73	20
David Peralta	420	.271	9	45	60	10
Angel Pagan	400	.285	5	33	60	15
B.J. Upton	500	.221	14	55	52	22
Jarrod Dyson	270	.263	1	35	35	35
Josh Hamilton	400	.242	15	65	55	1
Rajai Davis	350	.258	4	39	30	30
Matt Joyce	400	.240	13	55	55	3
Anthony Gose	420	.235	3	45	45	25

One-Star Value Pick: Matt Joyce & Oswaldo Arcia

As of mid-February I may be too low on Matt Joyce. If Josh Hamilton misses a lot of time Joyce could hit fifth behind Mike Trout and Albert Pujols. I don't see a lot of upside in Joyce, but I definitely like his opportunity. Oswaldo Arcia, who will only turn 24 in May, has tremendous power and I wouldn't be surprised if hit 30-plus home runs in 2015.

Starting Pitcher Preview

The value of the starting position depends dramatically on the size of your league. Before I say anything else every fantasy owner should ask themselves one question: am I confident I will be able to find breakout pitchers on the waiver wire? If you're a casual player I recommend paying for higher end pitchers in your drafts. If you read and/or watch a lot of baseball then I recommend drafting 1-2 four star pitchers and wait to fill out your rotation.

Overall, pitching is extremely deep. Some pitchers have strong injury concerns coming into the season and for me, I'm avoiding them in my drafts because this position is so deep. The last thing I want to begin the season with injured players clogging my bench.

Lastly, pitchers with a "*" next to their names mean I added replacement level statistics to my original projection for each player. By replacement level I mean a player that should be available on the waiver wire throughout the year. The replacement level player I used was Jason Hammel. For example I only projected 160 innings for Johnny Cueto and I added 40 innings from Hammel.

Five Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W
Clayton Kershaw	225	1.85	0.91	245	17
Felix Hernandez	225	2.57	1.10	230	14
Max Scherzer	210	2.90	1.08	237	14
David Price	215	2.99	1.08	233	14
Chris Sale	190	2.57	1.03	215	13
Stephen Strasburg	210	3.10	1.10	236	14
Corey Kluber	210	2.85	1.13	230	13

Five-Star Value Pick: Max Scherzer

Of all the pitchers in this list Max Scherzer could be the most likely (other than Clayton Kershaw) pitcher to win 20 games next year. I have Felix Hernandez ranked ahead of Scherzer now, but it's very likely I'll rank Scherzer higher because of how many more wins he'll have.

Four Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W
Madison Bumgarner	200	3.14	1.11	200	14
Yu Darvish*	200	3.29	1.18	217	14
Zack Greinke	190	2.99	1.15	186	15
Jordan Zimmermann	200	2.89	1.10	175	14
Johnny Cueto*	200	2.96	1.10	198	12
Jon Lester	210	3.15	1.13	200	13
Adam Wainwright	190	3.15	1.10	170	15
Jacob DeGrom	200	2.91	1.14	200	12
Gerrit Cole	190	3.30	1.15	200	14
Collin McHugh	190	3.09	1.11	190	13
Jake Arrieta	185	3.05	1.12	190	13
Tyson Ross	190	3.12	1.17	193	13
Cole Hamels	210	3.29	1.15	200	12
Jeff Samardzija	210	3.40	1.18	200	13

Four-Star Value Pick: Collin McHugh

Everything about Collin McHugh's game is real and most importantly repeatable. The primary reason is all of his pitches are thrown from the same arm slot, which makes his pitches difficult to pick up out of the hand. Therefore, it's no surprise he ranked 10th among starting pitchers in swinging strikes percentage.

Three Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W
Garrett Richards*	200	3.24	1.17	189	13
Jose Fernandez*	200	3.41	1.16	187	13
Hisashi Iwakuma	180	3.29	1.03	160	12
Masahiro Tanaka*	200	3.35	1.16	197	11
Mike Minor	200	3.35	1.14	180	12
Phil Hughes	200	3.55	1.14	178	13
Alex Cobb	190	2.94	1.14	170	11
Gio Gonzalez	190	3.30	1.20	190	12
Julio Teheran	210	3.40	1.12	170	12
Marcus Stroman	190	3.28	1.16	165	13
Anibal Sanchez*	200	3.44	1.15	180	12
Carlos Carrasco	180	3.40	1.20	180	13
Sonny Gray	210	3.40	1.21	175	13
James Shields	210	3.55	1.19	175	13
Drew Hutchison	200	3.79	1.24	200	13
Alex Wood	190	3.40	1.15	179	11
Cliff Lee*	200	3.37	1.16	187	10
Jose Quintana	200	3.43	1.23	174	13
A.J. Burnett	190	3.47	1.23	175	13
Ian Kennedy	200	3.62	1.30	200	13
Matt Shoemaker	190	3.50	1.19	166	13
Mat Latos*	197	3.38	1.17	173	11

Three-Star Value Pick: Mike Minor

Mike Minor struggled last year and the primary reason why he struggled was due to the injury he suffered in the offseason. The injury he suffered was minor, but it forced him to change his training regimen. Since he wasn't able to train on his schedule he rushed his comeback and subsequently caused him to suffer another injury. This offseason he's healthy and I expect a big rebound.

Two Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W
Kevin Gausman	180	3.40	1.24	180	12
Derek Holland	190	3.54	1.29	185	13
Andrew Cashner*	197	3.39	1.14	161	11
Chris Archer	195	3.35	1.25	175	12
Jake Odorizzi	185	3.76	1.23	175	13
R.A. Dickey	220	3.70	1.23	173	13
Dallas Keuchel	190	3.30	1.18	141	13
Lance Lynn	200	3.78	1.29	180	14
Zack Wheeler	200	3.55	1.31	195	12
Jered Weaver	200	3.89	1.23	167	14
Homer Bailey	180	3.51	1.17	165	11
Wily Peralta	190	3.45	1.28	166	13
Michael Pineda*	197	3.61	1.17	165	11
Chris Tillman	200	3.65	1.23	160	13
Matt Harvey	170	3.41	1.15	175	9
Justin Verlander	200	3.74	1.32	175	14
John Lackey	190	3.70	1.24	162	13
Hyun-Jin Ryu	180	3.45	1.22	155	12
Drew Smyly	180	3.65	1.17	160	11
Scott Kazmir	170	3.65	1.22	153	12
Ervin Santana	195	3.72	1.25	162	12
Danny Salazar	170	3.75	1.24	170	11
Matt Cain	180	3.75	1.20	160	11
Danny Duffy	180	3.50	1.25	144	12
Wade Miley	200	3.85	1.34	173	13

Two-Star Value Pick: Derek Holland

Derek Holland lost most of last year to a fluke injury, which is causing a lot of fantasy owners to forget about how good he was and the big steps he took in 2013. In a brief stint in the 2014 the command improved even more, which provides optimism he could continue to take another step forward.

One Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W
Andrew Heaney	190	3.90	1.30	160	13
Francisco Liriano	160	3.55	1.30	175	10
Clay Buchholz	170	3.45	1.27	136	12
CC Sabathia	200	3.85	1.24	157	11
Sean Nolin	200	3.60	1.22	153	10
Taijuan Walker	170	3.59	1.19	145	10
James Paxton	170	3.45	1.22	145	10
Bartolo Colon	190	3.67	1.23	145	11
Trevor Bauer	190	3.85	1.30	170	11
Kyle Lohse	200	3.90	1.17	139	11
Rick Porcello	200	3.75	1.26	130	13
Jake Peavy	170	3.80	1.20	150	10
Yordano Ventura	190	3.64	1.30	150	11
Doug Fister	180	3.39	1.21	115	11
Matt Garza	160	3.67	1.20	127	10
Justin Masterson	190	4.23	1.39	165	13
Brandon McCarthy	150	3.45	1.26	130	10
Yovani Gallardo	185	3.80	1.33	140	12
Jason Hammel	160	3.60	1.20	140	8
Tanner Roark	140	3.49	1.14	100	10
Dan Straily	180	3.96	1.28	130	11
Mark Buehrle	202	3.75	1.34	125	12
Henderson Alvarez	160	3.60	1.24	90	12
Alfredo Simon	190	4.30	1.29	121	13
Jared Cosart	190	3.77	1.34	120	12
Joe Kelly	180	4.02	1.35	120	13
Jason Vargas	190	4.20	1.27	120	12
Shelby Miller	190	4.20	1.27	140	10
Carlos Martinez	145	3.65	1.32	129	9
Edinson Volquez	180	4.01	1.33	139	10
Michael Wacha	140	3.14	1.16	100	7
Jeremy Hellickson	190	4.14	1.30	140	9
Miguel Gonzalez	160	4.26	1.29	115	10
Daniel Norris	150	3.90	1.35	110	9
Archie Bradley	140	4.12	1.38	140	7

One-Star Value Pick: Trevor Bauer

I watched all of Trevor Bauer's starts last year and my conclusion is this: he's incredibly talented and inconsistent. When he's on he can be one of the most dominant starters in baseball. When he doesn't have command of his fastball he walks a lot of batters and is very hittable.

Reliever/Closer Preview

I used to believe the adage of "never pay for saves." I followed this strategy blindly for years, but in the last two years I've had better results (in roto and H2H) drafting closers early in drafts. The primary reasons why I love this strategy is because how many more strikeouts, the saves they provide, the benefits to my pitching staffs ratios and the added roster flexibility.

If I'm in a 10-team mixed league I want at least one five star, one four star and one two star closer. If it's a 12-team or 15-team mixed league I want one five star and one four star. Having top flight closers allows you to set it and forget it. By that mean I mean you will have 2-3 pitchers that will be locked in your lineup the entire season, which will allow you to use your bench for streaming pitchers and/or to have high upside hitters.

Five Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W	SV
Craig Kimbrel	63	1.60	0.91	97	3	43
Greg Holland	66	1.30	0.97	95	2	45
Dellin Betances	70	1.56	0.84	115	3	35
Kenley Jansen	66	2.15	0.99	102	2	45
Aroldis Chapman	65	2.00	0.98	115	2	40

Five-Star Value Pick: Dellin Betances

If I knew Dellin Betances was going to be the closer the entire year he would be my number one closer because he has the best combination of raw stuff and team quality.

Four Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W	SV
Mark Melancon	71	1.90	0.93	70	2	43
Joaquin Benoit	61	1.94	0.95	78	2	38
David Robertson	65	2.67	1.05	90	2	39
Trevor Rosenthal	70	2.85	1.30	90	2	43
Steve Cishek	67	2.60	1.10	77	4	35
Cody Allen	70	2.35	1.07	90	2	35

Four-Star Value Pick: Trevor Rosenthal

Trevor Rosenthal had great season in 2013, but in 2014 his command regressed immensely (specifically the fastball). Of all the pitchers in this tier he has the highest likelihood of finishing the year in the five star category. For that to happen the command has to improve. In 2013 the command was there, which gives me a lot of optimism.

Three Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W	SV
Fernando Rodney	67	2.96	1.34	75	4	37
Glen Perkins	62	2.60	1.10	70	2	35
Sean Doolittle	61	2.77	0.92	96	2	26
Huston Street	60	2.55	1.01	55	2	35
Drew Storen	60	2.51	1.04	50	2	35
Jonathan Papelbon	63	2.50	1.10	60	3	31
Koji Uehara	50	2.50	0.94	69	2	29
Hector Rondon	63	2.50	1.06	65	2	29

Three-Star Value Pick: Drew Storen

The Nationals should be the best team in the NL and I'm probably projecting too few saves for Drew Storen (because I'm not 100% certain sure he'll keep the job if he struggles), but if he's the closer the entire season he could have the most saves of any pitcher in 2015.

Two Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W	SV
Brad Boxberger	65	2.38	0.90	80	3	17
Zach Britton	75	2.90	1.25	62	3	26
Tyler Clippard	70	2.50	0.96	80	3	14
Joe Nathan	60	3.69	1.40	54	4	30
Santiago Casilla	55	2.10	1.05	45	2	24
Jenry Mejia	60	2.60	1.10	70	2	20
Neftali Feliz	50	3.01	1.03	50	2	25
Luke Gregerson	69	2.31	1.05	60	3	16
Aaron Sanchez	65	2.01	0.98	59	3	14
Jake McGee	47	2.50	0.99	60	2	20
Jonatan Broxton	55	2.80	1.23	53	2	25

Two-Star Value Pick: Brad Boxberger

Jake McGee had arthroscopic surgery on his elbow in December and the latest update is he may be ready sometime in April. Any time a pitcher is recovering from elbow surgery the timeline is always fluid and rarely goes as scheduled. Therefore, I wouldn't be surprised if Brad Boxberger, the best reliever the Rays have, becomes the closer the entire year.

One Star

Player	IP	ERA	WHIP	SO	W	SV
LaTroy Hawkins	56	3.50	1.20	35	3	28
Addison Reed	60	3.90	1.20	68	2	24
Brett Cecil	60	2.99	1.27	71	2	20
Kevin Jepsen	50	2.88	1.28	65	2	17
Eric O'Flaherty	60	2.40	1.01	45	3	10
Chad Qualls	55	3.01	1.19	45	2	16
Bobby Parnell	40	2.50	1.10	30	2	15

One-Star Value Pick: Brett Cecil

As of mid-February the Blue Jays do not have a "proven" closer on their roster. With all the acquisitions they made in the offseason says they're going to try to win the division this year and I believe they have a really good chance of achieving that. Therefore, they are going to win a lot of games, which means whoever is the closer will have many save opportunities. Even though Cecil is left handed he doesn't have a major platoon split and is the best reliever in the bullpen, which makes him the front runner for saves.

Hitter Profiles/Capsules

The data underneath each player's name is from Baseball Prospectus. You'll notice some of the numbers I reference in the write-ups are not the same in the main player tables (primarily ground ball, fly ball, HR/FB rates). When I wrote the player capsules I was looking at various websites for statistical information. Sometimes I used data from FanGraphs and other times Baseball Reference. My recommendation when looking at the numbers is to not focus on the specific number. Instead look at the trends the numbers are indicating. For example, if a player's ground ball rate has increased for three straight years it doesn't matter that the write-up says his ground ball rate last year was 45 percent while the main player table says 43 percent. The overall trend is what matters.

For each player I provide the player rater numbers for ESPN and NFBC. Lastly, the players I choose are players that could be owned in a 15-team mixed league so there will be players that you may like that I missed. "RK" refers to my overall ranking of that player among all other hitters.

Please make sure to read my [scouting primer](#) before reading my player profiles as this will help you to read the player capsules, especially for the prospects because I quote prospect evaluators a lot and they use the same language in the primer.

Jose Abreu

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: White Sox | Position: 1B | RK: (14) | Player Rater: ESPN (6), NFBC (8)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	MLB	27	556	36	80	107	3/1	.317	.964	.356	21.1%	8.2%	20.7%	47.3%
Proj.			560	27	84	110	2	.288						

Jose Abreu has tremendous raw power, which is evidenced by the 35 home runs. He was fifth in the majors in home runs (two other hitters hit 35 too) but he was 29th among qualified hitters in extra base hit percentage (41.5%). Of the seven hitters who hit 35-plus home runs, five of them ranked in the top ten in extra base hit percentage (**Jose Bautista** ranked 35th). So something must be off with Abreu's season.

Before the All-Star Break Abreu had 29 home runs (37.2% HR/FB rate), but he only had seven during the second half (14.3% HR/FB rate). What's funny is even though he didn't hit for power in the second half he hit .345 with a .416 BABIP. So it's possible the second half performance was entirely fluky in regards to the power and batting average.

The question for every fantasy owner is what to make of his season. Why didn't he hit for power in the second half of the year? What kind of batting average is expected next year? According to BrooksBaseball.net the types of pitches he saw didn't [change that dramatically](#).

Of the 36 home runs he hit, only 15 came at home. This is counter intuitive because the home ballpark is a bam box.

I checked the types of home runs he hit and the percentages of Just Enough, Plenty, and etc. was similar to his contemporaries (Chris Carter, Giancarlo Stanton, Miguel Cabrera and Jose Bautista).

For the year he had a HR/FB of 29%, which is insanely high. Since 2008 only **Chris Davis** (in 2013) and **Ryan Howard** (in 2008) had HR/FB rates that high (29.8% and 28.4% respectively) so the smart money says a regression is coming. The question is how much of a regression?

In the second half of the year Abreu had a 14.3% HR/FB rate, which is low considering how much raw power he has. A conservative estimate is he'll have a 21.5% HR/FB rate, which means he should hit 25-27 home runs. That may sound low, but his fly ball rate was only 28.7%, which is really low for a power hitter. He's going to be drafted as a 40 home run threat, but I don't see it happening.

In regards to his .317 batting average, he benefitted greatly from a fluky second half of the season where he hit .350 with a .419 BABIP. Abreu is relatively safe to hit .270-plus, but I don't see last years batting average repeating.

Dustin Ackley

Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Mariners | Position: OF | RK: (147) | Player Rater: ESPN (118), NFBC (115)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	607	12	84	50	13/3	.226	.622	.265	18.6%	8.8%	25.4%	45.2%
2013	MLB	25	384	4	40	31	2/3	.253	.660	.301	16.9%	8.7%	19.6%	51.4%
2014	MLB	26	502	14	64	65	8/4	.245	.692	.273	16.6%	5.9%	22.5%	46.3%
Proj.			520	13	65	60	10	.262						

In 2013 **Dustin Ackley**, the former second overall pick, was back to the minor leagues to work on some things. After he was recalled he hit .285/.354/.404 in 68 games. Those results prompted some fantasy owners to believe a breakout was coming. Unfortunately for his fantasy owners he didn't have a breakout season, but what he did do was hit for the most power in his Major League career.

Other than the home run spike he had a very interesting season. In late September it was reported he had [bone spurs](#) in left foot. During that month he had a .149/.205/.299 slash line. If you remove the September numbers he has a .260/.307/.414 slash line with 11 home runs and eight stolen bases.

When he was drafted a lot of scouts envisioned a .400 OBP, but last he swung at more pitches, took less walks and tried to make more contact, which he did successfully. The fact he won't have a high OBP means he'll likely bat in the bottom of the lineup, which lowers his fantasy potential. All that said, he's still roster worthy in a deep format because he's going to provide a little bit of everything and he has the upside to be a 15/15 player.

Matt Adams**Bats: L | Age: 26 | Team: Cardinals | Position: 1B | RK: (77) | Player Rater: ESPN (85), NFBC (88)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	AAA	23	258	18	41	50	3/1	.329	.986	.360	20.7%	5.4%	42.2%	30.9%
2013	MLB	24	296	17	46	51	0/1	.284	.839	.337	25.1%	7.2%	28.2%	45.4%
2014	MLB	25	527	15	55	68	3/2	.288	.779	.338	20.2%	4.6%	23.6%	35.7%
Proj.			540	19	70	85	2	.282						

In 2014 **Matt Adams** put up eerily similar numbers to 2013. The batting average,

BABIP, and home runs were all essentially the same. That said, he made improvements to his game. For example, the strikeout rate decreased five percentage points, the ground ball rate decreased by nine percentage points and the contact rate increased nearly four percentage points. Basically, those positive trends indicate that a .280 batting average is very likely to be his floor heading into 2015.

There are some major flaws in his game. First, he struggles against lefties. In 193 ABs he has a .197/.227/.326 slash line. Since we're dealing with a small sample size its hard to say definitively he cannot hit lefties. The Cardinals and Adams' fantasy value would be better served if he sat against lefties. The Cardinals signed **Mark Reynolds** and it looks like he'll platoon with Adams against lefties.

The drop in power last year was troubling, but his 9.7% HR/FB rate doesn't pass the smell test for me. He has bigger raw power than that and the HR/FB rate should positively regress to the 11-13% range. However, I do believe in the power numbers he showed in 2013. Last year he hit 163 fly balls. If his HR/FB rate was 11.5% he would've had 18.75 home runs, which seems about his true talent level.

In late May he went on the DL with a [calf strain](#) and missed the minimum number of days. He had minor injuries after that (oblique strains), but he was relatively healthy. When I look at Adams I do not see a player that will age well as he enters his late 20s. As time goes on he will get bigger and bigger players do not age well (**Mo Vaughn** and **Ryan Howard** for example). If I was in a keeper or dynasty format I would try to sell high after the 2015 or 2016 season.

Adams is an average, maybe slightly above average real life player who will get an opportunity to hit in the middle of a lineup that should score a lot of runs. He only drove in 68 last year, but I expect **Matt Carpenter**, **Kolten Wong** and **Jason Heyward** to improve and Adams will have an opportunity to be a beneficiary.

Arismendy Alcantara**Bats: B | Age: 23 | Team: Cubs | Position: 2B, OF | RK: (158) | Player Rater: ESPN (270), NFBC (216)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	21	494	15	69	69	31/6	.271	.804	.332	21.9%	10.9%	28.5%	47.1%
2014	MLB	22	278	10	31	29	8/5	.205	.621	.266	31.0%	5.7%	21.3%	52.7%
2014	AAA	22	335	10	62	41	21/3	.307	.890	.380	22.7%	6.8%	25.2%	45.0%
Proj.			550	14	55	50	25	.235						

When evaluating **Arismendy Alcantara** it's easy to see the 10 home runs he hit in 70 games in the majors and believe he has 20/20 potential, but contrary to those statistics, he is far away from hitting 20 home runs in 2015. That said, I wouldn't be shocked if he hit 14-15 home runs because, to quote from his scouting report, he has "strong wrists and quick bat" (source: BaseballProspectus.com).

In regards to his stolen bases, if he plays a full season 20 is his floor and 40-plus could be his ceiling. Last year (between Triple-A and the majors) he stole 29 bases. The year prior he stole 31 in the Double-A.

His fantasy value is going to be dependent on his batting average. To quote the same Baseball Prospectus scouting report, "His strike zone control is still raw and he is still very aggressive at the plate but there's some aptitude there when it comes to understanding the strike zone." The minor league statistics back up this observation, as his strikeout rate was 22% in both Double-A and Triple-A. His speed is good enough that his BABIP should at least be in the .300s, which means his batting floor should be in the .230s.

What's likely going to suppress his value is he'll most likely hit at the bottom of the lineup, which means his RBI, and run totals will be so low he may not be startable in a 10-team mixed league even if he is a 15/20 player with a .230 batting average.

Jose Altuve**Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Astros | Position: 2B | RK: (7) | Player Rater: ESPN (1), NFBC (1)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	576	7	80	37	33/11	.290	.740	.321	11.7%	6.3%	25.3%	53.3%
2013	MLB	23	626	5	64	52	35/13	.283	.678	.316	12.6%	4.8%	22.2%	50.6%
2014	MLB	24	660	7	85	59	56/9	.341	.830	.360	7.5%	5.1%	20.7%	49.1%
Proj.			650	7	85	69	45	.299						

Sometimes players just get better. That's all I can say about **Jose Altuve's** ability to steal bases and everything in general. In the minor leagues he his stolen base success rate was 71.8%. In his first three years in the Majors 73.5%. Last year he stole 56 stolen bases and had a success rate of 86.2%.

The reason why his stolen base output increased so much because he was on-base a lot (duh), but his stolen base rate has been relatively the same in the Majors. The table below shows how often he attempted to steal a base (SB%).

Year	SB Attempts	# Of Times On-Base	SB%
2011	10	66	15.2%
2012	44	207	21.3%
2013	48	209	23.0%
2014	65	261	24.9%

The stolen base rate has increased year-over-year, but not that dramatically. Therefore, in order to maintain the stolen bases level as last year he's going to have to have the same OBP.

The reason why his OBP was so high last year was he batted .341 (with a .360 BABIP). On the surface the BABIP seems high, but he's a high BABIP player. In his first three Major League seasons he has a .317 BABIP. Obviously he outperformed his career BABIP by 43 points, which indicates he should regress back to that level. However, it's possible the regression may not be that much.

His ground ball rate has decreased year-over-year the past three years while the line drive rate has increased, which means he's making harder contact.

So to recap he's striking out less and generating more hard contact. Even though he is making harder contact doesn't mean he's going to start hitting 15-plus home runs. He doesn't have massive home run power, but instead it's only doubles power (which isn't a bad thing from a real life perspective!).

From a scouting perspective he added a leg kick (similar to **Josh Donaldson** and **Jose Bautista**) before the 2014 season. Below is an excerpt from [Ryan Parker's article](#) at Baseball Prospectus. His article goes into greater detail about Altuve's new swing.

"Last year, Altuve put himself in a very bad position to hit anything on the outer third, especially if it had break. His lower body had nothing left to drive and his only hope was to spin and rely on his insane hand-eye coordination. The 2014 Altuve puts the earlier version to shame. His new leg lift erases the problems from his prior stride."

Altuve may not hit .341 again, but .320 is very attainable. Even if he only hits .320 the stolen base output wouldn't decrease that much. Using last years stolen base rate if he hit .320 he would have had 61 stolen base attempts instead of the 65 last year.

Some fantasy owners may discount Altuve's 2014 season, but I'm not. He's hitting the ball harder and his new swing allows him to drive the ball and to hit balls anywhere in the strike zone. He'll probably be overrated in drafts because of last season's performance, but last year was not a fluke.

Pedro Alvarez**Bats: L | Age: 28 | Team: Pirates | Position: 3B | RK: (130) | Player Rater: ESPN (142), NFBC (101)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	525	30	64	85	1/0	.244	.784	.308	30.7%	9.7%	31.3%	48.0%
2013	MLB	26	558	36	70	100	2/0	.233	.770	.276	30.3%	7.8%	25.3%	44.9%
2014	MLB	27	398	18	46	56	8/3	.231	.717	.277	25.4%	10.1%	25.6%	44.9%
Proj.			400	28	60	64	4	.240						

With the emergence of **Josh Harrison** it looks as though **Pedro Alvarez** will be relegated to platoon duties at first base, which will be a positive for his 2015 fantasy value. Alvarez cannot hit lefties. In 558 PAs (which is still a relatively small sample size) he has a .197/.267/.321 slash line and a 12.7% HR/FB rate. Against righties its .247/.320/.427 with a 22.8% HR/FB rate.

After two straight years with HR/FB rates greater than 25% his HR/FB rate dropped ten percentage points. The question is what HR/FB rate represents his true talent? I'm inclined to believe the larger sample size so he should have HR/FB in the 20-25% range.

Last year he had the highest fly ball rate of his career, which means if the HR/FB rate positively regresses he could hit 25-plus home runs (even in a platoon). If he gets 400 ABs against righties and maintains the same FB% he'll hit about 156 fly balls which means if he has a 20% HR/FB rate he will hit 30-31 home runs.

He'll never hit for much average, but if he can hit in the .240s he'll provide enough power to offset it. Also, almost of nowhere he stole eight bases and had a respectable stolen bases success rate (72.7%) so it's possible he steals 5-plus next year.

Elvis Andrus**Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Rangers | Position: SS | RK: (80) | Player Rater: ESPN (89), NFBC (82)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	629	3	85	62	21/10	.286	.727	.332	13.5%	8.0%	18.3%	59.7%
2013	MLB	24	620	4	91	67	42/8	.271	.659	.312	13.9%	7.4%	13.2%	59.3%
2014	MLB	25	619	2	72	41	27/15	.263	.647	.305	14.0%	6.7%	12.4%	59.7%
Proj.			620	3	88	55	27	.275						

Even though **Elvis Andrus** is only 25 years old is it possible that he's not going to get any better? His offensive numbers have not improved and last year was one of his worst seasons as a Major Leaguer.

What's maddening for fantasy owners is his stolen base totals vary dramatically from year-to-year, which makes him a more volatile fantasy player. You don't know if you're getting 24 stolen bases or 40-plus.

There is optimism his batting average will increase because he had a career low .305 BABIP (he also had the same BABIP his rookie season).

Another aspect to consider is the career low 72 runs he scored last year. The Rangers offense was bad all around last year, but as of mid-December I don't think the offense is that much better. **Prince Fielder** is coming back, but who knows what you'll get out of him. Who's going to bat fifth? **Mitch Moreland**? **Jake Smolinski**? Andrus should see an uptick in runs, but I don't see a massive improvement.

Norichika Aoki

Bats: L | Age: 33 | Team: Brewers | Position: OF | RK: (155) | Player Rater: ESPN (103), NFBC (112)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	520	10	81	50	30/8	.288	.787	.304	9.4%	7.3%	21.6%	57.2%
2013	MLB	31	597	8	80	37	20/12	.286	.726	.295	5.9%	8.2%	15.0%	62.5%
2014	MLB	32	491	1	63	43	17/8	.285	.710	.314	8.9%	7.8%	10.2%	64.1%
Proj.			540	3	70	40	17	.279						

Norichika Aoki's best real life skills are he can make contact and get on-base. He's not a good defender and doesn't hit for much power. I know he hit eight and ten home runs with the Brewers, but since he's going to be playing AT&T Park (which is the worst place for left handed power) he's not going to hit more than five in 2015.

The biggest fantasy question is how many stolen bases will he have at the end of the year? He's had impressive stolen base totals but for the past two seasons his stolen base success rate is below 70% (i.e. that's really bad) so it's possible his stolen base opportunities decreases.

Another thing to consider is where he'll hit in the lineup. He should be hitting first or second and if that happens he could score 80-plus runs, which would make him a solid three category contributor.

Oswaldo Arcia

Bats: L | Age: 23 | Team: Twins | Position: OF | RK: (118) | Player Rater: ESPN (166), NFBC (119)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	22	351	14	34	43	1/2	.251	.734	.336	31.0%	6.1%	29.5%	44.9%
2014	MLB	23	372	20	46	57	1/2	.231	.752	.292	31.0%	7.6%	30.9%	37.0%
2014	AAA	23	77	5	16	18	1/0	.312	.962	.339	20.0%	5.9%	44.3%	37.7%
Proj.			500	23	62	78	1	.259						

After the first four games of the season **Oswaldo Arcia** went on the DL [with wrist inflammation](#). A big reason why I was avoiding him last year was the league started to make adjustments against him and he struggled. Specifically, they started less fastballs and more breaking pitches. In 2013 he batted .176/.227/.275 with a 40.5% strikeout rate against breaking pitches (curveballs, sliders, changeups and etc). Last year those numbers improved dramatically as he hit .244/.270/.413 against these pitches. You

may be asking yourself that slash line is better than overall numbers. You are correct. That means he performed miserably against fastballs (.220/.311/.485) and therefore should positively regress in 2015.

He's still early on into his career, but he may have to be ultimately platooned against left handed pitching because he sports a .224/.266/.347 slash line in 259 PAs. Since the Twins do not have a legitimate chance to make the playoffs in 2015 hopefully they'll allow Arcia to play every day (to get a better idea if he's making positive adjustments against lefties). The fact he had 20 home runs in a shortened season may cause some fantasy owners to believe he could 28-plus home runs (which is based on his [scouting report](#)), but except for a random extraordinarily high HR/FB rate I don't see it happening. In regards to the Twins home ballpark, it hasn't had any negative effect on his power. He has a career 16.5% HR/FB rate at home and 17.4% on the road. I'm projecting to hit 23 home runs with a .259 batting average in 500 PAs.

I would bat him fourth in the lineup, but you never know with the Twins. In regards to the RBI totals it's going to change dramatically based on where he hits in the lineup. Be sure to check back at the Fantasy Guide section with updated projections.

Nolan Arenado

Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Rockies | Position: 3B | RK: (37) | Player Rater: ESPN (93), NFBC (108)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	22	486	10	49	52	2/0	.267	.706	.296	14.0%	4.5%	22.2%	42.8%
2014	MLB	23	432	18	58	61	2/1	.287	.828	.294	12.4%	5.4%	25.0%	38.2%
2014	AAA	23	20	0	2	3	0/0	.350	.800	.412	15.0%	0.0%	47.1%	29.4%
Proj.			550	24	78	86	2	.295						

I wouldn't be shocked if **Nolan Arenado** finishes next year as the number one fantasy third baseman. He probably won't steal enough bases to finish number one on ESPNs or NFBCs Player Rater, but based on where he goes in drafts he'll provide the highest ROI.

Last year his power increased from 10 to 18 home runs and I think it's 100% legitimate. His extra base hit percentage increased 10.5 percentage points from 33% to 43.5%. It's reductive to say his home ballpark was the sole reason for the increased offensive numbers, but his home numbers were almost the same as last year. Instead, his road numbers improved: from a .619 OPS to a .713 OPS.

Last year he missed 37 games due to a [fractured finger](#). The injury occurred as he was sliding into second base. What's promising is after returned from the DL he hit 12 home runs and his extra base hit percentage was 47%, which indicates he felt no ill effect from the injury.

He probably won't steal more than 3-4 bases, but he's fast enough to steal 10-plus if they allow him to run. Other than stolen bases, he's going to be a four-category stud because he should hit in the middle of that lineup, his skills are improving and he plays in a great ballpark.

Erick Aybar

Bats: B | Age: 31 | Team: Angels | Position: SS | RK: (112) | Player Rater: ESPN (75), NFBC (70)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	517	8	67	45	20/4	.290	.740	.316	11.0%	4.0%	21.5%	55.7%
2013	MLB	29	550	6	68	54	12/7	.271	.683	.292	10.0%	3.9%	17.9%	53.0%
2014	MLB	30	589	7	77	68	16/9	.278	.700	.297	9.7%	5.6%	15.8%	50.8%
Proj.			560	7	65	70	18	.275						

Erick Aybar is an unsexy player but you know what you're going to get when you draft him. He's only played more than 144 games once in his Major League career so expect him to have a DL stint at some point in the season. His contact rates are so high he's almost a lock to hit .270-plus with 5-10 home runs.

The big question about Aybar for 2015 is how many bases will he steal? For the first seven years of his Major League career he had a stolen base success rate of 76%, but in the last two seasons its only 63.6%. He did have a [foot contusion](#) in April 2013 so that may have contributed to low success rate in 2013, but he didn't have any leg/foot issues in 2014 so it's possible he may have lost a tick of speed. In 2011 he stole 30 bases, but I no longer believe 30 is his ceiling. Instead I would plan for 12-17 and I would be ecstatic if he steals more.

Javier Baez

Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Cubs | Position: 2B, SS | RK: (168) | Player Rater: ESPN (354), NFBC (274)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	20	218	20	39	54	8/2	.294	.983	.333	28.8%	7.9%	35.5%	46.1%
2014	MLB	21	213	9	25	20	5/1	.169	.551	.248	41.5%	6.6%	28.0%	43.2%
2014	AAA	21	388	23	64	80	16/8	.260	.833	.322	30.0%	7.8%	37.4%	41.5%
Proj.			550	23	55	55	15	.219						

This is what [I wrote](#) on August 8, 2014 after **Javier Baez** hit two home runs in Colorado.

*"Last night **Javier Baez** had a monster day, hitting two home runs (he has three for the year) and driving in four. If I'm in a redraft league I'm selling high and trying to take advantage of his perceived market value. Right now this is going to be the peak of his 2014 value.*

*It's important to be aware of the circumstances surrounding his three home runs. First they occurred in Colorado, where fly balls turn into home runs more often than any other park. And yes, I recognize his raw talent is so good that he can barrel balls out of any park, but judging from the angle on TV, the balls he hit received some benefit from the ballpark. Another aspect to consider is the pitchers who allowed the home runs: **Boone Logan**, **Yohan Flande**, and **Juan Nicasio**. I want to see how performs against more elite pitching before I'm totally buying for this season.*

Baez has impressive raw power, but he's far from a finished product and will likely take more time to start to actualize his lofty tool set. I'm not a fan of the swing as he's going to be vulnerable to sliders and

curveballs (from righties) that are down and out of the zone. Every swing I've seen looks as though he's always trying to hit a home run, which can be good if the pitcher throws a fastball; however, if he doesn't get a fastball that approach and swing is going to get exposed. He's going to hit home runs, but I don't see the batting average going beyond the .230 mark."

I'm writing his player capsule in mid-October and I still believe in that evaluation. The hype surrounding Baez entering drafts will be immense and I'm certain he is going to be over drafted in redraft leagues.

In 229 PAs he struck out 41.5% of the time. How many players struck out that often and ended up having really good fantasy seasons? It's probably a short list. He's going to be a 20/20 threat but his fantasy value will depend on the batting average and I think he he'll have a sub-.210 batting average at the end of the year.

Jose Bautista

Bats: R | Age: 34 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: OF | RK: (24) | Player Rater: ESPN (10), NFBC (10)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	332	27	64	65	5/2	.241	.886	.215	15.8%	14.8%	35.9%	37.4%
2013	MLB	32	452	28	82	73	7/2	.259	.856	.259	15.9%	13.1%	27.7%	41.1%
2014	MLB	33	553	35	101	103	6/2	.286	.928	.287	14.3%	15.5%	25.4%	41.4%
Proj.			500	29	89	89	5	.265						

After two injury plagued years **Jose Bautista** played a full season and did not disappoint his fantasy owners. However, there are signs he may not be able to repeat the numbers he posted in 2014.

First the .286 batting average. He's only hit more than .285 twice in the past six years. His batting average last year was dependent upon the batting average on ground balls. The table shows his batting average on ground balls and his total batting average since he joined the Blue Jays. Odds are the performance on ground balls regresses.

Splits	GB AVG	AVG
2009	.208	.235
2010	.227	.260
2011	.313	.302
2012	.238	.241
2013	.240	.259
2014	.276	.286
Total Average	.255	.268

Even though he hit 35 home runs the HR/FB rate wasn't at the elite level he showed in 2010-12. Also, his extra base hit percentage was the lowest its been since 2009 which implies he's not making as much hard contact as before (table below).

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2009	79	29	36.7%
2010	148	92	62.2%
2011	155	69	44.5%
2012	80	41	51.3%
2013	117	52	44.4%
2014	158	62	39.2%

In regards to his health he's going to play the entire year at the age of 34 and he's had two tissue injuries in two of the past three seasons so the likelihood of him missing time is higher than most players.

Overall, I don't think Bautista is going to fall off dramatically, but he's going to be drafted a top ten player and there's too much risk with that ADP. The batting average is going to regress and he's a player who will be 34 and who has had issues staying healthy.

Brandon Belt

Bats: L | Age: 26 | Team: Giants | Position: 1B | RK: (79) | Player Rater: ESPN (246), NFBC (239)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	411	7	47	56	12/2	.275	.781	.351	22.5%	11.4%	33.3%	38.2%
2013	MLB	25	509	17	76	67	5/2	.289	.841	.351	21.9%	9.1%	30.4%	34.5%
2014	MLB	26	214	12	30	27	3/1	.243	.755	.288	27.2%	7.7%	28.5%	38.4%
Proj.			510	21	70	85	6	.265						

After a hot start to the season **Brandon Belt** was sidelined for eight weeks to a [broken thumb](#) after getting hit by a pitch. Then in July he [was hit in the face](#) by a baseball during batting practice. After the incident he dealt with post-concussion symptoms and subsequently missed 46 games.

Since his 2014 numbers and career numbers were underwhelming he may be a forgotten player for many fantasy owners, but do not be one of those owners. In 2013 his batting average, slugging and isolated power all ticked way up from the previous year. Before 2014 drafts some fantasy analysts were saying Belt was poised for a breakout. For the first 35 games he was poised to do just that as he hit nine home runs with a .264/.317/.504 slash line. After breaking his thumb it was a lost season for him.

In last year's guide I said Belt has been very underrated because his home ballpark suppressed his numbers. The table below shows his career home-road splits.

Splits	AVG	SLUG	OPS	BABIP	HR/FB	HR
Home	.278	.443	.801	.356	7.6%	16
Away	.256	.438	.770	.311	13.8%	31

For some reason he has a .356 BABIP at home in 760 plate appearances. Also, in the last three seasons his home BABIP has been below .347, which suggests he should have a higher than normal BABIP at home. It's odd his BABIP would be so much higher at home because the ballpark is an extreme pitchers park and suppresses power for left handed hitters. The only explanation for this is he's able to have a high BABIP is due to the fact he makes a lot of hard contact. That may sound counterintuitive considering his low home run totals, but his career 13.8% HR/FB rate tells me everything I need to know about the rate of hard contact.

What's the most interesting about Belt's 2014 season was he became more aggressive at the plate. Swinging at more pitches, but making less contact. It's possible those numbers were due to after coming off the first DL stint, but before breaking his thumb he was striking out 27% of the time. That indicates his approach at the plate changed from the very start of the season.

Overall, I believe Belt is post-hype sleeper candidate. He's not going to provide flashy numbers, but I can certainly see 20-25 home runs with a .260-plus batting average. He's going to hit in the middle of the Giants lineup (either third or fifth) so he's going to have a lot of opportunities to score and drive in runs.

Carlos Beltran

Bats: B | Age: 37 | Team: Yankees | Position: OF | RK: (102) | Player Rater: ESPN (197), NFBC (143)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	35	547	32	83	97	13/6	.269	.842	.291	20.0%	10.5%	28.0%	42.1%
2013	MLB	36	554	24	79	84	2/1	.296	.830	.314	15.0%	6.3%	24.0%	36.7%
2014	MLB	37	403	15	46	49	3/1	.233	.703	.252	17.8%	8.2%	23.5%	45.4%
Proj.			510	20	76	84	1	.255						

Carlos Beltran had a decent start to his career as a Yankee as he hit .263 with five home runs in the month of April. However, in mid-May he was diagnosed with a bone spur in his right elbow. He elected to rehab it and only missed 22 games. However, when he came back he didn't do very much, hitting .233 with ten home runs (in 309 PAs).

Last year he played 70% of the time as the DH and that is likely to change. With the signing of Chase Headley that makes **Alex Rodriguez** the DH. It is no guarantee Rodriguez is the DH because Garret Jones and Chris Young, who are both capable of being every day players, are on the roster. Either way I find it hard to believe Beltran will be able to get as my DH at-bats as last year, which hurts his fantasy outlook.

Even if he's able to play in 140-plus games (which is a big if) I don't see a lot of upside in his game. Sure, he could hit 20-25 home runs, but what's his batting average going to be? He's starting to struggle against left handed pitching and looks like he should be a platoon candidate. However, the contact rates are still solid and his swinging strike rate has decreased year-over-year for three years in a row. I still

cannot get over the fact he's going to play the majority of the year in the outfield at the age of 38. I rather take a flier on someone younger like **Marcel Ozuna**, **Melky Cabrera**, **Oswaldo Arcia** and so on.

Adrian Beltre

Bats: R | Age: 35 | Team: Rangers | Position: 3B | RK: (34) | Player Rater: ESPN (33), NFBC (38)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	604	36	95	102	1/0	.321	.921	.319	12.5%	5.5%	32.8%	39.7%
2013	MLB	34	631	30	88	92	1/0	.315	.880	.322	11.3%	7.2%	27.4%	37.8%
2014	MLB	35	549	19	79	77	1/1	.324	.879	.345	12.1%	9.3%	23.3%	43.1%
Proj.			575	19	86	93	1	.295						

There's going to be a narrative that **Adrian Beltre** refuses to age, but don't buy it. His 2014 numbers look good, but if you take a deeper dive there are signs that he is declining.

First, he was able to hit .324, which is great, but it required the highest BABIP of his career to do so. Second, his HR/FB rate has been declining year-over-year for the past three seasons and last year's HR/FB rate (11.1%) was the lowest since 2009, his last year with the Seattle Mariners. Third, his ISO has decreased year-over-year for the past four seasons, which indicates he's hitting the ball with less authority. Also, the table below shows his extra base hit percentage for his career.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
1998	42	16	38.1%
1999	148	47	31.8%
2000	148	52	35.1%
2001	126	39	31.0%
2002	151	52	34.4%
2003	134	55	41.0%
2004	200	80	40.0%
2005	154	56	36.4%
2006	166	68	41.0%
2007	164	69	42.1%
2008	148	55	37.2%
2009	119	35	29.4%
2010	189	79	41.8%
2011	144	65	45.1%
2012	194	71	36.6%
2013	199	62	31.2%
2014	178	53	29.8%

Fourth, how good is the lineup going to be for the Rangers? A lot is going to have to go right for the Rangers lineup to be better than average and if it doesn't there won't be as many RBI opportunities. His contact rates are still similar, which means the drop in batting average will not be a precipitous one.

Without a clear number one third baseman, Beltre will most likely earn that moniker. He's the type of player that if you draft him as the first third baseman he probably will not finish the year as the best third baseman, but he'll be top five.

Christian Bethancourt

Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Braves | Position: C | RK: (205) | Player Rater: ESPN (441), NFBC (475)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	21	358	12	42	45	11/7	.277	.741	.294	14.7%	4.1%	28.8%	44.1%
2014	MLB	22	113	0	7	9	1/1	.248	.548	.322	22.2%	2.6%	19.5%	56.3%
2014	AAA	22	343	8	33	48	7/1	.283	.716	.318	16.7%	3.6%	25.6%	44.3%
Proj.			420	13	40	40	11	.245						

With the trade of **Jason Heyward**, **Evan Gattis** will primarily play in left field, which means **Christian Bethancourt** becomes the everyday catcher for the Braves. Bethancourt has a very interesting profile as he has the raw speed to steal 10-15 bases and the power to hit 12-16 home runs, but it won't come with a lot of batting average (scouting report courtesy of BaseballProspectus.com). A fantasy comp for him would be **Russell Martin**, but unlike Martin, Bethancourt will likely bat eighth in the lineup so he won't score a lot of runs or have a lot of RBI opportunities. Since Bethancourt is so good defensively he's going to stay in the lineup even if he hits a cold streak at the plate.

Mookie Betts

Bats: R | Age: 22 | Team: Red Sox | Position: 2B, OF | RK: (108) | Player Rater: ESPN (223), NFBC (273)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AA	21	214	6	56	34	22/3	.355	.994	.366	7.9%	13.8%	34.0%	42.6%
2014	AAA	21	185	5	31	31	11/4	.335	.920	.380	14.2%	12.3%	31.6%	40.0%
2014	MLB	21	189	5	34	18	7/3	.291	.812	.327	14.6%	9.9%	28.9%	42.1%
Proj.			500	7	68	58	20	.284						

This is what I wrote at the time of **Mookie Betts'** call-up last year. The information is still highly relevant now.

"There were was a lot of rejoicing among the Baseball Professor staff about the call-up of Mookie Betts, but I wasn't one of them. It's not because I believe he'll fail at the major league level, but the hype surrounding him has gotten so out of control he is likely to disappoint and he has more value in trade.

The fantasy community is putting him in the class of elite prospects ([George Springer](#), [Gregory Polanco](#)), which is a mistake considering he wasn't ranked in the top five of the Red Sox system before the season began. (I realize prospect rankings are a snap shot of a moment in time and it's important not to be married to those rankings because players change.)

His minor league numbers this year have been great. He’s making a ton of contact, drawing a lot of walks, and limiting his strikeouts. However, minor league numbers translate differently in the major leagues. It’s easy to see the .322 batting average and .869 OPS in Triple-A and dream he can post similar numbers in the majors, but he accrued those numbers in 23 games. All the people who bought into [Chris Colabello](#) know it’s important not to inflate a player’s fantasy value after a 20-30 game sample.

If Betts bats leadoff he’ll be a three-category player: R, SB, BA. The biggest question is how many bases will he steal? He stole 46 last year (across three levels) and 29 this year (across two levels). This year the Red Sox have only attempted 41 stolen bases, which is the fourth lowest in the majors. Last year they had 142 stolen base attempts, which was 12th in the majors. There will be opportunities for him to steal bases, but maybe at the same level he was producing in the minors.”

In regards to Betts it’s going to come down to playing time. As of right now he’s blocked by **Shane Victorino** (and yes, I know that sounds really dumb because Victorino is not a good ball player) so I wouldn’t be surprised if he begins the year in Triple-A to begin the year. Betts was very impressive in his brief stint as an every day player, but so was **Xander Bogaerts** in 2013.

Xander Bogaerts

Bats: R | Age: 22 | Team: Red Sox | Position: 3B, SS | RK: (114) | Player Rater: ESPN (199), NFBC (210)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	20	225	9	32	32	2/2	.284	.822	.320	17.2%	10.9%	23.1%	48.9%
2013	MLB	20	44	1	7	5	1/0	.250	.684	.323	26.0%	10.0%	9.4%	46.9%
2014	MLB	21	538	12	60	46	2/3	.240	.660	.296	23.2%	6.6%	31.1%	38.9%
Proj.			550	15	77	70	2	.276						

Of the all the shortstops with jobs on Opening Day **Xander Bogaerts** has the highest realistic ceiling because he has the raw tools to be a .300 hitter with 25-plus home runs. **Javier Baez** has the higher fantasy ceiling overall, but there’s less than 5% chance of him hitting that in 2015. Bogaerts

Entering drafts last year his value was hyped up too much because of he performed during the 2013 postseason. Since his 2014 season was so below expectations he could be a post-hype sleeper and therefore, a tremendous value going into drafts.

Odds are if you’re reading this you know about his hitting statistics at third base compared to shortstop. The table below breaks down his career numbers at each position.

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS
Third base	203	.184	.516
Shortstop	439	.267	.729

There's a running narrative about playing a new position heavily contributed to his poor offense output. The position change played a role in his poor offense, but I also believe we're dealing with a small sample size too.

He had a monster September hitting .313 with 4 home runs and 16 RBI, which provides a glimpse of what he's capable of doing. In regards to his ability to steal bases he has a career 50% success rate in the minors and majors and is only an average runner (which is still really fast!) so I wouldn't expect any more than 5-7 stolen bases.

Charlie Blackmon

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Rockies | Position: OF | RK: (33) | Player Rater: ESPN (14), NFBC (15)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	113	2	15	9	1/2	.283	.732	.319	14.0%	3.3%	22.7%	50.5%
2013	MLB	26	246	6	35	22	7/0	.309	.803	.366	19.0%	2.7%	21.1%	42.2%
2014	MLB	27	593	19	82	72	28/10	.288	.775	.315	14.8%	4.8%	22.8%	43.1%
Proj.			570	15	89	70	20	.283						

Charlie Blackmon had an incredible first month of the season. After that first month he was good, but not nearly as good as the finals numbers indicate. The table below compares his first month to the rest of the season.

Splits	AVG	K%	BABIP	HR	SB	HR/FB
April	.374	7.1%	.364	5	7	17.2%
May-October	.271	16.4%	.304	14	21	9.0%

Another piece of evidence I would like to submit are his career home-road splits (table below).

Splits	PA	AVG	K%	BABIP	HR/FB
Home	578	.335	12.3%	.361	11.2%
Away	551	.243	18.0%	.281	6.9%

Based on the data provided I do not believe it is fair to question that Blackmon is a below average player who generates his offensive production purely from playing in Coors Field. That said, he's going to play half of his games in that ballpark so he's going to have fantasy relevance. Ideally I would platoon him with another player especially in leagues where you can change your lineup every day. He has 41 stolen bases in his Major League career and 26 of them are when he played at home. The low stolen base totals are probably low on the road because of the career .272 OBP.

I know it's reductive to split out Blackmon's home-road splits and say he's not very good (especially when the sample is small), but there's a pretty start contrast between the two. However, he's going to lead off for the Rockies and while the lineup is healthy he'll be primed to score a lot of runs. If he can

play a full year his floor is 10 home runs with 10-15 stolen bases. Also, since he plays in Colorado he'll have more opportunities to drive in runs than other leadoff hitters.

Michael Bourn

Bats: L | Age: 32 | Team: Indians | Position: OF | RK: (169) | Player Rater: ESPN (200), NFBC (203)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	624	9	96	57	42/13	.274	.739	.349	22.0%	10.0%	23.4%	54.1%
2013	MLB	30	525	6	75	50	23/12	.263	.676	.338	23.0%	7.0%	17.2%	58.4%
2014	MLB	31	444	3	57	28	10/6	.257	.674	.337	23.4%	7.2%	21.2%	52.8%
Proj.			500	2	73	44	20	.254						

Michael Bourn has been in decline for two straight years. The stolen bases and stolen base success rate have decreased year-over-year for four straight years. Also, during that same time span the strikeout rate has increased. It's very possible his stolen bases were way down last year because he missed 37 games with a hamstring strain. This was the first time he missed a substantial amount of time with a hamstring strain so it's possible this was a fluke injury and won't happen again. However, I subscribe to the theory that speed-first players age much faster in regards to on the field performance because once the speed goes he doesn't have much else to hang his hit on. His stolen base ceiling is 30 and he doesn't hit for much average anymore so he's basically only a one-category player.

Michael Brantley

Bats:L | Age: 28 | Team: Indians | Position: OF | RK: (8) | Player Rater: ESPN (3), NFBC (3)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	552	6	63	60	12/9	.288	.750	.310	9.2%	8.7%	25.8%	49.6%
2013	MLB	26	556	10	66	73	17/4	.284	.728	.304	11.0%	6.5%	21.0%	47.6%
2014	MLB	27	611	20	94	97	23/1	.327	.890	.333	8.3%	7.7%	19.3%	47.7%
Proj.			580	16	92	92	21	.301						

Despite **Michael Brantley's** breakout year I think he'll still come at a discount on draft day because I the fantasy community is going to believe last season was a fluke, but I disagree.

Prior to 2014 his career BABIP was .304 and last year his BABIP was 29 points higher. Usually when there's a spike in BABIP its due an increase on the batting average on ground balls. Last year his BABIP increase came on fly balls and not ground balls (table below).

Splits	GB AVG	GB BABIP	FB AVG	FB BABIP	LD AVG	LD BABIP
2009-13	.262	.262	.193	.133	.612	.597
2014	.276	.276	.308	.184	.639	.627

The higher batting average on fly balls coincides with the increase in home runs (and HR/FB rate) because it indicates he was making more hard contact than ever before. The table below shows his extra base hit percentage since 2011 and you will notice even though his batting average increased so did the extra base hit percentage.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2011	120	35	29.2%
2012	159	47	29.6%
2013	158	39	24.7%
2014	200	67	33.5%

Last year he played the majority of the season at the transcendent age of 27 and if you happen to believe that hitters hit their peak (which I do not) at that age Brantley’s performance makes sense. I think it’s possible for players to get better and that previous performance doesn’t preclude them from getting better and/or making adjustments.

In the first three months of the season he hit 12 home runs with 16.7% HR/FB rate and in the last three months eight home runs with a 9.5% HR/FB rate. From 2011-13 he had a career 5.8% HR/FB rate so even when “he fell off” in the second half of the year he still hit for much more power than ever before. In 2015 the power drops off to a 10% HR/FB rate and in the past three years he’s averaged 145 fly balls so he should 14-15 home runs next year.

Ryan Braun

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Brewers | Position: OF | RK: (101) | Player Rater: ESPN (65), NFBC (61)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	598	41	108	112	30/7	.319	.987	.346	18.9%	9.3%	31.2%	44.4%
2013	MLB	29	225	9	30	38	4/5	.298	.869	.360	22.1%	10.7%	24.7%	54.1%
2014	MLB	30	530	19	68	81	11/5	.266	.777	.304	19.5%	7.1%	18.8%	48.1%
Proj.			470	15	70	70	9	.274						

Last year I was extremely high on **Ryan Braun**. I thought his thumb would be fully healed and he would recapture his previous fantasy glory. However, I forgot to consider the possibility he wouldn’t be 100% at the start of the season. In early April he started [experiencing numbness in his thumb](#), which affected the way he gripped the bat and how he threw the baseball.

For the first half of the season he was doing quite well hitting .298/.348/.515 with 11 home runs and eight stolen bases. But in the second half he totally fell off as he hit .226/.295/.374 with eight home runs and three stolen bases. In late September it was revealed the thumb issue was now [affecting his entire hand](#). Therefore, it’s probably very likely this injury was a big reason why he struggled in the second half of the season.

In early October Braun had a [cryotherapy procedure](#) to help his ailing right thumb and shortly after felt good swinging a bat. To quote the article, "There isn't much of a track record of this sort of thing with baseball players, but this procedure isn't as risky or invasive as removing the nerve altogether. So they'll try this route first."

In order to get a better idea of how he'll perform you will have to wait and see how he feels during Spring Training. As someone who was burned by Bruan last year and was stuck with him all year I'm going to avoid him in 2015. He is the type of player I'll pass on and will not be mad if he breaks out because I want him to prove he's healthy before I invest in him again.

In late November [Braun said](#), ""Right now, I don't feel any [discomfort], and I haven't been able to say that for two years," Braun said. "I think I've told you guys, it [bothered me] shaking hands, writing -- you know, just everyday activities. Now I don't feel it at all, so I'm excited." You can read whatever you want into what that quote.

Domonic Brown

Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Phillies | Position: OF | RK: (162) | Player Rater: ESPN (178), NFBC (191)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	187	5	21	26	0/0	.235	.712	.260	16.0%	9.9%	23.9%	43.9%
2013	MLB	25	496	27	65	83	8/3	.272	.818	.287	18.0%	7.2%	24.6%	42.4%
2014	MLB	26	473	10	47	63	7/1	.235	.634	.269	17.8%	6.6%	18.7%	50.3%
Proj.			480	14	52	66	7	.259						

In last years guide I wasn't **Domonic Brown's** 2013 power surge, but I would be lying if I thought he'd only hit ten home runs in 2014. With two extreme home run totals which one is his true talent level? If you remove the 2013 season he has a career 9.1% HR/FB rate, which is approximately his true talent level. 9.1% is a little more than one percentage point higher than last years HR/FB rate but that doesn't mean he would have hit more home runs. Last year he hit 125 fly balls. If he had a 9.1% HR/FB rate he only would've hit 12 home runs.

Overall, the batting average should regress because he was extremely unlucky. For example, his batting average on line drives was 30 points lower than the year prior. Even if the batting average improves I don't see him hitting enough power to be relevant in 12-team mixed leagues.

Jay Bruce

Bats: L | Age: 28 | Team: Reds | Position: OF | RK: (29) | Player Rater: ESPN (117), NFBC (107)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	560	34	89	99	9/3	.252	.841	.283	24.5%	9.8%	36.9%	36.4%
2013	MLB	26	626	30	89	109	7/3	.262	.807	.322	26.5%	9.0%	27.1%	37.9%
2014	MLB	27	493	18	71	66	12/3	.217	.654	.269	27.3%	8.1%	20.9%	48.6%
Proj.			570	30	85	93	8	.253						

After hitting 30 home runs with a .252-.262 batting average **Jay Bruce** was seen as a low floor, medium ceiling fantasy player. However, what happened was he had the worst fantasy of his career as he had career lows in home runs and batting average. However, last year was by the far the worst of his career.

In early May Bruce had surgery to repair a torn meniscus. At the time of the surgery he was expected to only miss 3-4 weeks, but he only ended up missing 16 days (13 games). Some have said he was [rushed back too soon](#) and heavily contributed to his poor season.

I believe the injury hampered his performance and the statistical manifestation of that is the ground ball rate. From 2009-13 he had a 36% ground ball rate and last year it was 45%. This tells me he was rolling over on a lot of pitches he used to crush. Also, do not overlook the 12 stolen bases. If the stolen base totals remain and the power positively regresses he could be a top 30-40 fantasy hitter.

Since he's been in the league so long it's hard to believe he is going to play next year at the age of 28. If Bruce is healthy I expect him to bounce back and to be one of the highest ROI players on draft day.

Kris Bryant

Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Cubs | Position: 3B | RK: (144) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AA	22	248	22	61	58	8/2	.355	1.160	.440	25.9%	14.5%	41.3%	32.0%
2014	AAA	22	244	21	57	52	7/2	.295	1.036	.367	28.6%	14.5%	50.0%	34.4%
Proj.			400	20	66	66	5	.242						

Usually when it comes to rookie hitters I am conservative when projecting their statistics. **Kris Bryant** has been fantastic so far in his professional career and based on where I think he'll go in drafts (especially if he begins the year in the majors) his fantasy owners will think those results in the minors will fully translate in the majors. However, other than going from High-A to Double-A, the leap to the majors from Triple-A is the hardest jump in any baseball player's career.

The quality of pitcher in the majors is vastly superior to Triple-A pitchers. Major League pitchers are better equipped to find hitters' weaknesses (and Bryant's case a [hole in his swing](#)) and exploit over and over again. Also, his Triple-A numbers were great, but we're talking about a 70 game sample size and I bet a lot of those at-bats came against pitchers who only faced him once, which means they didn't have

an opportunity to identify and exploit his weaknesses. Bryant is going to have a bright future, his rookie year is going to be a year where he learns the league and makes adjustments.

Billy Butler

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Royals | Position: DH | RK: (87) | Player Rater: ESPN (132), NFBC (144)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	614	29	72	107	2/1	.313	.882	.341	16.3%	8.0%	27.8%	47.9%
2013	MLB	27	582	15	62	82	0/0	.289	.787	.326	15.3%	11.8%	20.9%	53.5%
2014	MLB	28	549	9	57	66	0/0	.271	.702	.310	15.9%	6.8%	20.6%	51.2%
Proj.			570	16	69	90	0	.282						

In a surprise move today the A's gave **Billy Butler** a three-year, \$30 million deal. My initial thoughts when I heard the news was the length of the contract was too long and \$10M a year for a DH who doesn't hit for a lot of power is too much. However, after reading David Schoenfield's [take on the signing](#) I no longer believe the contract is a salary dump.

The fact of the matter is the A's do not have a lot of money and in order for them to be successful they need to take gambles on players like Butler. They cannot afford a Nelson Cruz or even a **Melky Cabrera** (whom I think he would be a great fit in the two spot for that lineup) so why not take a chance on Butler? From 2011-13 he had a .369 OBP and hit 63 home runs (which averages out to 21 a season). Obviously the power numbers are skewed by the 29 home runs in 2012 that was extremely fluky, but he still averaged 15-20 home runs a year for five straight years before 2014.

There are two ways to interrupt his career low 6.9% HR/FB rate. A) he's getting old (he turns 29 in mid-April) and this is the beginning to the end or B) he got unlucky with the HR/FB rate and should positively regress. After looking at the data I believe in the latter.

He had a brutal April that dragged down his overall numbers. He hit .224/.285/.255 with zero home runs and only three extra base hits. After April he hit .282/.332/.406 with nine home runs and an 8.2% HR/FB rate.

Any time a player suddenly sees a sharp decline in power I look at the percentage of extra base hits to get an idea if he's making the same amount of hard contact as before. Usually if the extra base hit percentage is relatively the same as the past I'm more inclined to believe the HR/FB rate should improve. From 2011-13 he had 167 extra base hits, which represents 31.3% of his hits. Starting in May of last year he had 38 extra base hits, which represents 29.9% of his hits. Therefore, the power numbers should positively regress in 2015.

He's slow and hits into a lot of double plays, but for the A's offense that's not a problem. The A's offense is built upon getting on-base and hitting home runs. Butler may not hit more than 20 home runs, but he should be on-base a lot for Josh Reddick and Stephen Vogt.

Butler will probably bat fifth, behind Josh Donaldson and Brandon Moss (against right handed pitching). He'll probably bat cleanup against left handed pitching. Butler is going to have a lot of RBI opportunities. Yoennis Cespedes hit in that area of the lineup for the A's and at the time of trade to the Red Sox Cespedes was eighth in the majors in plate appearances with runners in scoring position. If Butler can stay healthy (and there's no reason to believe he can't because he's never hurt despite the poor body) he could have 100-plus RBIs.

Overall, Billy Butler will be a great buy low going into drafts in 2015. The power and batting average should positively regress and he's going to have a lot of RBI opportunities in that lineup.

Marlon Byrd

Bats: R | Age: 37 | Team: Reds | Position: OF | RK: (128) | Player Rater: ESPN (68), NFBC (62)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	34	143	1	10	9	0/3	.210	.488	.257	20.3%	3.3%	29.6%	50.4%
2013	MLB	35	532	24	75	88	2/4	.291	.847	.353	24.9%	5.4%	28.3%	41.7%
2014	MLB	36	591	25	71	85	3/2	.264	.757	.341	29.0%	5.5%	25.2%	38.1%
Proj.			530	20	70	75	2	.251						

Marlon Byrd had a very interesting 2015 season in that he hit more home runs than the previous season, struck out 29% of the time and had a .264 batting average with a .341 BABIP. From 2008-14 he has a .327 BABIP so last year's BABIP isn't as high as it looks. Also, his extra base hit percentage was almost identical as 2014, which suggests the power is real and should be repeatable. The question for me is what will his batting average be. Like I said earlier he struck out a lot last year, which doesn't provide a lot of upside in regards to the batting average. Last year he swung at pitches outside of the strike zone at the highest rate of his career, which makes sense considering the strikeout rate. Overall, I think he can hit .250 and belt 20 home runs because he's had high BABIPs in his career, the home run should continue and he should make enough contact to have a decent batting average. The biggest risk with drafting Byrd is he could provide your team literally nothing, which could very well happen. However, at his ADP, if he struggles you can drop him and pick up someone else up.

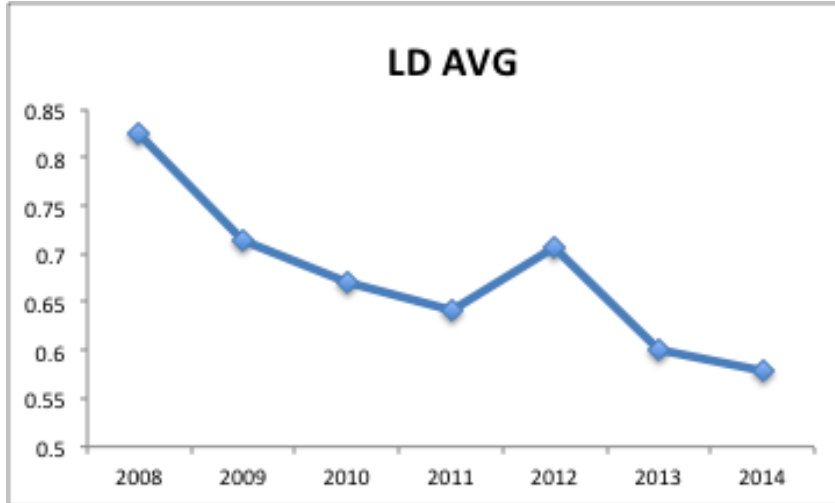
Asdrubal Cabrera

Bats: B | Age: 29 | Team: Rays | Position: SS | RK: (165) | Player Rater: ESPN (111), NFBC (104)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	555	16	70	68	9/4	.270	.762	.303	16.1%	8.4%	29.2%	41.6%
2013	MLB	27	508	14	66	64	9/3	.242	.700	.283	20.3%	6.2%	31.1%	38.3%
2014	MLB	28	553	14	74	61	10/2	.241	.694	.272	17.5%	8.0%	26.5%	41.8%
Proj.			500	14	60	60	9	.250						

In late December **Asdrubal Cabrera** signed a [one-year deal](#) with the Rays and becomes the every day

second baseman. I never believed in the 25 home run season (in 2011) as his true talent level, but I do think he can hit 13-16 next year. Since 2012 he's been incredibly consistent, averaging 15 home runs and 9.5 stolen bases. Even though his batting average has hit in the .240s the past two seasons I think the batting average can positively regress next year because he's been unlucky on line drives (image below).



It's possible the reason why the production on line drives has decreased is due to the fact he's not making as much hard contact. However, his extra base hit percentage has been the same since 2012 which indicates there is room for improvement in 2015.

Melky Cabrera

Bats: B | Age: 30 | Team: White Sox | Position: OF | RK: (45) | Player Rater: ESPN (46), NFBC (50)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	459	11	84	60	13/5	.346	.906	.379	12.6%	7.2%	21.4%	53.0%
2013	MLB	28	344	3	39	30	2/2	.279	.682	.313	12.6%	6.2%	19.9%	48.0%
2014	MLB	29	568	16	81	73	6/2	.301	.808	.316	10.8%	6.9%	19.5%	49.6%
Proj.			560	15	100	66	5	.301						

In last year's fantasy guide I was huge believer in **Melky Cabrera**. In 2013 I wrote that his poor season was due to playing the majority of the season with a [tumor on his spine](#) rather than no longer being on PEDs. I thought he would steal more than six bases, but based on where you drafted him you made a tremendous profit.

The question is can he repeat his 2014 season? I was a big fan of him last year and I see no reason why he shouldn't be able to do it again. Since 2011 (in 2,200 PAs) he has a .309/.351/.458 slash line with 48 home runs and 41 stolen bases. He's leaving Toronto's home ballpark, which hurts his value slightly, but you could argue he's going to better lineup (it all depends on how much you believe in **Jose Abreu** and **Adam Eaton** takes the next step). If Cabrera plays in 140 games he could easily have 110 runs scored to go along with a .295-plus batting average, 12-plus home runs and 5-plus stolen bases.

Cabrera is not a good defender. His range is below average and he takes plays off in the field, but he's a really good hitter. He can hit righties and lefties at the same clip. He probably won't steal more than 7-8 bases because his stolen base success rate suggests he's better off not running. The cloud of PED use will probably still make him a draft bargain but it won't be as much as last year.

Miguel Cabrera

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Tigers | Position: 3B | RK: (2) | Player Rater: ESPN (11), NFBC (12)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	622	44	109	139	4/1	.330	.999	.331	14.1%	9.5%	34.3%	42.6%
2013	MLB	30	555	44	103	137	3/0	.348	1.078	.356	14.4%	13.8%	28.1%	39.7%
2014	MLB	31	611	25	101	109	1/1	.313	.895	.346	17.1%	8.8%	26.7%	41.6%
Proj.			585	35	99	110	1	.320						

Miguel Cabrera had a down year (by his standards) in 2014, but he still finished the year as a top ten hitter on ESPN's Player Rater. The biggest decline in his offensive numbers was in the home run department, but that should positively regress. Last year he had a 13.7% HR/FB rate; from 2008-13 his HR/FB rate was 20.8%. Last year's HR/FB rate was seven percentage points less, which indicates there should be a positive regression.

In late October Cabrera [had surgery](#) to remove bone spurs and to repair a stress fracture in the navicular bone in the top of his foot. As of early January we do not know if he'll be ready at the start of the season or not. All I know he'll be evaluated in [mid-February](#).

If healthy, Cabrera will be a consensus top five pick next year, but there are some red flags. My biggest concern is nagging injuries. Last year he missed 13 games due to tissue injuries (groin, abdomen, and hip strains). He only missed two games in 2013, but he dealt with a lingering groin injury in September and in the postseason. Last year he played the most games at DH (25) than ever before and I think next year he'll play even more games at DH, which will help him increase his ability to stay on the field.

Lorenzo Cain

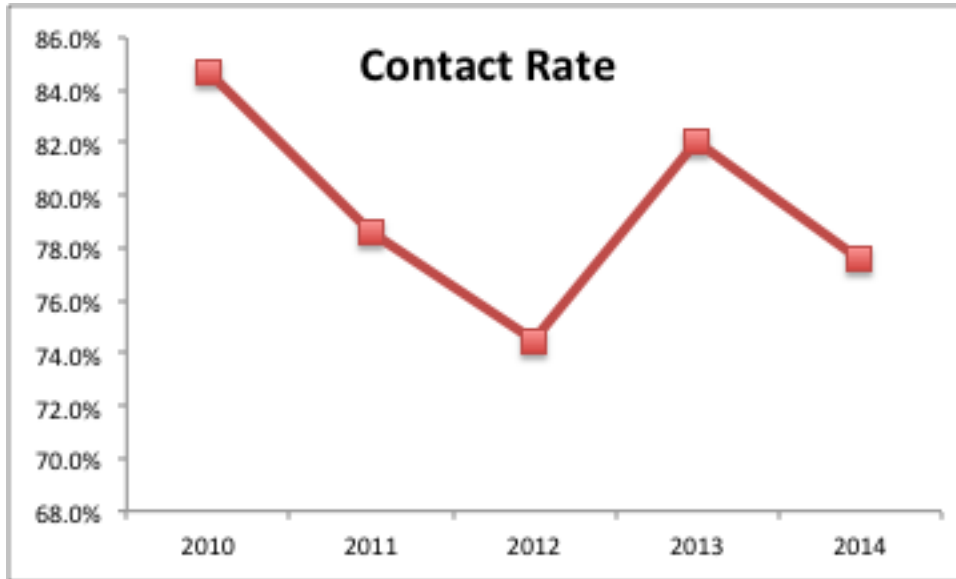
Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Royals | Position: OF | RK: (120) | Player Rater: ESPN (56), NFBC (57)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	222	7	27	31	10/0	.266	.734	.319	23.0%	6.1%	28.2%	47.1%
2013	MLB	27	399	4	54	46	14/6	.251	.658	.309	20.4%	7.5%	21.3%	49.5%
2014	MLB	28	471	5	55	53	28/5	.301	.751	.380	21.5%	4.8%	16.1%	51.9%
Proj.			500	6	65	65	23	.261						

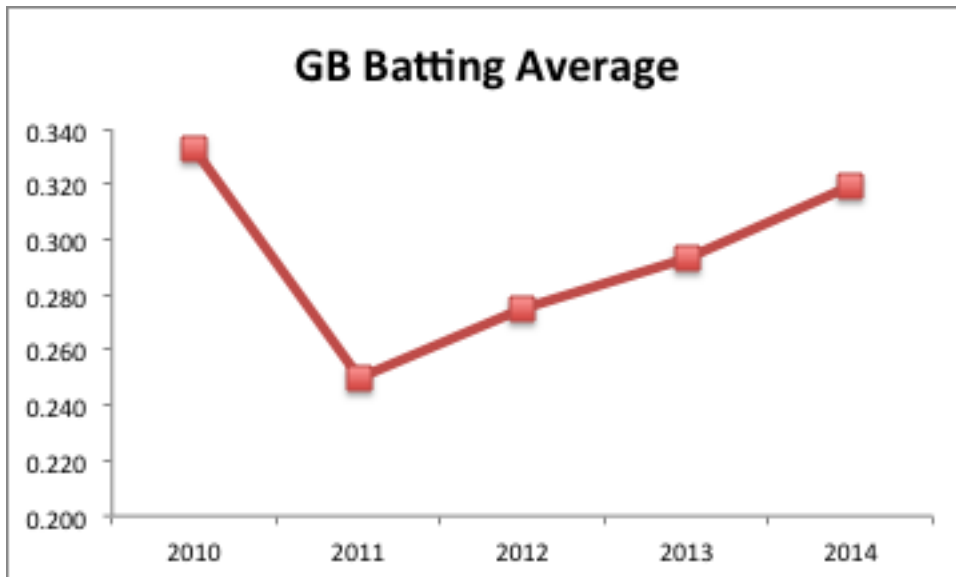
Prior to 2014 **Lorenzo Cain** had a career slash line of .266/.318/.380 with a .325 BABIP. Last year he hit .301/.339/.412 with a .380 BABIP. Usually when a player has a significant uptick in batting average and BABIP I want to see if the player made any changes and/or adjustments that led to this change. Most of

his fantasy is derived from the batting average because his stolen bases increased dramatically because his OBP increased so much.

First, his contact rate actually decreased substantially compared to last year (image below; per FanGraphs).



Second, the ground ball rate has increased year-over-year since for the past three years, which implies the spike in BABIP came on ground balls. The image below shows that yes, he saw a dramatically increase on the batting average on ground balls.



Based on the factors I brought up I think the batting average was a fluke and it's going to regress in 2015. However, I do not believe the steals are going to regress that much. Even though he added 50 points of batting average (compared to last year) his OBP only increased 30 points. So, even though his

OBP increased by 10% his stolen bases increased 100%. Therefore, even when the batting average decreases he should be able to steal 20-plus bases.

He's going to bat third so he should have plenty of RBI opportunities (at least to begin the year), but when the batting average drops he's not going to stay in that spot of the lineup. Also, I don't see an uptick in power coming, for his career 6.3% HR/FB rate at home compared to 4.9% on the road.

Kole Calhoun

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Angels | Position: OF | RK: (96) | Player Rater: ESPN (79), NFBC (75)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	23	0	2	1	1/0	.174	.457	.235	24.0%	8.0%	35.3%	41.2%
2013	MLB	25	195	8	29	32	2/2	.282	.808	.311	18.5%	9.5%	25.2%	42.8%
2014	MLB	26	493	17	90	58	5/3	.272	.776	.313	19.4%	7.1%	17.3%	44.8%
Proj.			525	14	94	60	4	.272						

To recap his 2014 season **Kole Calhoun** missed 31 games with an [ankle sprain](#) while running to first base, which was a little fluky. He scored 90 runs, which is incredibly high considering he missed so much time. If he played in 155 games he would have had 109-110 runs, which would have ranked fourth overall in the majors.

I wasn't buying Calhoun last year and I'm still not entirely sold. I've seen him play and the only thing he has going for him is he gets to hit in front of **Mike Trout**. He doesn't make a lot of hard contact; he doesn't get on-base at a high enough clip to be a leadoff hitter; he doesn't steal enough bases; he struggles against lefties (he was benched off and on against lefties last year).

All that said, if he's going to bat leadoff he's going to have value, but in order to get a profit on draft day he's going to have to hit 15-18 home runs and I don't think he can do that because he may not play against lefties and he doesn't make hard contact.

Robinson Cano

Bats: L | Age: 32 | Team: Mariners | Position: 2B | RK: (26) | Player Rater: ESPN (22), NFBC (34)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	627	33	105	94	3/2	.313	.929	.326	13.8%	8.8%	22.3%	49.5%
2013	MLB	30	605	27	81	107	7/1	.314	.899	.327	12.5%	9.5%	23.6%	46.5%
2014	MLB	31	595	14	77	82	10/3	.314	.836	.335	10.2%	9.2%	15.3%	53.6%
Proj.			600	17	85	84	5	.303						

If you're reading this you already know **Robinson Cano** is one of the best hitters in the game and is one of the safest fantasy players because he hits for a high average and never gets hurt.

The big concern for fantasy owners prior to the 2014 season was how much the Mariners ballpark saps his power? When the season ended he only 14 home runs, the lowest of his career since 2008. Some believe the power will come back, but not me.

First, he had the highest ground ball rate (52.6%) of his career. If the ground ball rate continues to be that high it's going to take a higher HR/FB rate to hit for a lot of power, which is unlikely to happen especially in that ballpark. For example, last year he only hit 126 fly balls. Even if he had the same HR/FB rate as 2013 (17.3%) he only would have had 21-22 home runs.

Even though he didn't hit for much power the Mariners home ballpark wasn't the reason. At home he had a 14.5% HR/FB rate while it was 7.5% on the road. I think the away HR/FB rate positively increases, but it's not a guarantee he'll repeat the home HR/FB rate at home. The reason I say that is because he's been making less and less hard contact (table below).

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2005	155	52	33.5%
2006	165	57	34.5%
2007	189	67	35.4%
2008	162	52	32.1%
2009	204	75	36.8%
2010	200	73	36.5%
2011	188	81	43.1%
2012	196	82	41.8%
2013	190	68	35.8%
2014	187	53	28.3%

The extra base hit percentage has decreased year-over-year for the past three seasons and last year was an all-time low. The contact and swing rates suggest he should be able to maintain the .300-plus batting average but I'm expecting a lot of singles.

Narratives about what the data says can be built in any direction and there is no right or wrong answer. I'll conclude with this. I watched him a lot last year and rolled over on a lot of pitches on the inner half of the plate. That could be nothing and/or subject to a small sample size, but when I see an older player rolling over in that pitch location it indicates he's losing a tick of bat speed and if that's the case it's going to be harder to catch up to plus fastballs. He'll likely be a top 10-20 pick, which means positive regression in the home run department is baked into that ADP. I don't believe the power comes back and if you draft him at that ADP he's extremely safe; he'll easily be a top 40 player but not a top 10-20 player.

Matt Carpenter

Bats: L | Age: 29 | Team: Cardinals | Position: 3B | RK: (83) | Player Rater: ESPN (87), NFBC (86)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	296	6	44	46	1/1	.294	.828	.346	18.5%	10.0%	35.8%	39.6%
2013	MLB	27	626	11	126	78	3/3	.318	.873	.359	13.7%	10.0%	25.3%	40.3%
2014	MLB	28	595	8	99	59	5/3	.272	.750	.318	15.7%	13.4%	23.4%	42.6%
Proj.			600	10	105	61	3	.284						

Last year [I wrote](#) **Matt Carpenter** was going to regress and fantasy owners shouldn't pay for his 2013 numbers and that's exactly what happened. The question is 2014 more indicative of his true talent level and is there room for improvement in 2015?

The table below shows his batting average and BABIP for each hit type.

Splits	FB		GB		LD	
	AVG	BABIP	AVG	BABIP	AVG	BABIP
2013	.257	.194	.289	.289	.654	.647
2014	.194	.130	.279	.279	.642	.632

His low BABIP last year was almost entirely due to fly balls. Last year his fly ball distance 276 feet and in 2013 it was 282, which suggests his hard contact rate was the same. However, the extra base hit percentage decreased dramatically last year (table below). The low percentage could be due some bad luck on fly balls, but doubles and triples come from line drives and not fly balls.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2012	87	33	37.9%
2013	199	73	36.7%
2014	162	43	26.5%

A .194 batting average is awfully low. That batting average ranks in bottom 10% of hitters. Therefore, I expect the batting to positively regress. However, I have questions whether he's going to make a lot of hard contact. With the acquisition of **Jason Heyward** there are grumblings Carpenter may hit third in the order, which would be a mistake especially if the extra base hit percentage doesn't improve.

Chris Carter**Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Astros | Position: DH | RK: (82) | Player Rater: ESPN (70), NFBC (55)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	218	16	38	39	0/0	.239	.864	.295	31.9%	15.0%	37.0%	34.8%
2013	MLB	26	506	29	64	82	2/0	.223	.770	.311	36.2%	12.0%	31.8%	31.4%
2014	MLB	27	507	37	68	88	5/2	.227	.799	.267	31.8%	9.8%	31.6%	28.6%
Proj.			520	35	67	85	3	.235						

Chris Carter's season was a tale of two halves. He was extremely brutal in the first half and in the second half he was one of ten most valuable players in fantasy. The table shows his 2013 and his 2014 season broken down by three month increments.

Splits	AVG	K%	BB%	BABIP	Swng%	Miss%	Chas%	HR/FB
2013	.223	36.2%	12.0%	.311	45.0%	37.5%	25.6%	20.3%
April-June	.184	33.2%	8.8%	.222	49.2%	38.2%	30.8%	16.0%
July-October	.264	30.6%	10.6%	.306	47.2%	35.6%	26.3%	26.7%

Kevin Goldstein always used to say on the [Up and In Podcast](#) that it takes longer for right handed power to develop and this could be true with Carter.

Narratives can be assigned based on how you look at the data and neither one is wrong. You could say the second half of 2014 was fluky and the batting average and power should regress. Another narrative is the light finally turned on for Carter and he could be a .250ish hitter and hit 35-45 home runs. I'm more inclined to believe the second half statistics more because they look similar to his 2013 numbers. The strikeout rate dropped a little more than four percentage points while the contact rates were the same, implying he's making more contact on pitches he can do more damage on. If you draft Carter you have to keep in your lineup because he is going to have cold and hot streaks throughout the year.

Nick Castellanos**Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Tigers | Position: 3B, OF | RK: (179) | Player Rater: ESPN (146), NFBC (158)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	AA	20	322	7	35	25	5/4	.264	.678	.322	22.3%	4.1%	30.5%	43.4%
2013	AAA	21	533	18	81	76	4/1	.276	.793	.307	16.8%	9.1%	37.2%	38.4%
2014	MLB	22	533	11	50	66	2/2	.259	.700	.326	24.2%	6.2%	32.0%	37.3%
Proj.			550	15	53	67	2	.255						

Nick Castellanos had a strange final 2014 stat line as he hit .259 with a .326 BABIP. Usually when I see BABIPs that high I would expect a batting average in at least the .275s so something strange must have happened. The table below shows his batting average and BABIP split out by hit type (ground ball, fly ball and line drive) compared to an average hitter; average is defined by the cumulative average of all qualified hitters from 2008-14.

Splits	FB		GB		LD	
	AVG	BABIP	AVG	BABIP	AVG	BABIP
Castellanos	.261	.186	.187	.187	.757	.750
AVG	.297	.167	.241	.241	.678	.671

My takeaway from the table was he got unlucky with fly balls and extremely lucky on line drives. It's reductive to say when both numbers regress they'll cancel each other out and he'll repeat his batting average next year. With a batted profile like this I'm inclined to believe the performance on line drives should regress, but I'm not confident the fly ball performance will positively regress. He plays in pitcher friendly ballpark and doesn't make a lot of hard contact (as evidenced by the cumulative .135 ISO ... this number was not included in the table).

What I like about him in 2015 is there's a possibility he'll bat in sixth spot of the lineup, which means there could be a lot of RBI opportunities. There's a possibility he'll take a step forward with the offense because some scouts see him as .285-plus hitter with 25-plus home runs potential, but I don't see that happening.

Rusney Castillo

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Red Sox | Position: OF | RK: (61) | Player Rater: ESPN (336), NFBC (429)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	MLB	26	36	2	6	6	3/0	.333	.928	.357	15.0%	7.5%	20.0%	66.7%
Proj.			500	17	70	70	30	.245						

The only thing I can safely say about **Rusney Castillo** is if he's healthy and he's going to play every day for the Red Sox in 2015. According to several scouting reports ([here](#) and [here](#)) his biggest fantasy tool will be his speed. With 70 grade speed (on the 20-80 scouting scale) you would think he could steal at least 20 and upward of 40. Also, he's no slouch on the power either. Even though a 45-50 is below average it still means he could hit 15-20 home runs. So in essence he could be a 20/20 player with a .240-.250 batting average. Ideally I would wait until Spring Training to get a better idea of his true talent level, but as of early December if I'm in a 10-12 team mixed league (in a re-draft league) I would gladly take him ahead of **Jorge Soler**, **Wil Myers**, **Charlie Blackmon** and **Carlos Beltran** because his upside is much higher.

Wellington Castillo

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Cubs | Position: C | RK: (214) | Player Rater: ESPN (250), NFBC (226)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	170	5	16	22	0/0	.265	.754	.348	26.8%	8.9%	25.0%	46.7%
2013	MLB	26	380	8	41	32	2/0	.274	.746	.347	22.7%	7.9%	22.0%	44.4%
2014	MLB	27	380	13	28	46	0/0	.237	.686	.288	24.5%	6.2%	25.2%	40.4%
Proj.			250	6	35	35	0	.257						

Prior to the 2014 season **Wellington Castillo** had a career .346 BABIP in 583 ABs. In 2014 he had a .291 BABIP in 377 ABs. In the aggregate he has a career .324 BABIP, which I believe is his true talent level. Therefore, his BABIP was more than 30 points less than true talent level, which means his batting average should regress in 2015. Also, he only had a .607 batting average on line drives in 2014, which was 181 points less than his career batting average on line drives (.788).

In 2014 his power positively regressed as his HR/FB rate increased three percentage points and he belted 13 home runs. Castillo will likely go undrafted in even two catcher leagues, but I believe the batting average positively regresses and the 12-16 home run power is legitimate.

Jason Castro

Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Astros | Position: C | RK: (210) | Player Rater: ESPN (229), NFBC (256)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	257	6	29	29	0/0	.257	.735	.309	20.7%	10.5%	27.2%	45.0%
2013	MLB	26	435	18	63	56	2/1	.276	.835	.351	26.5%	10.2%	27.8%	39.8%
2014	MLB	27	465	14	43	56	1/0	.222	.651	.294	29.5%	6.6%	26.7%	44.7%
Proj.			400	13	47	47	0	.226						

After a breakout year in 2013 **Jason Castro** regressed significantly. In last year's fantasy guide I warned you about severe regression occurring. The reason why I said he would regress is because he had an extraordinarily high BABIP (.351), a high strikeout rate 26.5% and is a slow player (which means his BABIP was more luck based).

What happened in 2014 was the BABIP regressed to a normal level, the strikeout rate increased three percentage points from last year (29.5%) and the walk rate decreased by 3.5 percentage points.

Overall, the numbers he showed in 2014 is more along the lines of this true talent level. I don't like his approach at the plate; far too often is he looking fastball and his two-strike approach got even worse in 2014. That said, he's going to bat in the middle of the order and he's going to be the primary catcher, which has value in a two-catcher league.

Starlin Castro

Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Cubs | Position: SS | RK: (69) | Player Rater: ESPN (82), NFBC (83)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	646	14	78	78	25/13	.283	.753	.315	14.5%	5.2%	26.5%	46.8%
2013	MLB	23	666	10	59	44	9/6	.245	.631	.290	18.3%	4.3%	21.9%	51.8%
2014	MLB	24	528	14	58	65	4/4	.292	.777	.337	17.6%	6.2%	19.5%	46.0%
Proj.			650	16	70	79	5	.291						

After his worst fantasy, **Starlin Castro** had a nice rebound season 2014. In five Major League seasons he's had the following batting averages: .300, .30, .283, .245 and .292; of those five it's easy to see which number does not belong.

He's always been healthy, playing in 158-plus games from 2011-13. He missed 23 games last year because of an ankle sprain; it happened when he was [sliding at home plate](#). That's a fluky injury I'm banking on him playing at least 155 games next year. If he didn't get hurt he easily would have had the most home runs in his career (in the 16-18 range). He's only 24 years old (he turns 25 in late March) so it's possible we continue to see an uptick in the power. Below are his average fly ball and home run distances for his career:

Year	FB Dist.	HR Dist.
2010	280	389
2011	283	402
2012	300	400
2013	294	392
2014	306	398

The table below shows his extra base hit percentage for his career:

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2010	139	39	28.1%
2011	207	55	26.6%
2012	183	55	30.1%
2013	163	46	28.2%
2014	154	48	31.2%

To recap, he's not hitting the ball much farther and he's not hitting a lot more extra base hits. It's very possible he arrives at Spring Training looking much bigger (i.e. good weight) and starts to make harder contact, but if a power surge is coming, I don't see it in the data.

For two years he's stolen less than ten bases; and in those two seasons the stolen base success rate has dropped too, which leads me to believe I cannot expect more than ten. Overall, Castro is what he is – he's a .290-plus hitter with 14-18 home runs and a couple of stolen bases.

Yoenis Cespedes**Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Tigers | Position: OF | RK: (60) | Player Rater: ESPN (44), NFBC (39)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	487	23	70	82	16/4	.292	.861	.326	18.9%	8.0%	27.8%	40.5%
2013	MLB	27	529	26	74	80	7/7	.240	.737	.274	23.9%	6.4%	27.3%	37.7%
2014	MLB	28	600	22	89	100	7/2	.260	.751	.293	19.8%	5.4%	27.1%	34.2%
Proj.			500	22	70	86	7	.271						

With three seasons in the majors there is a sufficient amount of data to draw conclusions about **Yoenis Cespedes'** true talent level. After a really high BABIP year in 2012 and a low BABIP year in 2013 he finally had a confluence of both seasons in 2014. Therefore, you can expect similar numbers next season with the Tigers.

There is an opportunity for an increase in last years batting average. For example, last year he only hit .199 against lefties; prior to that he was a .288 hitter so there should be some positive regression.

In regards to the power it's possible there is room for improvement but I don't know how much Oakland's ballpark inhibited his power because his HR/FB rate was higher at Oakland than on the road (14.3% and 11.7% respectively).

This is the last year on his deal so it's possible there's an uptick in his stolen bases and home runs, but it's hard to see that happening.

Most importantly, throughout his career he's always had minor injuries and the A's would DH him a lot to keep his bat in the lineup. I don't see that happening with the Tigers because the DH will be occupied by either **Miguel Cabrera** or **Victor Martinez**. Therefore, I wouldn't be surprised if misses more games in 2015 than in the past.

Lonnie Chisenhall**Bats: L | Age: 26 | Team: Indians | Position: 3B | RK: (186) | Player Rater: ESPN (101), NFBC (105)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	142	5	16	16	2/1	.268	.741	.300	17.9%	5.3%	23.5%	44.3%
2013	MLB	24	289	11	30	36	1/0	.225	.668	.243	18.2%	5.2%	28.6%	38.5%
2014	MLB	25	478	13	62	59	3/1	.280	.770	.328	18.6%	7.3%	25.4%	40.4%
Proj.			400	12	60	55	2	.260						

Simply put, **Lonnie Chisenhall's** 2014 numbers benefitted greatly from a fluky two months of the season. The table below provides a break down of the first two months compared to the last four months of the season.

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	GB%	FB%
First 2 Months	147	.369	.977	.433	16.3%	3.3%	28.4%
Last 4 Months	386	.247	.692	.287	19.4%	4.8%	37.5%

The first two months of the year he had .433 BABIP, which insanely high even for the elite hitters. If you compare the last four months of the season it looks more in-line with the numbers he put up in the majors before, which leads me to believe the performance the last four months of the season better represent his true talent level.

Chisenhall doesn't hit for much power or steals a lot of bases so his fantasy value is going to be derived through the batting average. Even with an incredibly fluky first two months of the year he only finished with a .280 batting average, which isn't high enough to offset the lack of power and stolen bases.

Anyone who watched a lot of Indians baseball knows all too well that Chisenhall is a bad defender at third base. Therefore, if he gets off to a slow start (or performances to his true talent level) he may be out of a job.

Shin-Soo Choo

Bats: L | Age: 32 | Team: Rangers | Position: OF | RK: (43) | Player Rater: ESPN (191), NFBC (209)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	598	16	88	67	21/7	.283	.815	.353	21.9%	10.6%	24.3%	50.8%
2013	MLB	30	569	21	107	54	20/11	.285	.885	.338	18.7%	15.7%	20.0%	50.8%
2014	MLB	31	455	13	58	40	3/4	.242	.714	.308	24.8%	11.0%	23.2%	51.8%
Proj.			550	20	96	65	10	.284						

Shin-Soo Choo's season ended in late August to remove a bone spur in his elbow. This injury had been bothering him [since Spring Training](#). He also played through an ankle injury he [suffered in April](#).

Last year was his worst fantasy season. How much you want to assign the injuries to his poor performance is up to you, but I have to assume the injuries played a major toll. From 2008-13 he has hit .290 and averaged 17 home runs 17 stolen bases (and those numbers include two seasons where he only played a little more than half a season). I find it hard to believe a player whose that consistent would suddenly fall off so much in one year without injuries playing a major part.

In 2015 he bounces back; he may not steal 20-plus bases because of the ankle and/or age (he turns 33 in July), but I expect the power to come back and for him to score 95-plus runs in that lineup.

Brandon Crawford

Bats: L | Age: 28 | Team: Giants | Position: SS | RK: (204) | Player Rater: ESPN (152), NFBC (152)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	435	4	44	45	1/4	.248	.653	.307	20.0%	6.9%	24.6%	48.7%
2013	MLB	26	499	9	52	43	1/2	.248	.674	.290	17.5%	7.6%	20.1%	49.9%
2014	MLB	27	491	10	54	69	5/3	.246	.713	.307	22.9%	10.5%	27.5%	39.3%
Proj.			480	9	53	55	3	.247						

At this point **Brandon Crawford** is who he is. He'll hit for some pop and have a decent batting average. This may not sound like a sexy profile, but in deeper mixed leagues he is very valuable because you when you draft him you'll know what you'll get.

Carl Crawford

Bats: L | Age: 33 | Team: Dodgers | Position: OF | RK: (141) | Player Rater: ESPN (77), NFBC (81)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	117	3	23	19	5/0	.282	.785	.319	17.6%	2.4%	22.4%	54.1%
2013	MLB	31	435	6	62	31	15/4	.283	.736	.321	14.1%	6.0%	22.6%	48.8%
2014	MLB	32	343	8	56	46	23/6	.300	.767	.335	14.9%	4.3%	18.5%	46.9%
Proj.			400	8	68	45	16	.283						

Carl Crawford's 2014 seasons' numbers are a little misleading as an incredible September heavily inflated those numbers (table below).

Splits	AVG	BABIP	GB%	FB%	HR/FB
April-August	.264	.298	48.3%	25.9%	8.3%
September	.448	.482	40.7%	28.8%	17.6%

When see numbers like that I'm more inclined to believe the larger sample size before the one fluky breakout month. You'll notice the ground ball rate dropped almost eight percentage points, which indicates he may been making harder contact – maybe because he was finally healthy?

At the end of May he went on the DL with a sprained left ankle; he missed 41 games. In the last four seasons he's only averaged 96 games played. Even if he's healthy, which is a big if, he's going to be platooned against left handed pitching. Last year he was platooned with **Scott Van Slyke**; the Dodgers also acquired **Chris Heisey** from the Reds who will also be another platoon candidate. Moving forward Crawford will probably start receiving the **Coco Crisp** treatment in that he'll play 90-110 games but there will be a lot of days off in order to keep him healthy.

Overall, I think the batting average regresses to the .280-.289 range and the home runs stay in the 7-10 range. The big wild card is the stolen bases. To his credit he stole roughly the same number of bases before and after the injury (9 and 14 respectively) so it's reasonable to expect 15 as a floor with room

for 25-30. For me Crawford doesn't provide the upside to warrant taking him in drafts because the likelihood of injury is high I don't see him performing at the level he did with the Tampa Rays.

Coco Crisp

Bats: B | Age: 35 | Team: Athletics | Position: OF | RK: (139) | Player Rater: ESPN (106), NFBC (103)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	32	455	11	68	46	39/4	.259	.742	.280	12.6%	8.9%	28.1%	46.1%
2013	MLB	33	513	22	93	66	21/5	.261	.779	.258	11.1%	10.4%	26.0%	43.0%
2014	MLB	34	463	9	68	47	19/5	.246	.699	.266	12.3%	12.3%	24.3%	41.3%
Proj.			460	8	68	60	19	.255						

After hitting a career high 22 home runs (12.4% HR/FB rate) **Coco Crisp** regressed back to the mean last year only hitting nine home runs (5.7% HR/FB rate). Last year he was dealing with neck pain throughout the year (he never went on the DL) but he missed nearly 30 games with it and other various injuries. At this point in his career you have to expect only 120-130 games played at most. In fact the last time he played more than 140 games was in 2007.

As an A's fan it looked as though he wasn't hitting the ball with as much authority as before. Part of it may be due to the fact he played the entire season at the age of 34. Another part of it could be due to the neck injuries that bothered him the majority of the year. I think it was a combination of both with more weight given to the injury portion. You may be asking yourself, "But he's hurt every year. What makes this season different?" I honestly don't know. Like I said previously he wasn't the ball with as much authority as years past.

Hopefully this year he'll start to sit against left handed pitching because he's frankly below replacement level against them. Since 2011 he has 738 plate appearances against lefties and he has a slash line of .225/.289/.350 with a .244 BABIP. His overall numbers will make him usable in a 12-team mixed league, but since he's going to miss so much time (randomly most of the time) he's going to drive you crazy. His value decreases substantially if you play in leagues where you set your lineup once a week.

Nelson Cruz

Bats: R | Age: 34 | Team: Mariners | Position: OF | RK: (57) | Player Rater: ESPN (13), NFBC (11)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	585	24	86	90	8/4	.260	.779	.301	21.8%	7.5%	33.2%	41.2%
2013	MLB	32	413	27	49	76	5/1	.266	.833	.295	23.9%	7.7%	28.9%	42.9%
2014	MLB	33	613	40	87	108	4/5	.271	.859	.288	20.6%	8.1%	25.5%	42.7%
Proj.			580	23	70	105	2	.265						

When **Nelson Cruz** signed with the Orioles [I wrote](#), "For 2014 I expect him to hit 25-30 home runs with room for a little more if he plays in 150-plus games." Not only did he play in more than 150 games he

only missed three games (because he spent the majority of time as the DH). Overall his numbers were good, but most of his statistics were accumulated in the first three months of the season. The table below compares his first three months of the season compared to the last three.

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	wOBA	HR	HR/FB
First 3 Months	.281	.916	.290	.381	25	24.7%
Last 3 Months	.261	.799	.288	.338	15	16.7%

All the statistics look the same but the only difference was the incredibly high HR/FB rate. Now that he's going to Seattle I don't like his prospects for 2015. Seattle's ballpark saps a hitters' power (especially for right handed batters). For example, **Adrian Beltre** played in Seattle for five seasons (during his prime) and he never hit more than 26 home runs.

Cruz is going to finish the 2015 year at the age of 35 and he has a skill set that will not age well. He's a bad defender; not athletic; slow and his primary skill is power, which history has shown will decrease dramatically with age.

He's going to bat fourth, behind **Robinson Cano** so he's going to have a lot of at-bats with men on-base. Now, I do not believe his Cruz's power will suddenly disappear but his ADP is going to be inflated because of the 40 home runs last year. I would expect 20-25 home runs with 100 RBIs and a .255-plus batting average.

Michael Cuddyer

Bats: R | Age: 36 | Team: Mets | Position: OF | RK: (142) | Player Rater: ESPN (170), NFBC (245)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	358	16	53	58	8/3	.260	.806	.287	19.8%	8.1%	27.1%	49.3%
2013	MLB	34	489	20	74	84	10/3	.331	.919	.382	18.5%	8.5%	21.9%	50.3%
2014	MLB	35	190	10	32	31	3/0	.332	.955	.351	14.6%	6.8%	16.1%	49.7%
Proj.			400	15	59	59	10	.270						

For this write-up I am going to use an excerpt from Joe Sheehan's newsletter on November 11. First of all, I believe in his analysis of **Michael Cuddyer** and second I love reading his writing. I've been a subscriber for almost three year's now and he writes a lot of great content. To subscribe please go here: <http://joesheehan.com/>

"Michael Cuddyer had never hit .285 prior to 2013; he'd never had a .365 OBP, and hadn't had a .350 OBP since 2007; he'd slugged .500 twice. Mind you, this is the part of the game he is good at. He's a wretched corner outfielder who will take huge chunks out of whatever batting value he produces by turning outs into singles and doubles.

Cuddyer will be 36 next year. Thirty-six-year-old baseball players, and I'm going to use sabermetric jargon here, kind of suck. There were 11 of them last year. Just two played in 100 games. Just three produced at least one bWAR. Just one, Marlon Byrd, was worth two bWAR. Collectively, all 36-year-old position players produced 7.5 bWAR. Want to go back a year? In 2013, five 36-year-olds played in 100 games, three were worth at least 1.9 bWAR, the group was worth a bit more than five wins. Go back to 2012, and you hit the jackpot with Torii Hunter (5.7) and David Ortiz (3.2), plus four other players around two wins. Actuarially speaking, Michael Cuddyer is quite likely to be a bad player."

Travis d'Arnaud

Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Mets | Position: C | RK: (201) | Player Rater: ESPN (209), NFBC (187)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AAA	25	55	6	13	16	0/0	.436	1.384	.409	8.5%	5.1%	26.0%	46.0%
2013	MLB	24	99	1	4	5	0/0	.202	.548	.244	18.8%	10.7%	26.6%	48.1%
2014	MLB	25	385	13	48	41	1/0	.242	.718	.259	15.2%	7.6%	25.4%	43.0%
Proj.			400	13	47	53	0	.255						

Travis d'Arnaud had a very interesting 2014 season. Since he was one of the big pieces in the **R.A. Dickey** trade he began the season as the Mets Opening Day catcher. He started off extremely slow. So slow he was [optioned to Triple-A](#). When he was optioned he had an .180/.271/.273 with a .200 BABIP in 128 ABs. He spent two weeks in the minors before he was brought back to the Major Leagues. After the call-up he had a .272/.319/.486 slash line with a .287 BABIP.

A few days before the season ended he had [elbow surgery](#) to have remove bone chips. This doesn't really impact his ability to hit, but it should help him improve his defense.

It's important to note d'Arnaud has had substantial health problems in the past where he missed large chunks of time. In 2010 it was back injuries. In 2011 it he tore ligaments in his thumb. In 2012 it was a knee sprain. In 2013 it was fractured left foot. Maybe his injuries were more of an effect of bad luck than his body being brittle, but you have been forewarned.

Overall, d'Arnaud isn't rosterable in shallow one-catcher leagues, but he is a sneaky value in two-catcher leagues because I wouldn't be surprised if he hits 20 home runs with a .250-plus batting average. He was healthy for the majority of the 2014 season, but it is hard to project for a similar outcome in 2015.

Chris Davis**Bats: L | Age: 29 | Team: Orioles | Position: 1B | RK: (27) | Player Rater: ESPN (150), NFBC (137)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	515	33	75	85	2/3	.270	.827	.335	30.1%	6.6%	33.0%	39.8%
2013	MLB	27	584	53	103	138	4/1	.286	1.004	.336	29.6%	10.7%	35.5%	34.7%
2014	MLB	28	450	26	65	72	2/1	.196	.704	.242	33.0%	11.4%	30.0%	37.5%
Proj.			550	32	90	100	2	.248						

This past November [I wrote](#) about [Chris Davis'](#) fantasy value heading into 2014 (this was my first ever Baseball Professor article). I recommend you check it out, but the essence of the article was his year a little fluky and regression was going to occur. I had no idea he would regress this much because I projected him to be a top 20 player. In late September he [was suspended](#) for 25 games for testing positive for the use of amphetamines. He missed the last 17 games of the season and seven postseason games and one additional regular season game.

I suspect entering the offseason there is going to be a wide range of opinions about Davis' fantasy value heading into 2015. Fantasy owners are either going to write off the 2013 season as a fluke while others will see a buy low opportunity. I fall into the ladder category.

I'm not going to address the issue of his PED use because I am going to hold judgment until more information comes out. In general I don't believe PEDs have a dramatic effect on player performance. So, moving on. The two numbers that stand out are the .196 batting average and the .242 BABIP, both of which are career lows. The .242 BABIP was driven by being unlucky on line drives (table below).

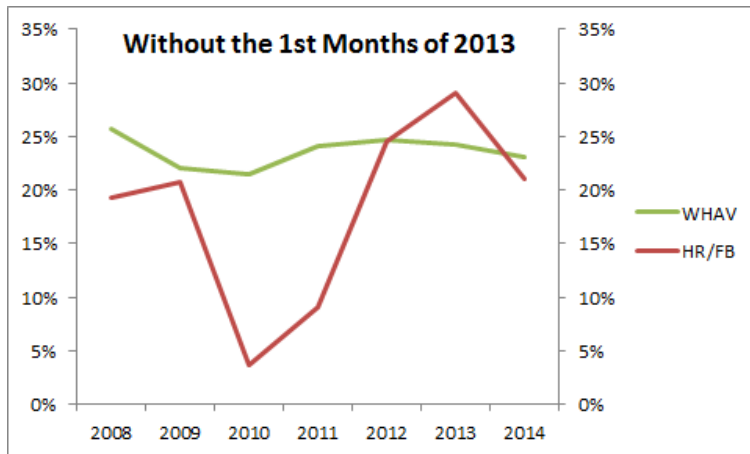
Year	Total PA	AVG	BABIP
2008	317	.774	.774
2009	419	.714	.700
2010	136	.722	.722
2011	210	.853	.853
2012	562	.790	.790
2013	673	.767	.765
2014	525	.609	.591

AVG and BABIP are his performance on line drives only. Per FanGraphs, league averages in 2014 are .692 and .685, respectively.

The career low in batting average on line drives could be in part due to the shift. According to [Mike Podhorzer](#), Davis faced the shift 83% of the time last year. In 2013 he faced the shift only 52% of the time. Usually line drives are hit with harder contact and are usually harder to catch even with defensive shifts. Next year I expect the BABIP on line drives to regress.

The home runs were way down compared to last year, but it was actually close to the numbers he put up in 2012. In my original article I said Davis would regress more to the player he was in 2012, and if you look at his HR/FB rates that's exactly what happened.

Davis had an incredible first two months of the 2013 season, which inflated his overall numbers (read my original article for the exact numbers). The image below shows the same image as above, **but without the first two months of the 2013 season**. What you will see is he was making the same percentage of hard-hit contact as his career, but he got a little luck with the HR/FB rate in 2013.



Every Major League player is capable of playing over his head for a brief period. The personification of that is [Vernon Wells](#) in 2013. From 2011-2012 Wells had a slash line of .222/.258/.409, but for the first six weeks of 2013 he had a slash line of .301/.357/.538. After those first six weeks Vernon Wells regressed to be, well, Vernon Wells with a slash line of .199/.243/.253. I'm not comparing Davis to Wells, but I'm saying Major League players can get hot. Over time they will regress to the player's true talent level. That's what happened after the first two months in 2013 for Davis and I believe he is going to positively regress in 2015.

Davis still plays in one of the best home run ballparks in the majors, will get an opportunity to bat in the middle of an above average lineup (i.e. a lot of runners on-base) and most importantly the batting average should positively regress as his batting average on line drives increases. Overall, Davis is going to be a .250-.260 hitter with 30-plus home runs and 90-plus RBI. That may not sound like a lot, but 30-plus home runs is hard to come by because only 10 players have 30-plus home runs this year.

Ike Davis

Bats: L | Age: 28 | Team: Athletics | Position: 1B | RK: (180) | Player Rater: ESPN (226), NFBC (197)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	519	32	66	90	0/2	.227	.771	.246	24.1%	10.4%	30.4%	39.4%
2013	MLB	26	317	9	37	33	4/0	.205	.661	.268	26.8%	15.1%	24.8%	46.8%
2014	MLB	27	360	11	43	51	0/4	.233	.722	.265	18.3%	14.8%	26.6%	40.2%
Proj.			450	17	55	60	1	.254						

In **Chili Davis** and the A's organization I trust. They were able to turn **Josh Donaldson** and **Brandon Moss**

into all-star caliber hitters when the market (i.e. the other 29 teams) thought they were an afterthought. When the A's picked up **Ike Davis** for basically nothing I liked the acquisition because it's a great buy low. He's two years removed from 32 home runs and is still young (he turns 28 in March). The strikeout rate was the lowest of his career while the walk rate almost 15%. His career slash line against right handed pitching is .254/.357/.456, which is pretty good. For the A's fans who bemoan the loss of Brandon Moss this was his slash line in 2013: .256/.337/.522 ... looks awfully similar to Davis' career production against righties. Now, Moss hit 30 home runs that year and Davis probably won't hit that many home runs, but I can certainly see 20-25. If it appears Davis will get the majority of at-bats against righties he is a great buy low in leagues as shallow as 12-team mixed.

Khris Davis

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Brewers | Position: OF | RK: (111) | Player Rater: ESPN (96), NFBC (91)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	25	243	13	35	37	6/4	.255	.822	.283	21.0%	11.0%	32.3%	33.3%
2013	MLB	25	136	11	27	27	3/0	.279	.949	.293	22.2%	7.2%	26.2%	43.7%
2014	MLB	26	501	22	70	69	4/1	.244	.756	.275	22.2%	5.8%	27.8%	39.7%
Proj.			500	24	68	75	4	.252						

Last year some fantasy analysts said **Khris Davis** had a legitimate shot to hit 30 home runs and I thought that was bonkers. However, I thought he would hit for power; 21 to be exact. Actually, since I'm looking at last year's fantasy guide I projected 21 HRs, .250 AVG, 5 SBs, 61 R/RBI (pretty close to his actual numbers if I say so myself!).

I think there is room for improvement for Davis entering next season. First, I think the batting average improves. During the second half of the season the batting average dropped off dramatically due to a low BABIP (table below).

Splits	AVG	BABIP	GB%	FB%	K%
1st Half	.252	.293	39.1%	40.3%	24.2%
2nd Half	.229	.246	37.6%	39.0%	18.6%

Not only did the BABIP fall through the roof the strikeout rate decreased 5.5 percentage points, which indicates the batting average should have improved. Second, I think there's more power to be had because with the amount of hard contact he makes he should have a HR/FB rate in the 15-17% range. I still do not believe 30 home runs is a realistic outcome, but I think 25 is certainly attainable. Third, he only hit .228 with runners in scoring position. Even if he regresses to .245 he should have 75-plus RBIs.

Rajai Davis

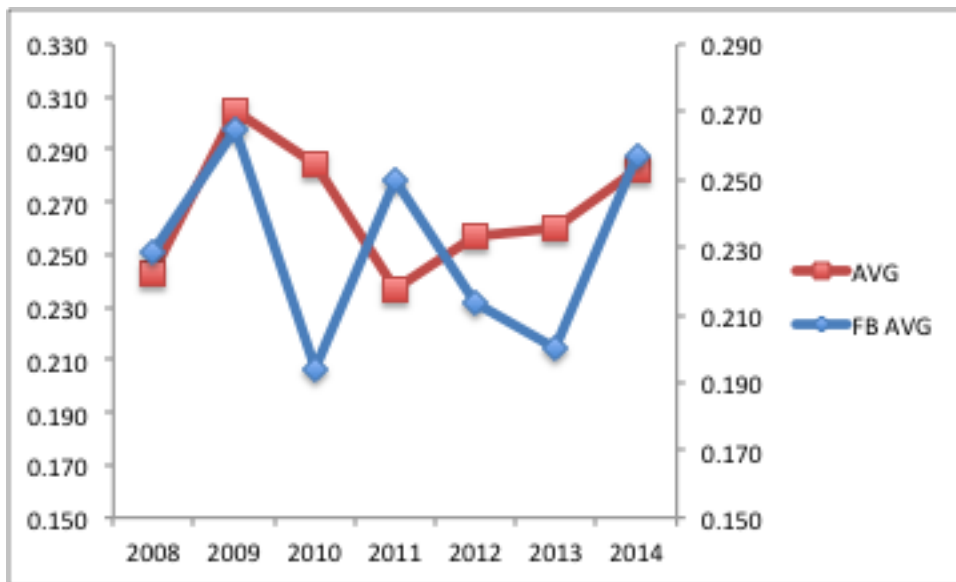
Bats: R | Age: 34 | Team: Tigers | Position: OF | RK: (191) | Player Rater: ESPN (43), NFBC (44)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	447	8	64	43	46/13	.257	.687	.314	20.9%	6.0%	23.4%	47.1%
2013	MLB	32	331	6	49	24	45/6	.260	.687	.308	18.6%	5.8%	23.6%	40.4%
2014	MLB	33	461	8	64	51	36/11	.282	.721	.320	15.2%	4.5%	18.4%	52.0%
Proj.			350	4	30	39	30	.258						

For the past few years **Rajai Davis** would go undrafted (despite his well above average stolen base potential) in a lot of shallow leagues because he was never the Opening Day starter. However, he would always find his way to 350-plus PAs and 35-plus stolen bases. Last year was no different; he didn't have a starting job but found his way to 494 PAs.

This year Davis once again enters the season without a starting job to begin the year. With the injury issues of **Yoennis Cespedes** and the lack of bat in **Anthony Gose's** bat I can see still see Davis getting 350-plus PAs in 2015.

The big question is what will his batting average be? Last year his batting average increased 22 points without a major uptick in BABIP so something strange must have happened. Last year he hit .257 on fly balls. From 2008-13 he is a career .222 hitter on fly balls. Based on history, he tends to have upticks in batting average when his fly ball batting average spikes (image below).



I believe the batting on fly balls regresses, which means the batting average will regress to the .255-.265 range.

Alejandro De Aza**Bats: L | Age: 30 | Team: White Sox | Position: OF | RK: (156) | Player Rater: ESPN (129), NFBC (128)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	524	9	81	50	26/12	.281	.760	.339	18.6%	8.0%	26.9%	43.8%
2013	MLB	29	607	17	84	62	20/8	.264	.728	.318	21.8%	7.4%	24.2%	43.4%
2014	MLB	30	477	8	56	41	17/10	.252	.700	.317	22.5%	7.4%	19.8%	45.9%
Proj.			460	10	60	49	16	.263						

In 2013 **Alejandro De Aza** was almost a 20/20 player, missing that plateau by three home runs. Despite the very good 2013 season there were some negative trends after the 2014 season concluded. For the past two seasons the strikeout rate has increased year-over-year while the batting average has decreased. His numbers ticked up after being traded to the Orioles in September (.293/.341/.537), but it's still a small sample size and the fact it was September means he could've been facing a wider range of pitching talent.

Overall, he'll provide a batting average that neither good nor bad. The home run power could tick up to the 10-13 range, but I don't see him getting close to 17 again because I believe that's going to be his outlier season.

He's going to be platooned against lefties so his fantasy value is going to hinge upon where he'll hit in the lineup. If he hits atop the lineup he could be a fifth outfielder in a 12-team mixed league.

Ian Desmond**Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Nationals | Position: SS | RK: (40) | Player Rater: ESPN (23), NFBC (19)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	513	25	72	73	21/6	.292	.845	.332	20.7%	5.5%	25.9%	47.4%
2013	MLB	27	600	20	77	80	21/6	.280	.784	.336	22.1%	6.6%	21.2%	44.8%
2014	MLB	28	593	24	73	91	24/5	.255	.743	.326	28.2%	7.1%	18.2%	50.1%
Proj.			590	20	74	85	21	.265						

It's difficult to criticize a player who has been a 20/20 player for three straight years, but here goes.

Despite having relatively the same BABIP as the previous two seasons **Ian Desmond's** batting average was 30-40 points lower in 2014 compared to the previous two seasons. The reason why the batting average was much lower was due the strikeout rate increasing nearly six percentage points and the contact rates on pitches outside the strike out zone decreasing ten percentage points from 2013.

From watching him hit was extremely susceptible to curveballs and sliders on the outer half of the plate from righties. The increase in strikeout rate came almost entirely against righties so Desmond is going to have to make an adjustment if the batting average goes back to the .280 range.

In regards to the power and speed I see another 20/20 season occurring. The stolen base success rate improved and in two of the past three seasons the HR/FB rate has been 18.2%, which indicates this could be his true talent level. Last season the ground ball rate was above 50% for the first time since 2011, which is concerning. This could be a minor blip, but if this trend continues and the HR/FB decreases even two percentage points he only hit 17 home runs.

Corey Dickerson

Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Rockies | Position: OF | RK: (32) | Player Rater: ESPN (30), NFBC (52)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	24	315	11	61	50	6/10	.371	1.046	.409	14.2%	7.5%	34.8%	37.8%
2013	MLB	24	194	5	32	17	2/2	.263	.775	.307	19.2%	7.5%	16.7%	41.7%
2014	MLB	25	436	24	74	76	8/7	.312	.931	.356	21.1%	7.7%	22.4%	37.5%
Proj.			550	19	86	85	10	.284						

For me, **Corey Dickerson** is the benefactor of the Coors Effect in that his numbers are really good, but they're mostly a product of the home ballpark than his true talent level. The table below shows his career home-road statistics.

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	HR
Home	359	.346	1.072	.377	16.7%	19
Away	332	.245	.681	.298	24.7%	10

That said, if he plays half of his games in Coors he's still a really valuable fantasy player, but he still has his faults. He still hasn't been able to figure out lefties as he has a Major League career .236/.297/.386 slash line (and that's with the benefit of playing in Coors!) in 138 PAs. Second, he only has pull-side power. Of the ten home runs he hit on the road for his career, nine were hit to right field and the other to center field. Third, he still struggles to hit pitches on the outer half of the plate even against righties.

In 2014 he had a .387 BABIP at home (and hit .363), which was 26 points higher than the Rockies as a team hit as a whole so his BABIP should regress at home. If he plays in 140-plus games he should have 15-20 home runs, 5-10 stolen bases and a .280-plus batting average, but I think the hype surrounding will be immense and fantasy owners will likely pay for what he did last year, which means he'll be over drafted.

Matt Dominguez

Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Astros | Position: 3B | RK: (164) | Player Rater: ESPN (239), NFBC (244)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	109	5	14	16	0/0	.284	.787	.299	15.0%	3.5%	19.6%	54.3%
2013	MLB	23	543	21	56	77	0/1	.241	.690	.254	16.3%	5.1%	28.1%	44.3%
2014	MLB	24	564	16	51	57	0/1	.215	.586	.244	20.6%	4.8%	24.1%	44.6%
Proj.			550	22	55	75	0	.241						

Last year I thought **Matt Dominguez** would be able to build upon his 2013 season by hitting for a little more power. Instead he regressed in almost every offensive category; the batting average, home runs, RBIs and contact rates all decreased while the strike out rate and swing and miss strike rate increased.

The reason for the uptick in strikeout rate and lower batting average came against right handed pitching (table below).

Year	AVG	OPS	BABIP	wOBA	HR/FB	K%
2013	.244	.714	.252	.306	12.8%	16.0%
2014	.204	.551	.236	.243	8.3%	21.1%

Something must have happened to cause his offensive numbers to drop precipitously and it looks like he had trouble hitting fastballs (table below).

Year	AVG	OPS	BABIP	wOBA	HR/FB	K%
2013	.245	.781	.238	.333	15.7%	15.2%
2014	.184	.519	.212	.233	8.1%	21.4%

It's important to remember we're dealing with small sample sizes for both sets of data I've presented. I honestly do not know how to interrupt the data. I would think Major League hitters should be able to hit fastballs and therefore, a positive regression should occur. However, from watching him hit his approach at the plate stunk last year. There were many teams when he would chase fastballs outside of the strike zone. Maybe he was pressing, which caused him to change his approach. Either way, he's going to be starting third baseman for the Astros to begin the year so he will get an opportunity to make further adjustments. I'm still believer in his bat and I think he'll have a year similar to his 2013 campaign.

Josh Donaldson

Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Athletics | Position: 3B | RK: (12) | Player Rater: ESPN (34), NFBC (26)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	274	9	34	33	4/1	.241	.687	.278	20.7%	4.8%	28.5%	41.1%
2013	MLB	27	579	24	89	93	5/2	.301	.883	.333	16.5%	11.4%	22.9%	44.3%
2014	MLB	28	608	29	93	98	8/0	.255	.798	.278	18.7%	10.9%	25.7%	45.4%
Proj.			585	30	95	102	5	.280						

Other than the batting average, what's not to love about **Josh Donaldson's** 2014 season? He hit for power, stole bases, drove in and scored runs. His batting average was extremely low, but that was the result of an extremely brutal June. The table below shows his statistics for June and the rest of the year combined.

Splits	AB	H	HR	AVG
Other	503	136	26	.270
June	105	19	3	.181

Obviously, I'm making arbitrary end points with the data, but I think the "rest" category reflects his true talent level. You may want look at his .241 BA in 2012, but don't. He was up and down (between the majors and minors) that year. He didn't take off until he was called back up on Aug. 15 and [made an adjustment to his swing mechanics](#) that prompted him to hit .290 with a .844 OPS for the rest of the season.

His 2014 jump in strikeout rate (16.5% to 18.7%) stands out as a red flag for his batting average going forward and so does his low .278 BABIP. While the BABIP should bounce back — it was .200 in June and .295 the rest of the year — if his strikeout rate continues to be near the 19% mark I don't see him hitting more than .275.

He'll likely see a boost in his power numbers because he'll no longer have to hit in the cavernous O.co Ballpark. He has a career 12.1% HR/FB rate at home compared to 16.4% on the road. Last year he hit 190 fly balls. Suppose half of those occurred at home. He hit 11 HR at home last year if he had the same HR/FB as the road he would've hit 4-5 more.

Before this trade he would likely have been drafted as the third or fourth third baseman. Now he's going to be drafted as the first third baseman because he's in the prime of his career, plays in a great lineup and the home ballpark should add 4-8 more home runs.

Brian Dozier

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Twins | Position: 2B | RK: (30) | Player Rater: ESPN (36), NFBC (25)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	316	6	33	33	9/2	.234	.603	.267	17.1%	4.7%	30.2%	43.4%
2013	MLB	26	558	18	72	66	14/7	.244	.726	.278	19.3%	8.2%	29.4%	39.8%
2014	MLB	27	598	23	112	71	21/7	.242	.762	.269	18.2%	12.6%	27.7%	38.3%
Proj.			570	22	109	70	20	.243						

In last year's guide I said **Brian Dozier** was a sneaky player who could hit 20/20 and during the first half of the season it looked as though he was serious contender to be a 30/30 player. However, after a great first half he cooled off quite a bit, hitting only five home runs and stealing five bases. Either way, at the end of the year he was one of the biggest draft day profits. The question is will this positive trend continue? Or which half is Dozier's true talent level?

First, his approach at the plate improved dramatically as his walk rate has increased year-over-year and improved nearly five percentage points from 2013. Second, he became very pull happy in 2014. The table below provides a break down of his hit location by year.

Year	HLLt%	HLct%	HLRt%
2012	40.0%	46.4%	13.2%
2013	41.1%	45.8%	13.0%
2014	53.4%	32.4%	13.8%

Usually the problem with a pull happy approach is a player is more vulnerable to pitches on the outer half of the plate. The table below shows his performance on pitches on the outer half of the plate.

Year	AVG	K%	BB%
2012	.240	24.5%	7.0%
2013	.229	20.6%	11.3%
2014	.207	20.4%	14.2%

This data suggests pitchers are going to (or at least they should) try to exploit him on the outer half going forward in 2015 so it's going to be up to him to make the appropriate adjustments. It's possible if he doesn't make the necessary adjustments he could be a batting average risk, but since his walk rate increased so much last year leads me to believe his batting average floor is .230.

Lastly, he was able to score 112 runs while **Joe Mauer** hit like crap. If you believe Mauer rebounds then Dozier could score 120-plus runs.

Lucas Duda**Bats: L | Age: 29 | Team: Mets | Position: 1B | RK: (59) | Player Rater: ESPN (58), NFBC (47)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	401	15	43	57	1/0	.239	.718	.301	26.1%	11.1%	34.5%	36.6%
2013	MLB	27	318	15	42	33	0/3	.223	.767	.276	26.6%	14.3%	39.9%	32.6%
2014	MLB	28	514	30	74	92	3/2	.253	.830	.283	22.7%	11.6%	32.9%	31.9%
Proj.			520	28	77	95	1	.250						

Lucas Duda had his **Alex Gordon** and **Edwin Encarnacion** season last year. By that I mean he finally had an offensive breakout after he changed defensive positions and got an opportunity to focus on hitting. Duda, who was always a first baseman, was forced to play the outfield to make room in the field for **Ike Davis**. In 2014 the Mets finally traded Davis (to the Pirates and who now plays for the A's) and made Duda their every day first baseman.

Duda, in 469 PAs, has a career slash line of .212/.291/.317 against lefties so it's possible he'll be platooned against lefties next year. I argue that would be a positive for his fantasy value because that would about ten points of batting average. If you look at the 2011 season its tempting to think the .292 batting average can happen again, but that's overly optimistic. Duda is a pull hitter (only 13% of his batted balls are hit to left field) and he'll continue to lose hits due to the shift.

There were only 11 players with 30-plus home runs and Duda was one of them. The question is will be able to do it again? For his career he has a 13.5% HR/FB rate and last years HR/FB rate was two and half percentage points higher. Most of the increase in HR/FB rate came on the road, which makes sense because his home ballpark suppresses his power. The fact the Mets are [bringing in the walls](#) in right and right-center field certainly helps (68% of his home runs have been hit to right field).

Overall, Duda got a little lucky with the HR/FB rate, but the moving in of the fences counteracts that, which means I think he can repeat the 30 home runs performance (with room for a little more).

Jarrod Dyson**Bats: R | Age: 30 | Team: Royals | Position: OF | RK: (185) | Player Rater: ESPN (112), NFBC (110)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	292	0	52	9	30/5	.260	.650	.318	17.0%	9.1%	21.4%	58.4%
2013	MLB	28	213	2	30	17	34/6	.258	.692	.317	18.8%	8.8%	16.9%	63.4%
2014	MLB	29	260	1	33	24	36/7	.269	.651	.330	17.9%	7.6%	13.9%	65.3%
Proj.			270	1	35	35	35	.263						

The signing of **Alex Rios** means **Jarrod Dyson** will be the fourth fielder for the Royals, which means he'll once again have limited playing time. Despite limited playing the past three years he's had 30-plus stolen bases each year (100 bases total). Those stolen bases are not a fluke. If you take **Billy Hamilton** and **Dee Gordon** out of the majors he's the fastest player in the league.

Overall, he falls into the **Rajai Davis** category where his ADP will be really low because he doesn't have a starting job at the beginning of the year but he will be a must add when there's an injury in the Royals outfield because he can steal 10-plus bases the 2-3 weeks he gets everyday at-bats.

Adam Eaton

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: White Sox | Position: OF | RK: (81) | Player Rater: ESPN (94), NFBC (93)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	85	2	19	5	2/3	.259	.794	.294	14.6%	13.6%	21.1%	66.2%
2013	MLB	24	250	3	40	22	5/2	.252	.674	.294	15.9%	6.1%	11.9%	59.5%
2014	MLB	25	486	1	76	35	15/9	.300	.763	.359	15.4%	8.0%	15.5%	61.9%
Proj.			550	4	94	55	23	.275						

Blind resume time. Below are the stats for two players in 2014. One is **Adam Eaton**. Can you guess which one is him? Can you name the other player?

Splits	AVG	HR	SB	R	RBI
Player A	.302	5	31	94	37
Player B	.300	1	15	76	35

Player A is **Denard Span**. Obviously Span's numbers look better because Span played in 24 more games than Eaton, but I wanted to show he's not much different than Span. I bet Span will go 3-5 rounds later (or even more) because the hype train around Eaton will gain a lot of momentum as we enter draft season.

I don't see a lot of power potential coming from Eaton's bat and 5-6 home runs could be his ceiling. Even though he hit .300 last year I have doubts he'll continue to have a .359 BABIP to maintain that batting average. He had two injuries (oblique strain and hamstring strain), which could have contributed to his low stolen base totals (and perhaps the low stolen base success rate). Like I said earlier I think the hype train will get a little out of control and I don't think there's enough upside to get any type of profit on his ADP especially when you get a player like Span later in drafts.

Jacoby Ellsbury

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Yankees | Position: OF | RK: (9) | Player Rater: ESPN (16), NFBC (16)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	303	4	43	26	14/3	.271	.682	.304	13.3%	5.9%	28.7%	47.5%
2013	MLB	29	577	9	92	53	52/4	.298	.781	.341	14.5%	7.4%	18.6%	51.4%
2014	MLB	30	575	16	71	70	39/5	.271	.747	.296	14.6%	7.7%	22.1%	42.9%
Proj.			575	15	80	80	39	.285						

Last year some fantasy analysts projected **Jacoby Ellsbury** to hit 20-plus home runs because of the short right porch in Yankee Stadium, but I didn't think that was going to occur because other than that one fluke year he never hit for a lot of power. What's funny is he hit more home runs on the road (9) than at home (7) last year. Also, he had the same HR/FB rate at home and on the road, which indicates he didn't benefit from the home ballpark.

Another reason why I didn't know 20-plus home runs was reasonable was because he doesn't that many fly balls to right field. The table below breaks down the hit locations of all the fly balls he's hit since 2008.

Year	LF%	CF%	RF%
2008	22.9%	47.0%	30.1%
2009	21.6%	57.6%	20.9%
2010	17.6%	76.5%	5.9%
2011	11.9%	51.0%	37.1%
2012	22.9%	57.1%	20.0%
2013	27.1%	48.6%	24.3%
2014	20.0%	55.2%	24.8%

The vast majority of the fly balls he hits are to center field. Last year it ticked up, but not to the point where there's an opportunity for fly balls to go over the fence in right field.

In regards to the batting average, there's optimism he can improve next year. Last year his batting average on fly balls was extremely low compared to his career. The table below compares his statistics on fly balls in 2014 compared to 2008-13.

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP
2008-13	559	.305	1.075	.213
2014	125	.248	.967	.136

Edwin Encarnacion

Bats: R | Age: 32 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: 1B | RK: (15) | Player Rater: ESPN (38), NFBC (32)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	542	42	93	110	13/3	.280	.941	.266	14.6%	13.0%	37.8%	33.8%
2013	MLB	30	530	36	90	104	7/1	.272	.904	.247	10.0%	13.2%	29.8%	35.9%
2014	MLB	31	477	34	75	98	2/0	.268	.901	.260	15.1%	11.4%	28.5%	37.1%
Proj.			500	35	90	100	2	.270						

In early July **Edwin Encarnacion** missed 33 games due to a quad strain. If he didn't miss time he would have had his best fantasy season of his career in regards to RBIs, HRs and runs. Other than stolen bases I don't see regression coming in 2015. He's still making hard contact and his contact rates are still good. In

regards to the stolen bases the days of Encarnacion stealing 7-plus are likely over. Instead you should plan for 3-4 and be happy if you get any more.

Since he plays in Toronto you would think his numbers are greatly aided by the home ballpark, but that's not the case. The table below shows his career home-road splits since 2009.

Splits	AVG	OPS	HR/FB	BABIP
Home	.270	.877	15.8%	.263
Away	.260	.841	16.1%	.258

Overall, he is a consistent fantasy player and if he can avoid hitting the DL (the odds of him hitting the DL is higher when compared to a year ago) he will be a top 20 fantasy hitter.

Alcides Escobar

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Royals | Position: SS | RK: (154) | Player Rater: ESPN (52), NFBC (54)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	605	5	68	52	35/5	.293	.721	.344	15.4%	4.2%	19.7%	54.8%
2013	MLB	26	607	4	57	52	22/0	.234	.559	.264	13.1%	3.0%	22.6%	49.3%
2014	MLB	27	579	3	74	50	31/6	.285	.694	.326	13.4%	3.7%	19.3%	46.1%
Proj.			590	3	68	50	24	.255						

In most cases it's easy to say a player's batting average was BABIP dependent, but in this case that's what happened in 2014 for **Alcides Escobar**. The table below shows his batting average on ground balls since 2009.

Year	GB AVG	AVG
2010	.209	.235
2011	.263	.254
2012	.259	.293
2013	.247	.234
2014	.307	.285

You may be asking yourself, "but hey, in 2012 he hit for an even higher average in 2012 and his batting average on ground balls was only .259 that year." In 2012 he a career best .750 batting average on line drives, which was accompanied with an unusually high .344 BABIP.

His stolen base totals are entirely dependent upon his ability to get on-base. It's not surprising the both years he stole 30-plus bases was when had batting averages greater than .285. He has a career batting average of .264, but he's never actually had a year where he has hit in the .260s. That means when you roster him you may get a really good batting average or a really poor one.

Yunel Escobar**Bats: R | Age: 32 | Team: Nationals | Position: SS | RK: (204) | Player Rater: ESPN (242), NFBC (282)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	558	9	58	51	5/1	.253	.644	.273	11.5%	5.8%	21.8%	57.7%
2013	MLB	30	508	9	61	56	4/4	.256	.698	.281	12.6%	9.9%	22.9%	54.6%
2014	MLB	31	476	7	33	39	1/1	.258	.664	.282	11.3%	8.1%	23.0%	50.5%
Proj.			500	8	50	50	3	.264						

As of mid-February **Yunel Escobar** is slated to be the everyday second baseman for the Nationals. He doesn't provide any above average statistics, which makes him a deep mixed league option. Maybe the stolen bases increase because he's going to the National League and the Nationals. The retort to that statement is he'll likely bat eighth, in front of the pitcher, so very rarely will he be given the green light to steal bases.

Danny Espinosa**Bats: B | Age: 27 | Team: Nationals | Position: 2B | RK: (171) | Player Rater: ESPN (275), NFBC (235)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	594	17	82	56	20/6	.247	.717	.333	28.7%	7.0%	25.9%	48.3%
2013	MLB	26	158	3	11	12	1/0	.158	.465	.202	28.1%	2.4%	25.7%	53.1%
2014	MLB	27	333	8	31	27	8/1	.219	.634	.319	33.5%	4.9%	18.4%	47.2%
Proj.			450	15	60	60	15	.220						

When **Ryan Zimmerman** went on the DL in April [I recommended](#) **Danny Espinosa** as a potential pickup because he had 20/20 upside with a .235-.245 batting average. He only got 364 PAs and he maintained the same HR/FB as his career rate. Also, the stolen base rate was the same as years past so if he played a full season he would have been close to a 20/20 season. However, what I didn't think would happen was his strikeout rate more than five percentage points to 33.5%.

The increase in strikeout rate came against right handed pitching. Last year he struck out 39% of the time compared to a 27.7% rate before the 2014 season. He's always struggled against righties. The table below shows his career statistics against righties and lefties.

Splits	AVG	BABIP	K%	GB%	FB%
RHP	.213	.284	29.7%	43.4%	36.8%
LHP	.271	.341	24.4%	45.8%	34.4%

As of late December it looks like Espinosa will be the starting second baseman, which means he could be usable in deeper formats. However, he'll be a legitimate batting average risk if he continues to strikeout at such a high clip.

Prince Fielder**Bats: L | Age: 30 | Team: Rangers | Position: 1B | RK: (55) | Player Rater: ESPN (355), NFBC (366)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	581	30	83	108	1/0	.313	.940	.321	12.2%	12.3%	29.6%	42.7%
2013	MLB	29	624	25	82	106	1/1	.279	.819	.307	16.4%	10.5%	24.7%	41.7%
2014	MLB	30	150	3	19	16	0/0	.247	.720	.274	13.5%	14.0%	18.1%	51.2%
Proj.			550	25	75	90	0	.275						

Before the 2014 season began I wasn't high on **Prince Fielder**. After the first three weeks of the season I wrote [Fielder was a sell high](#). A month later he had [cervical fusion of the C5-C6 discs](#) in his neck. According to Stephania Bell of ESPN [it would take](#) 3-6 months for bone healing, but a full recovery can take much longer. In early November the Rangers [activated Fielder](#) from the 60-day DL and expect him to be ready for 2015. It was later learned this started to [bother him in 2013](#), but he didn't tell anyone.

When I read that I have no idea how to evaluate Fielder from a statistical level. Obviously his 2014 numbers should be discounted, but what about his 2013 numbers? In the first half of 2013 he hit for a lot of power, but not a lot average. In the second half it was the reverse. Any attempt to evaluate how he's going to perform after a major surgery on his neck is going to be a wild guess. Fantasy owners are going to have to wait until Spring Training to get a better idea of how he looks. For me, I'm not going to roster him because I rather wait and see how he performs before I invest in him.

Wilmer Flores**Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Mets | Position: SS | RK: (176) | Player Rater: ESPN (282), NFBC (297)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AAA	22	220	13	43	57	0/2	.323	.935	.339	16.2%	6.6%	34.6%	37.3%
2013	MLB	21	95	1	8	13	0/0	.211	.542	.264	22.8%	5.0%	17.8%	50.7%
2014	MLB	22	259	6	28	29	1/0	.251	.664	.265	11.3%	4.4%	27.0%	41.3%
Proj.			470	16	60	50	1	.265						

The biggest question about Wilmer Flores is does he have the defensive chops to stick at shortstop because the bat is ready for the majors. His minor track record is good (albeit in a great hitting environment in Las Vegas) I don't know why he's not talked about even more in the fantasy community especially since he's a Mets prospect. Ideally he's probably a second baseman but since Daniel Murphy is there and David Wright is at third base Flores' only chance for everyday at-bats is at shortstop. If he plays every day he could hit .270-plus with 13-plus home runs and more RBIs than most other shortstops. Lastly, this is a link to Flores' scouting report from [Baseball Prospectus](#).

Tyler Flowers**Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: White Sox | Position: C | RK: (211) | Player Rater: ESPN (203), NFBC (171)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	136	7	19	13	2/1	.213	.708	.301	36.6%	7.8%	16.0%	58.0%
2013	MLB	27	256	10	24	24	0/1	.195	.603	.261	34.2%	5.1%	28.8%	42.3%
2014	MLB	28	407	15	42	50	0/1	.241	.693	.355	36.0%	5.7%	20.0%	48.4%
Proj.			380	12	45	45	0	.219						

Tyler Flowers cannot hit a baseball. I know his 2014 numbers were much better than the previous three seasons, but his .241 batting average was a product entirely based on an insanely high .355 BABIP. He strikes out a lot and doesn't make a lot of contact, which screams BABIP regression next year. He should only be considered to drafted in an AL-only and even at that point I'd recommend taking a backup catcher because Flowers' batting average is going to do more harm than good.

Dexter Fowler**Bats: B | Age: 29 | Team: Astros | Position: OF | RK: (136) | Player Rater: ESPN (121), NFBC (124)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	454	13	72	53	12/5	.300	.863	.390	24.2%	12.8%	27.8%	43.1%
2013	MLB	27	415	12	71	42	19/9	.263	.776	.323	21.3%	13.2%	24.1%	43.0%
2014	MLB	28	434	8	61	35	11/4	.276	.774	.351	21.4%	13.1%	27.1%	44.2%
Proj.			500	10	75	45	13	.275						

In mid-January **Dexter Fowler** was traded to the Cubs and becomes their everyday center fielder. I've never believed in the upside Fowler showed with the Rockies because his numbers looked like they were a product of Coors Field (table below).

Split	AVG	OBP	SLUG	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR	RBI	Runs	SB
Home	.298	.395	.485	.365	19.4%	13.2%	27	146	226	48
Away	.241	.333	.361	.329	25.3%	11.5%	13	64	150	35

Last year he had an opportunity to prove he was a better player than his road numbers indicated. He put up solid numbers in a shortened season (he missed 40 games due to [back tightness](#)), hitting .277 and if healthy, could have been in double digits in home runs to go along with double digit stolen bases.

Fowler won't light up the draft sheet when you prepare for your draft, but he will provide average production in four categories and could be a sneaky play for 85-plus runs. He's going to be on-base a lot and if you believe in the Cubs offense (which I do not) he could be a sneaky play for a lot of runs. He's only played more than 135 games once so I wouldn't project more than 520 plate appearances. Also, this is the last year before enters free agency; I don't put any weight into this but it's worth noting.

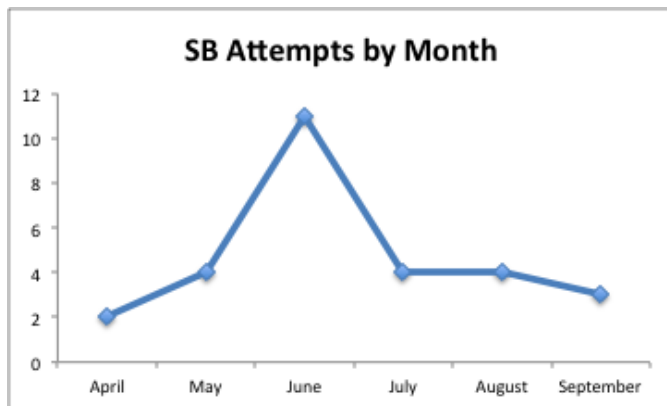
Todd Frazier

Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Reds | Position: 3B | RK: (35) | Player Rater: ESPN (15), NFBC (14)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	422	19	55	67	3/2	.273	.829	.316	22.2%	7.7%	38.7%	32.8%
2013	MLB	27	531	19	63	73	6/5	.234	.721	.269	20.8%	8.3%	23.6%	42.6%
2014	MLB	28	597	29	88	80	20/8	.273	.795	.309	21.1%	7.9%	22.5%	42.2%
Proj.			580	23	87	84	10	.272						

Raise your hands if you saw a 20/20 season coming from **Todd Frazier**? I wrote last year the batting average should improve and there was an opportunity for an uptick in his power, but I didn't see this coming.

The biggest surprise was the 20 stolen bases because he never showed the proclivity to steal bases in the majors. That said, he stole 17 and 14 bases in Triple-A in the two seasons before getting called up to the majors. The question is will he continue to steal bases in 2015? I have no idea; it seems as though Frazier (and every player) decide whether or not to steal bases any time they want. What I will say is the majority of his stolen base attempts came in the month of June (image below).



There are two ways to interrupt this data. Either you think he benefitted from an outlier month in June and his stolen bases are going to regress to the 5-10 range. Or you think he will have a month like this again and he'll steal 14-20. I fall into the former camp; I don't believe 20 is realistic for next year.

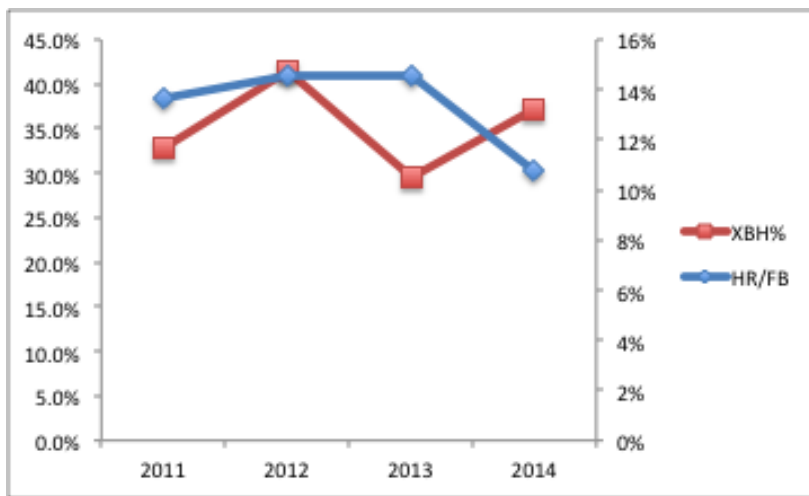
Since 2012 his fly ball rate has declined year-over-year, which only exacerbates why the power will decline next year (in order to reproduce the same power numbers he'll need to outperform his career norms again). Last year he had 23% HR/FB rate at home, which is nine percentage points higher than his career home numbers before 2014. He does play in a home run friendly ballpark so fluky HR/FB rates have a higher likelihood of occurring.

Freddie Freeman

Bats: L | Age: 25 | Team: Braves | Position: 1B | RK: (44) | Player Rater: ESPN (48), NFBC (51)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	540	23	91	94	2/0	.259	.796	.295	20.8%	10.3%	34.0%	37.1%
2013	MLB	23	551	23	89	109	1/0	.319	.897	.371	19.2%	10.5%	29.4%	38.4%
2014	MLB	24	607	18	93	78	3/4	.288	.847	.351	20.5%	12.7%	24.9%	37.6%
Proj.			575	22	85	90	2	.282						

After three straight 20-plus home run seasons **Freddie Freeman** fell two home runs short. Any time there's a fairly significant decrease in power the two numbers I look at the are the HR/FB rates and extra base hit percentage. The image below shows both of those numbers since 2011.



The data shows his extra base hit percentage was just as high as 2012 but the HR/FB was extremely low. Therefore, I assume the power levels should bounce back to the 20-23 range next year. He's going to play the majority of the year 2015 season at the age of 25 so it's possible he has a power surge, but I don't see that coming. Maybe he hits 25-26 if he has a fluky HR/FB rate, but I wouldn't count on it.

In his first four full seasons in the majors Freeman has had the following batting averages: .282, .259, .319 and .288. Based on those four data points it looks as though the .259 batting average is the outlier. Even though he had the second highest batting average of his career in 2014, his contact rates were two percentage points less than his career norms, which could be a little troublesome. Even though the contact rates were slightly lower, his walk rate increased two percentage points and the strike out rate was relatively the same, which indicates he's a relatively safe bet to hit .275-plus.

David Freese

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Angels | Position: 3B | RK: (193) | Player Rater: ESPN (167), NFBC (188)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	501	20	70	79	3/3	.293	.839	.352	21.5%	10.1%	22.0%	52.2%
2013	MLB	30	462	9	53	60	1/2	.262	.721	.320	20.3%	9.0%	17.0%	56.5%
2014	MLB	31	462	10	53	55	1/3	.260	.704	.330	24.3%	7.4%	17.8%	50.7%
Proj.			460	9	55	60	1	.261						

Last year I thought **David Freese** would improve upon 2013s batting average because the BABIP wouldn't positively regress (before the 2013 season he had a career .359 BABIP with 1,234 PAs). However, instead of the batting average regressing the batting average stabilized. After two years of roughly the same batting average I have to conclude that his true talent level. What also stabilized was the power.

Considering how much hard contact he makes I thought he could hit 15-plus home runs, but after nearly 2,500 PAs his true talent level in regards to his HR/FB rate is between 10-11% and not the 20% he showed in 2012. Freese is a high ground ball hitter so his home run production is going to be limited. In the last two years he's only hit 193 fly balls (which is only 86-87 per year) so if only 10-11% of those become home runs he'll only have 8-10 at the end of the year.

Avisail Garcia

Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: White Sox | Position: OF | RK: (73) | Player Rater: ESPN (277), NFBC (289)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	21	47	0	7	3	0/2	.319	.692	.405	19.6%	5.9%	8.1%	64.9%
2013	MLB	22	244	7	31	31	3/3	.283	.731	.344	23.0%	3.5%	19.8%	56.1%
2014	MLB	23	172	7	19	29	4/1	.244	.718	.285	23.2%	7.4%	16.2%	56.2%
Proj.			540	18	65	85	15	.262						

Avisail Garcia is the epitome of the post-hype prospect that struggled the year before and everyone will forget about. He [jammed his shoulder](#) early in the year trying to dive for a fly ball. I much rather buy low on a player coming back from a freak injury like Garcia's than someone like **Coco Crisp** who is constantly dealing with tissue injuries. Before the 2013 season [he was projected](#) to have 60 run and 60 potential power, which means he has the raw tools to be a top 30 fantasy player. He has 497 PAs in the majors and he has a .273/.314/.408 with 14 home runs and seven stolen bases and he doesn't turn 24 until June.

He's always going to strikeout a lot because he's very aggressive at the plate, but when he makes contact it's very hard (he has a career 15.7% HR/FB rate). I think he can make enough contact to hit .260 and if the 23 year old can stay healthy he's almost a shoe-in to hit 15/10 with room for more. Also, the

lineup should be much better with the additions of **Adam LaRoche**, **Melky Cabrera** and a full year of **Adam Eaton** batting leadoff.

Brett Gardner

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Yankees | Position: OF | RK: (78) | Player Rater: ESPN (57), NFBC (48)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	31	0	7	3	2/2	.323	.804	.417	18.9%	13.5%	20.0%	40.0%
2013	MLB	29	539	8	81	52	24/8	.273	.759	.342	20.9%	8.5%	24.6%	44.5%
2014	MLB	30	555	17	87	58	21/5	.256	.749	.305	21.1%	8.8%	25.9%	44.8%
Proj.			550	9	92	60	21	.264						

Who saw 17 home runs from **Brett Gardner** coming? I sure didn't see it happening. The biggest question is how sustainable are the home runs? Last year his average home run distance was 378.2 feet. Two years ago it was 377.1 feet and since 2008 to 2014 its 372.1 feet. It's pretty safe to say he didn't hit the ball that much harder last year.

To put Gardner's home distance into context lets look at the average home run distances for players in 2014 (table below).

Splits	HR Dist.
Top 98%	418.5
Top 90%	409.5
Top 75%	402.4
Top 50%	393.9
Top 25%	383.2
Top 10%	376.4

Gardner ranks in the bottom 10% of home run distances, which indicate he got lucky with the HR/FB rate and regression is going to occur next year.

In regards of the stolen bases it's pretty safe to say he's not going to steal 40-plus anymore and that 27 may be his ceiling and his floor could be 11-12. I think he's going to be over drafted next year because of 17 home runs, which means he won't be on any of my teams.

Evan Gattis

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Astros | Position: C, OF | RK: (129) | Player Rater: ESPN (131), NFBC (126)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	26	21	1	1	1	0/0	.333	1.030	.375	18.2%	0.0%	41.2%	35.3%
2013	MLB	26	354	21	44	65	0/0	.243	.771	.255	21.2%	5.5%	27.5%	42.0%
2014	MLB	27	369	22	41	52	0/0	.263	.810	.298	24.2%	5.5%	24.1%	39.8%
Proj.			520	28	63	77	0	.238						

I wasn't buying **Evan Gattis** at the beginning of the 2014 season for two reasons: A) I didn't think his body could hold up to the rigors of catching every day and B) there were flaws in his game, specifically against right handed pitching. Based on his ADP I projected he would be a bust because his numbers would regress in 2014.

Obviously I was wrong because his 2014 numbers were better than 2013s. However, I was correct about the injury issues, but most importantly, I do not believe his 2014 numbers are sustainable. The table below breaks down his performance by lefties and righties by year.

Year	RHPs				LHPs			
	AVG	SLUG	BABIP	K%	AVG	SLUG	BABIP	K%
2013	.236	.473	.249	22.7%	.260	.500	.270	17.3%
2014	.245	.466	.275	23.9%	.364	.652	.422	24.6%

The first thing I noticed was he didn't make any substantial improvements against right handed pitching. His 2014 performance was fueled by left handed pitching, which was punctuated with a .422 BABIP. His performance against lefties is not sustainable is because the increased strike out rate indicates he made less contact and when he did a lot of balls found holes.

With the recent news of him being acquired by the Astros I'm going to be targeting him in drafts. First, I love catchers who don't have to catch. With **Jason Conger** and **Hank Conger** on the roster Gattis' days catching are probably over, which is a good thing. Second, he's going to be able to DH, which is good considering he has a big body and has two knee operations and has dealt with back problems. Third, the ballpark he's going to is good for right handed power. Fourth, the Astros lineup is going to be much better than the Braves' (who thought I would be saying that this past October) so he'll have more RBI opportunities.

Originally I projected him to hit 24 home runs, but after the trade I'm projecting 28. He's going to be a batting average risk and the pitching is better in the AL so I lowered my projected batting average from .241 to .238; not a big decrease. Even though I'm projecting 28 home runs I don't see a lot of RBIs because of the lack of contact he makes and how I do not believe there will be men on-base when he hits those home runs. I say that because the Astros lineup is going to have a lot of three outcome players.

Scooter Gennett**Bats: L | Age: 24 | Team: Brewers | Position: 2B | RK: (157) | Player Rater: ESPN (108), NFBC (136)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	23	321	3	44	22	10/5	.280	.697	.333	16.9%	6.0%	21.0%	50.9%
2013	MLB	23	213	6	29	21	2/1	.324	.834	.380	18.3%	4.3%	18.6%	43.5%
2014	MLB	24	440	9	55	54	6/3	.289	.754	.321	14.1%	4.6%	19.5%	42.9%
Proj.			480	10	55	55	6	.288						

Scooter Gennett can flat out hit the baseball. He's hit at every level in the minor leagues and has a .300 career batting average in the majors. Other than batting average he doesn't provide anything else. He's not a fast runner and has never stole more than 12 bases in a professional season. He doesn't hit or project to hit for a lot of power. He's also probably going to hit in the bottom of the lineup so he will not have a lot of RBI and run scoring opportunities.

There are grumblings he should be platooned against left handed pitching, but he's only 24 years old and I think he should be able to get an opportunity to see if can or cannot hit lefties. He probably won't be able to hit lefties, but why not give him a full season of at-bats and see if he can make the necessary adjustments. With **Rickie Weeks** likely gone there isn't a clear platoon candidate to pair with Gennett. Either way, Gennett is more of a NL-only play than a 12-team mixed league play. That said, if you're in a 15-team mixed and you have a **Chris Carter** then it would make more sense to grab a Gennett to counterbalance the low batting average.

Paul Goldschmidt**Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: 1B | RK: (4) | Player Rater: ESPN (51), NFBC (68)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	514	20	82	82	18/3	.286	.850	.340	22.1%	10.2%	30.5%	39.9%
2013	MLB	25	602	36	103	125	15/7	.302	.952	.343	20.4%	13.9%	23.4%	44.4%
2014	MLB	26	406	19	75	69	9/3	.300	.938	.368	23.0%	13.4%	21.4%	45.5%
Proj.			600	30	90	100	13	.300						

Paul Goldschmidt's 2014 season ended prematurely in early August after being hit in the hand (due to a bone fracture). Other than the power being slightly down, his numbers were almost identical to 2013s. If he played a full year he only would have had 29 home runs and I think that's about his ceiling for 2015 (28-33 home runs). He is a relatively safe player and should be a top ten pick, but there is one red flag. Last year his strikeout rate increased nearly three percentage points and his batting average was slightly better than 2013s batting average. In order to hit .302 last year required an unusually high BABIP (compared to his career before 2014). If the BABIP last year were similar to his career BABIP his batting average would have been in the .290 instead of .302.

As of early January it's also important to remember he's not a guarantee to be fully healthy at the start of the year. At times hand, finger and wrist injuries tend to have some lingering effects on power production. The most extreme case of this is **Derrek Lee**. In 2005 he hit 46 home runs, but hurt his wrist before the next season and he only hit eight and only played 50 games.

Yan Gomes

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Indians | Position: C | RK: (103) | Player Rater: ESPN (81), NFBC (79)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	98	4	9	13	0/0	.204	.631	.246	28.8%	5.4%	30.0%	50.0%
2013	MLB	25	293	11	45	38	2/0	.294	.826	.342	20.8%	5.6%	30.4%	44.3%
2014	MLB	26	485	21	61	74	0/0	.278	.785	.326	23.2%	4.6%	27.5%	37.7%
Proj.			475	20	63	71	0	.290						

In late August **Yan Gomes** was one of Keith Law's [ten breakthroughs for the season](#). I highly suggest you read his piece. Even though he made his list he didn't make it for his offense. Instead he made the list primarily for his defense (which I don't agree with, but he definitely knows more than I do).

In limited action in 2013 Gomes had a breakthrough year, hitting .294 with 11 home runs in 293 at-bats. In 2014 the Indians moved **Carlos Santana** off the catcher position and allowed Gomes to play every day. Gomes did not disappoint as he continued to hit for power and for average. The HR/FB rate was a little higher than last year and the BABIP was a little less than last year, which suggests what he did in 2014 is repeatable. The past years he has had BABIPs of .326 and .356, which seems awfully high for a player without any speed. His BABIPs are so high because he makes a lot of hard contact on fly balls. The table below shows his career Major League numbers on fly balls.

Year	AVG	BABIP
2012	.204	.246
2013	.294	.342
2014	.278	.326

He does have a platoon split (.315 career average against lefties and .276 against righties), which means if he doesn't smash lefties next year he could be in store a batting average dip.

Carlos Gomez

Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Brewers | Position: OF | RK: (5) | Player Rater: ESPN (7), NFBC (5)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	415	19	72	51	37/6	.260	.768	.296	21.7%	4.4%	30.4%	42.6%
2013	MLB	27	536	24	80	73	40/7	.284	.843	.344	24.7%	6.3%	25.7%	42.8%
2014	MLB	28	574	23	95	73	34/12	.284	.833	.339	21.9%	7.3%	25.5%	39.0%
Proj.			560	23	94	79	35	.284						

Carlos Gomez doesn't have a lot of flaws in regards to his fantasy value and potential for 2015. He's one of the rare five tool fantasy players with a track record of performance for three years straight.

The only red flag I could find was he tends to slow down in the second half of the season. For example, in the last three years he's hitting .287 (in 848 ABs) during the first half of the year, but only .266 (in 677 ABs) the second half of the year. We're still dealing with a small sample size so these trends are not absolute. However, it could be a great sell high candidate at the All-Star break or someone to avoid in daily formats during the second half of the year.

Lastly, he doesn't have any major platoon splits either home or away and against lefties and righties so his production should be stable in 2015 assuming he's healthy.

Adrian Gonzalez

Bats: L | Age: 32 | Team: Dodgers | Position: 1B | RK: (23) | Player Rater: ESPN (29), NFBC (27)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	629	18	75	108	2/0	.299	.806	.334	16.1%	6.1%	28.1%	41.2%
2013	MLB	31	583	22	69	100	1/0	.293	.803	.315	15.3%	7.3%	27.9%	38.8%
2014	MLB	32	591	27	83	116	1/1	.276	.817	.294	17.0%	8.5%	26.5%	39.4%
Proj.			590	24	75	100	1	.292						

I'm writing this in early October and I bet **Adrian Gonzalez** is going to be an under drafted player in 2015. Below are popular reasons why fantasy owners may overlook him in drafts.

- First, his age. He is going to turn 33 in early May. Usually hitters start to see a major decline once they hit 33.
- Second, his 2014 power numbers (HR/FB rate) suggest he got lucky and therefore a regression is going to happen.
- Third, his batting average decreased substantially in 2014 and it could be a sign that he no longer has a .295-plus batting average ceiling.

I believe these arguments are incorrect. I do not like drafting older players but he doesn't show any signs of slowing down. The table below shows the percentage of hard hit contact and you will see it was the highest it's been since 2009.

Season	H	XBH	XBH%
2006	173	63	36.4%
2007	182	79	43.4%
2008	172	69	40.1%
2009	153	69	45.1%
2010	176	64	36.4%
2011	213	75	35.2%
2012	188	66	35.1%
2013	171	54	31.6%
2014	163	68	41.7%

The batting average was down because he only hit .201 against lefties (with a .246 BABIP) in 2014. From 2008-13 he has a .282 batting average against lefties (with a .325 BABIP). Positive regression against lefties will happen, which means I expect his batting average floor to be .285-.288. Lastly, he never gets hurt. In an era where injuries happen with a higher frequency, it is even more important to have players who do not miss a lot of time.

Carlos Gonzalez

Bats: L | Age: 29 | Team: Rockies | Position: OF | RK: () | Player Rater: ESPN (12), NFBC (15)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	518	22	89	85	20/5	.303	.881	.352	19.9%	9.7%	18.5%	49.3%
2013	MLB	27	391	26	72	70	21/3	.302	.958	.368	27.1%	9.4%	19.2%	41.3%
2014	MLB	28	260	11	35	38	3/0	.238	.723	.283	24.9%	6.8%	18.3%	47.1%
Proj.			450	22	79	86	16	.298						

The injury plagued **Carlos Gonzalez** was only limited to 70 games in 2014 due to a myriad of injuries one of which was extremely fluky. His numbers were so bad I have to wonder if he was ever healthy in 2014.

For the majority of the year he played with a tumor in his index finger. The injury caused him to be pulled from games several times. Eventually the injury landed him on the DL in early June. When the tumor was removed it "[fatty mass with tentacles](#)" and could have been a Cheeto.

He returned from the DL in mid-July but was only able to play 18 games before being placed on the DL again with a torn patella tendon in his left knee and never played again in 2014.

At the end of the day it's going to come down to health for Gonzalez. If he plays in 120-plus games you'll probably make a profit on where he's likely to be drafted. His draftability increases the shallower the league so if I'm in a 10-team league I'm more likely to take a chance on him than in a 15-team mixed league.

Dee Gordon**Bats: L | Age: 26 | Team: Marlins | Position: 2B | RK: (62) | Player Rater: ESPN (8), NFBC (7)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2011	MLB	23	224	0	34	11	24/7	.304	.686	.345	11.6%	3.0%	19.1%	58.8%
2012	MLB	24	303	1	38	17	32/10	.228	.561	.281	18.8%	6.1%	15.5%	63.7%
2014	MLB	26	609	2	92	34	64/19	.289	.704	.346	16.5%	4.8%	11.8%	63.4%
Proj.			590	1	87	30	49	.269						

After proving it much or less over a full year I still do not believe in **Dee Gordon** moving forward. The table below provides his first and second half splits.

Splits	AVG	OBP	BABIP	GB%	FB%
1st Half	.287	.339	.340	59.1%	22.5%
2nd Half	.284	.300	.348	63.4%	15.1%

By all accounts both halves were the same, but what stands out the most is the .300 OBP in the second half of year (he literally only had four walks). If that trend continues the only way he gets on-base will be via a hit, which means his offensive production will be inconsistent.

That said, prior to the 2014 season he added about ten pounds of muscle to have a better ability to not be jammed by high velocity. He's a smart hitter because he takes full advantage of his speed by slapping the ball on the ground and beating out hits. Before 2014 he always had a hard time with popping up the ball too much (about 15% of the time), but last year he cut it almost in half, popping up 8% of the time.

There are some holes in his game. In the first of the year he struck out 15.3% of the time, but that was paired with a 6.9% walk rate. However, in the second half he struck out 18.4% of the time and only walked 1.6% of the time (that's four walks ... I know I mentioned this twice but it's extremely important since he is expected to leadoff). The increase in strikeout rate came primarily on fastballs. He struck out 12.6% of the time against fastballs in the first three months, but the last three months he struck out 17.6% of the time against fastballs.

For the first four months he saw 3.9 pitches per plate appearances, but in the last two months he only saw 3.6 pitches. This makes sense considering how the walk rate plummeted and the strikeout rate increased. There are two ways to interrupt these trends. One narrative could be that it's a small sample size and not indicative of a trend. The other narrative is pitchers started to figure him out and challenge him more. I fall more in ladder category.

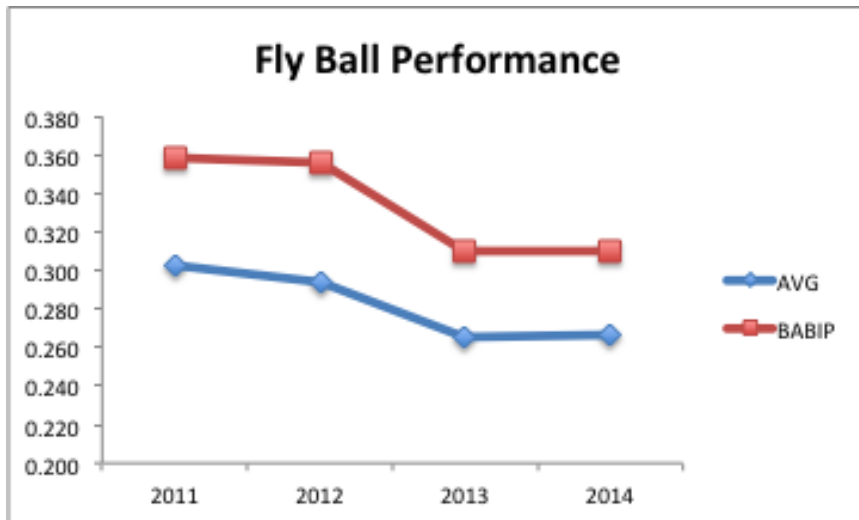
Alex Gordon

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Royals | Position: OF | RK: (56) | Player Rater: ESPN (54), NFBC (46)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	642	14	93	72	10/5	.294	.822	.356	19.4%	10.1%	29.3%	42.8%
2013	MLB	29	633	20	90	81	11/3	.265	.749	.310	20.1%	7.4%	29.5%	40.6%
2014	MLB	30	563	19	87	74	12/3	.266	.783	.310	19.6%	10.1%	27.7%	44.0%
Proj.			570	19	88	76	11	.265						

Last year I thought **Alex Gordon's** batting average would positively regress because he was coming of an incredibly low BABIP compared to the two seasons prior. However, he hit for the same batting average as 2013 and also put up near identical numbers to that season.

The question is can he return to the .290-plus batting average? Probably not. His batting average in 2011-12 were primarily fueled by unusually high BABIPs on fly balls. In the last two seasons his fly ball performance has reached normal levels, which is why the batting average has been in the .260s the past two years.



Overall, if you draft Gordon you're getting one of the safest players in fantasy. He's not going to win you your league and he's not going to lose it. He has a high floor and a low ceiling. When you draft him you're going to feel really confident in the production he's going to provide, which has value.

Anthony Gose**Bats: L | Age: 24 | Team: Tigers | Position: 2B | RK: (200) | Player Rater: ESPN (272), NFBC (255)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	21	166	1	25	11	15/3	.223	.622	.340	31.2%	9.0%	14.4%	63.1%
2013	MLB	22	147	2	15	12	4/3	.259	.691	.333	24.2%	3.3%	13.5%	55.9%
2014	MLB	23	239	2	31	13	15/5	.226	.604	.317	27.0%	9.1%	12.4%	66.5%
Proj.			420	3	45	45	25	.235						

In the offseason the Tigers solved their center field vacancy by trading for **Anthony Gose**. As a prospect he was always a very good defender, but the biggest question concerning his game has been his ability to hit the ball. He's a slap hitter and more than 25% of his hits are infield hits, which is really high.

What's odd about his 2014 season was the walk rate took a huge jump (from 3.3% to 9.1%) while the contact rate decreased dramatically (from 80.2% to 71.8%). You could look at these facts in two different ways. One way could be he became more patient at the plate and only swung at "his pitch." If that was true then why would the contact rate of pitches in the strike zone be lower (from 85.7% to 84.1%)? Another way to look at it is the walk rate was due to a small sample size and he's still has major problems identifying pitches, which results in a lot of swings and misses. I fall into the latter category.

All that said, he's going to be on the plus side of a platoon (with **Rajai Davis**) and he's very fast so it's very possible he'll have 30-plus stolen bases. Since he's so fast it's possible he'll have an incredibly high BABIP and hit in the .260s. I think that's not likely to happen but predicting high BABIPs is almost an impossible feat.

Yasmani Grandal**Bats: B | Age: 26 | Team: Padres | Position: C | RK: (183) | Player Rater: ESPN (204), NFBC (140)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	192	8	28	36	0/0	.297	.863	.333	17.3%	13.7%	22.6%	51.6%
2013	MLB	24	88	1	13	9	0/0	.216	.693	.257	16.7%	16.7%	22.5%	52.1%
2014	MLB	25	377	15	47	49	3/0	.225	.728	.277	26.0%	13.1%	24.3%	43.7%
Proj.			400	17	60	60	1	.241						

After a poor first half **Yasmani Grandal** had a much improved second half, hitting nearly 30 points higher and belting eight home runs in 177 ABs. The table below provides a breakdown of his 2014 splits.

Split	AVG	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	GB%	FB%
1 st Half	.210	.262	26.7%	11.3%	14.0%	46.7%	36.5%
2 nd Half	.237	.288	25.7%	14.5%	15.7%	38.9%	39.7%

The biggest stats that stand out are the increased BABIP and HR/FB rate. The HR/FB rates are not much different because if you remove one home run from the second half the HR/FB rate is 14%.

His ground ball rate decreased substantially in 2014 while the fly ball rate increased. For his career he has a .289 batting average on fly balls compared to a .251 batting average on ground balls. In the second half the ground ball rate dropped significantly. Therefore, if he continues to hit more fly balls the .237 batting average could repeat itself in 2015. He's a better hitter against righties so he'll likely platoon with **A.J. Ellis**, which will increase Grandal's batting average potential.

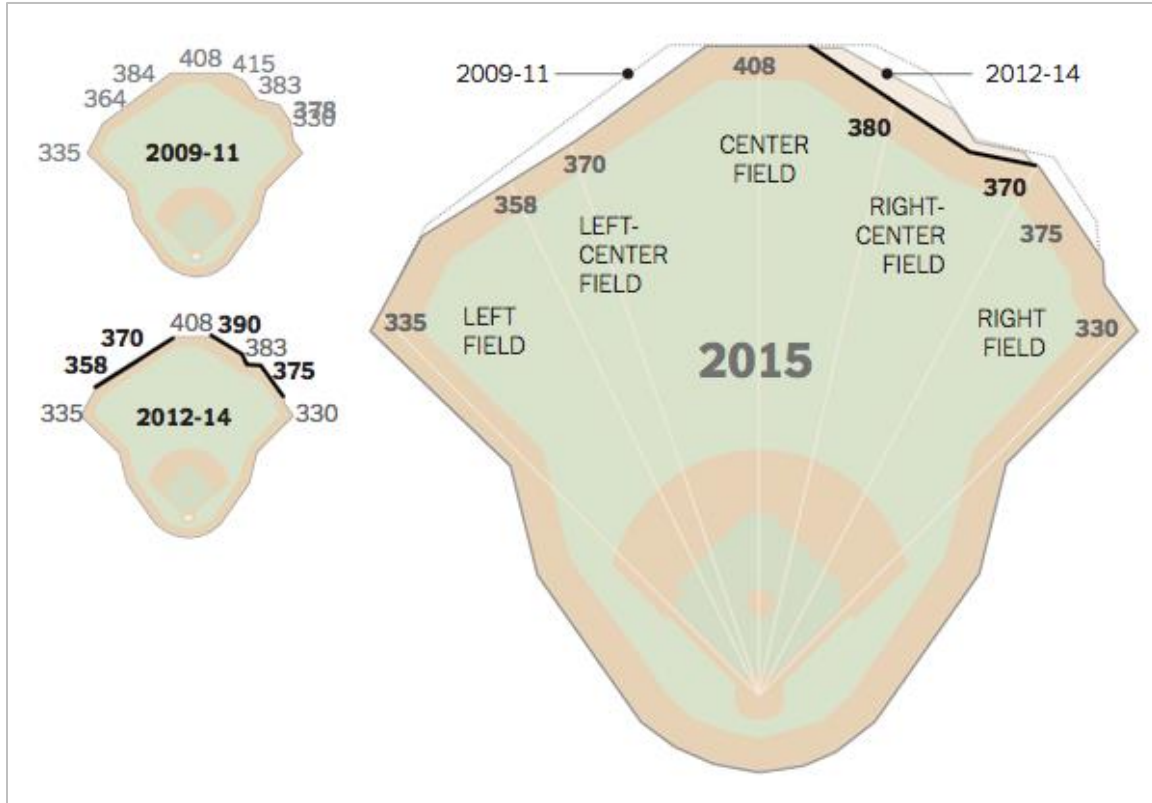
With 777 PAs he has a career .291 BABIP and .245 batting average, which is his true talent level especially since he gets to leave Petco Park. Now that he's no longer confined to Petco he should an uptick in his power. He has a 15.5% HR/FB rate on the road compared to 12.9% at home. His new ballpark adds 1-3 more home runs, which means he could be on the verge of 20 if gets a little lucky.

Curtis Granderson

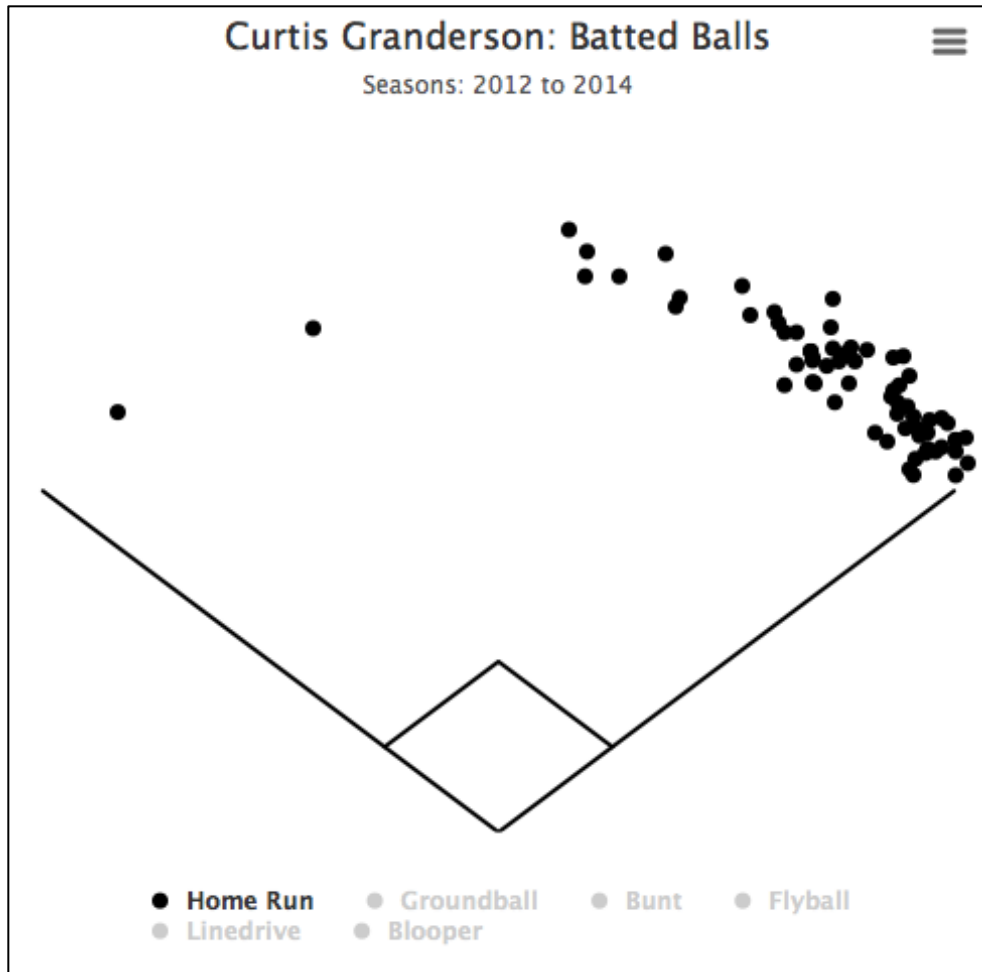
Bats: L | Age: 34 | Team: Mets | Position: OF | RK: (122) | Player Rater: ESPN (113), NFBC (96)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	596	43	102	106	10/3	.232	.811	.260	28.5%	11.0%	39.9%	34.7%
2013	MLB	32	214	7	31	15	8/2	.229	.723	.302	28.2%	11.0%	33.8%	37.8%
2014	MLB	33	564	20	73	66	8/2	.227	.714	.265	21.6%	12.1%	35.5%	36.4%
Proj.			530	23	70	70	8	.238						

There's a lot of buzz about how the [new dimensions](#) at the Mets home ballpark is going to help increase **Curtis Granderson's** home run totals in 2015. The new dimensions are being made primarily in right center (image below):

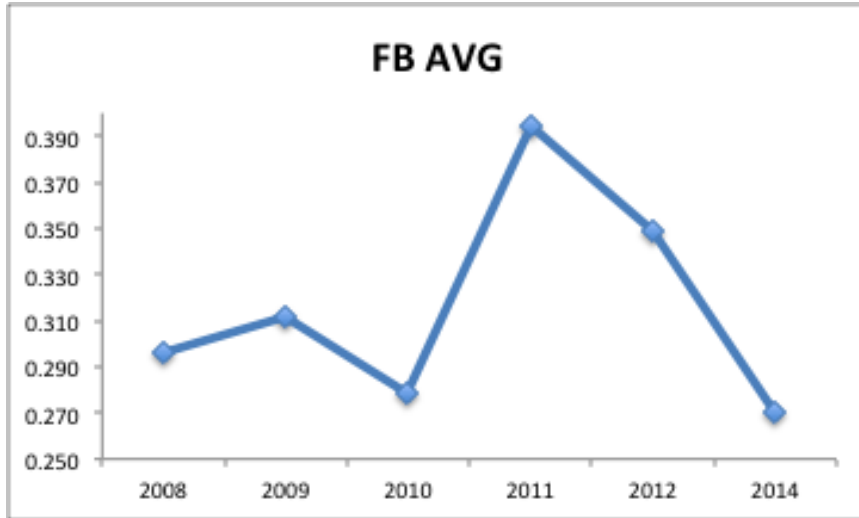


Based on that information it looks like this should help increase the home runs for Granderson, but most of his home runs the past three seasons were hit to right and a little bit to right-center field (image below courtesy of [FanGraphs](#)).



The question is will the power come back next year? From 2010-13 (when he played for the Yankees) he had a 14.7% HR/FB rate on the road compared to 20.6% at home. Last year he had a 6.2% rate at home compared to 13.5% on the road. So, last year he showed the same power as before, which implies the power is still there. The question how much do you think the alterations to the home ballpark will affect him. Last year he hit 113 fly balls and seven home runs. Suppose his HR/FB rate jumps to 10% then he would've hit 10-11, which isn't that much more. Maybe he hits 25 next year, but I don't see anymore than that.

One thing I didn't expect to see in 2014 was his strikeout rate decreasing nearly seven percentage points along with the SwStr% decreasing four percentage points, which implies he's approach at the plate has improved. The question is if the strikeout rate decreased so much why wasn't there any improvement in the batting average? It turns out he got extremely unlucky on fly balls. The image below shows his batting average on fly balls since 2008 (I excluded the 2013 season because of a small sample size).



Last year was his lowest batting average on fly balls with .270; from 2008-10 the batting average was .298 so there should be some positive regression next year.

Didi Gregorius

Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Yankees | Position: SS | RK: (206) | Player Rater: ESPN (292), NFBC (275)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AAA	24	226	3	42	25	3/0	.310	.836	.338	10.0%	9.2%	27.2%	43.1%
2013	MLB	23	357	7	47	28	0/2	.252	.704	.290	16.1%	9.2%	23.7%	38.6%
2014	MLB	24	270	6	35	27	3/0	.226	.653	.257	17.4%	7.4%	23.4%	41.0%
Proj.			510	7	60	48	4	.249						

I have a feeling **Did Gregorius** will be drafted in 12 and maybe 10-team mixed leagues because of the team he plays for, but do not be one of those people. He's a really good real life player, but he shouldn't be on your fantasy team.

Gregorius doesn't have much upside with the bat; he doesn't have a lot of power; he doesn't have patience at the plate and he's almost an instant out with two strikes. Also, he's not very fast so maybe his ceiling for stolen bases is 8-10. He's not going to provide power, steals, batting average or any runs (because he's going to hit ninth in the lineup).

Jedd Gyorko

Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Padres | Position: 2B | RK: (166) | Player Rater: ESPN (267), NFBC (194)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	AAA	23	369	24	62	83	4/3	.328	.968	.344	16.7%	8.3%	32.0%	38.6%
2013	MLB	24	486	23	62	63	1/1	.249	.745	.287	23.4%	6.3%	32.1%	37.5%
2014	MLB	25	400	10	37	51	3/2	.210	.612	.253	22.6%	8.1%	24.8%	44.2%
Proj.			470	15	62	66	2	.250						

When evaluating **Jedd Gyorko** its up to each fantasy owner how he/she looks at his 2014 statistics. For the first 56 games he had a miserable .162/.213/.270 slash line. He ended up going on the DL in early June with plantar fasciitis and missed 45 games. After coming off the DL he had a slash line of .260/.347/.398 with five home runs. The second half performance looks similar to the slash lines he put up in 2013, which provides optimism he can rebound in 2015.

However, I do not believe he can approach the 23 home runs he hit in 2013. First of all, on the 23 he hit 12 (52%) had just [enough power](#) to leave the ballpark. Second, even when he hit the ball well (after returning from the DL) his HR/FB rate was only 11%, four percentage points less than 2013s rate.

In regards to his batting average there is hope for optimism. He does strikeout a lot so the batting average ceiling will be limited and somewhat BABIP dependent, but even after a brutal 2014 season his contact rate increased almost two percentage points and his swing rate on pitches inside the strike zone decreased four percentage points. Overall, he's making more contact and the contact he's making are ball in the strike zone, which bodes well for his batting average.

Billy Hamilton

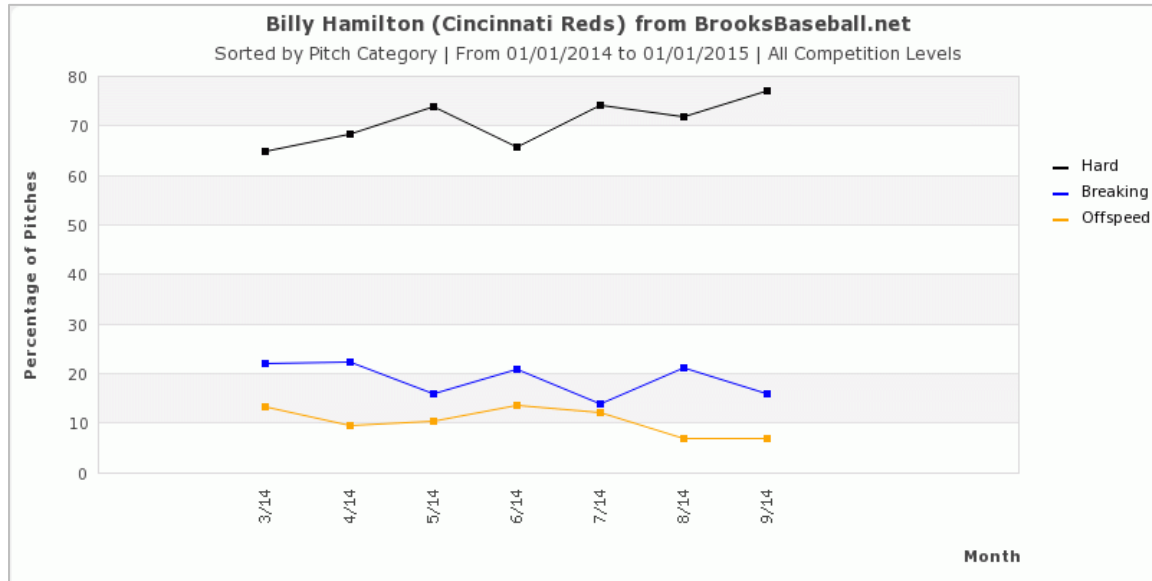
Bats: B | Age: 24 | Team: Reds | Position: OF | RK: (54) | Player Rater: ESPN (24), NFBC (18)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	AA	21	175	1	33	15	51/16	.286	.789	.371	20.2%	16.9%	24.6%	55.2%
2013	AAA	22	504	6	75	41	75/15	.256	.651	.310	18.6%	6.9%	23.6%	48.6%
2014	MLB	23	563	6	72	48	56/23	.250	.648	.304	19.1%	5.6%	19.0%	47.7%
Proj.			560	6	79	45	55	.245						

Billy Hamilton has amazing speed, but the question in fantasy circles was would he get on-base enough to utilize that speed on the base paths. Before looking at his rookie season the first thing I want to look at is how much he fell off during the last three months of the season (table below).

Splits	AVG	K%	BB%	BABIP	AB	GB%	FB%	LD%
First 3 Months	.281	18.2%	4.3%	.333	281	48.3%	32.1%	19.7%
Last 3 Months	.220	20.1%	6.8%	.274	282	40.9%	38.2%	20.9%

So what happened in the last three months of the seasons? He saw a lot more fastballs (image below is from BrooksBaseball.net).



If you read Hamilton’s scouting reports he biggest potential problem he had (in the minors) was, is he strong enough to make solid contact against fastballs for pitchers to respect it because if pitchers didn’t they would just jam him with fastballs on the inner half. In the first three months he hit .322 against fastballs (with a .348 BABIP) but in the next three months only .228 (with a .262 BABIP) so something must have happened; one of the two halves have BABIPs are that are more indicative of his true talent level. So which one better represents his true talent level?

After looking at the data I didn’t see any change in the hit distribution against fastballs. The biggest statistic I saw was he started chasing a lot more fastballs outside of the zone in the second half of the year. This very easily correctable (I know this is easier said than done) because all he has to do is improve his approach at the plate.

I’m writing this in mid-November but I think Hamilton will likely be drafted in the top 50, which will be too high for me because at that ADP he’ll have to perform like he did in the first half of 2014 for the entire season for the entire 2015 season, which I don’t think has a high probability of happening.

Josh Hamilton

Bats: L | Age: 34 | Team: Angels | Position: OF | RK: (189) | Player Rater: ESPN (186), NFBC (196)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	562	43	103	128	7/4	.285	.930	.320	25.5%	9.4%	35.0%	37.4%
2013	MLB	32	576	21	73	79	4/0	.250	.739	.303	24.8%	7.4%	29.3%	40.3%
2014	MLB	33	338	10	43	44	3/3	.263	.745	.350	28.3%	8.4%	25.8%	37.7%
Proj.			400	15	55	65	1	.242						

Last year **Josh Hamilton** missed two months of the season due to a [thumb injury](#). He got hurt sliding into first base, which was a fluke accident. Towards the end of the year he missed 20 games with shoulder and upper-body injuries. In early February he had shoulder [surgery to fix an AC joint](#). “He is expected to resume baseball activities in three to eight weeks, while a full recovery is estimated at six to eight weeks, the team said.”

Hamilton, who turns 34 in May, is a player who no longer has the physical tools to be a top 50 fantasy player, but if he can play 140-plus games the lineup around him could make him a tremendous value on draft day. The shoulder surgery probably makes unlikely he can play 140-plus games at this point.

When he’s active, he’s going to bat either fourth or fifth, which means he’s going to have a lot of RBI opportunities. You may be saying to yourself that he played 151 games in 2013 and he only had 79 RBIs. The reason why the RBI totals were low was because he only hit .224 with runners in scoring position, which is extremely low.

In regards to the power, the HR/FB rate has decreased year-over-year for three years. However, last year was the second to lowest HR/FB rate of his career so there should be some positive regression. That said, I don’t see 40-plus or even 30-plus home runs as a reasonable ceiling for him but I think he is capable for 25 if he plays in 140 games.

Last year he had a career high in strikeout rate and he was able to have .263 batting average with a .350 BABIP. Any time I see a high strikeout rate and high BABIP I immediately think regression. Last year he struggled a lot against fastballs. For example, last year he hit .285 with a 24.4% strikeout rate. From 2008-13 he hit .338 with a 16% strike out rate. These statistics can be one of two things: A) a decrease in bat speed or B) it’s a small sample size. I think it may be a combination of both. If the strikeout rate doesn’t decrease I see the batting average regressing to the .240s.

Since his 2014 numbers were so bad, his injuries last year and his current injury he may be a draft value. Two years ago he was one of the top five best players in baseball so it’s possible he could breakout. However, at the same time he has a low floor. If I’m in a shallow league I would take a flyer at the end of the draft.

J.J. Hardy

Bats: R | Age: 32 | Team: Orioles | Position: SS | RK: (143) | Player Rater: ESPN (160), NFBC (181)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	663	22	85	68	0/0	.238	.671	.253	14.9%	5.3%	30.6%	45.2%
2013	MLB	30	601	25	66	76	2/1	.263	.738	.263	11.3%	5.9%	25.3%	46.3%
2014	MLB	31	529	9	56	52	0/0	.268	.682	.317	18.3%	5.1%	21.8%	45.4%
Proj.			540	16	70	70	0	.264						

After three seasons of at least 22 home runs **J.J. Hardy** only hit 9 and not surprisingly had the lowest

HR/FB of his career (5.6%). Offensive fluctuations have been apart of his game his entire career so it wasn't totally unusual for the power to disappear. The big question is will the power come back in 2015?

First, he played the fewest number of games since 2011 because he missed a few games here and there with a few nagging injuries (mostly lower back), but never landed on the DL. Back injuries are troubling especially for a shortstop. Also, once someone starts to have back problems very rarely do they completely go away.

What's strange about his batting average was it was relatively the same as the past years, but he achieved last year's batting average with a much higher BABIP. Last year he hit a career low .188 on fly balls and a career best .333 on ground balls. It looks as though both numbers should regress back to his career norms so the batting average should be in the .260s.

In regards to the power, it should positively regress, but I think 22 is the ceiling rather than the floor. Creating arbitrary beginning and end points is never fully reliable, but it can provide a glimpse into what happened. From June 1 to the end of the season he had 9 home runs with a 8.7 HR/FB rate, which is close to the same rates he posted the past two seasons. Also, he hit 28 doubles, which is nearly identical to the number of doubles he hit the past three seasons.

I also believe there was also a human element to his low power numbers because I'm sure it must have been an anchor in his mind and probably snowballed which contributed to the delay of his first home run. It's important to remember these players are human beings and this isn't Strat-O-Matic.

Bryce Harper

Bats: R | Age: 22 | Team: Nationals | Position: OF | RK: (46) | Player Rater: ESPN (182), NFBC (212)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	19	533	22	98	59	18/6	.270	.817	.310	20.1%	9.4%	27.2%	45.1%
2013	MLB	20	424	20	71	58	11/4	.274	.854	.306	18.9%	12.3%	23.4%	46.9%
2014	MLB	21	352	13	41	32	2/2	.273	.768	.352	26.3%	9.6%	18.7%	47.2%
Proj.			550	27	79	88	7	.265						

It's hard to forget **Bryce Harper** just turned 22 years old this past October. For a lot of top tier prospects they're entering Double-A at the age of 22, but Harper is performing at the Major League level.

For two years in a row Harper has missed a substantial amount of time due to injury. What's interesting is both of those injuries came on fluke plays. Last year he tore a ligament in his thumb sliding into a base and in 2013 it was because he ran into a wall while playing a fly ball. Usually I like players staying healthy in the future if the injuries are fluky rather than tissue-based injuries, but since he plays the game so hard the likelihood of him sustaining a fluky injury is higher.

Starting on April 26, 2014 he missed 57 games with the torn ligament in his thumb. For the first 25 games of the season he struggled, hitting only .232. When he came off the DL on June 30 it was obvious

he wasn't 100% when he came back from the DL because he was rolling over on a lot of balls he would've crushed. When August rolled around he caught fire. In the last two months of the season he hit .283 with a .805 OPS and ten home runs.

Also, his strikeout rate increased dramatically last year as it rose seven percentage points (from 18.9% to 26.3%). You may be thinking a lot of that increase occurred when he first came back from the DL, but he struck out 26.9% the last two months of the season.

If you look at his three Major League seasons he has hit between .270-.274 every year so it's natural to project him to have a batting average in that range in 2015. However, last year he was able to hit .273 last year with an incredibly high .352 BABIP. The BABIP was fueled by a .333 batting average on ground balls. The two years prior he only hit .240 on ground balls. If the high strikeout rate continues to be north of the 25% may only be a .250 hitter next year.

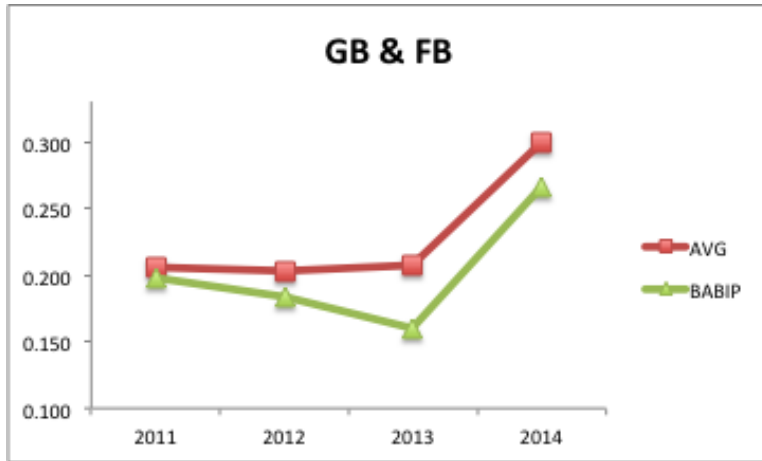
Since Harper is so young and has missed big chunks of the past two seasons it's hard to get a gauge what his current true talent really is. He has the raw physical tools to be the best fantasy player in baseball, which makes him intriguing on draft day. If he can play in 145-plus games he easily hits 26 home runs with room for more and if **Matt Williams** doesn't bat him seventh all year he could have 90-plus RBIs.

Josh Harrison

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Pirates | Position: 3B, OF | RK: (113) | Player Rater: ESPN (35), NFBC (36)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	249	3	34	16	7/3	.233	.624	.259	13.4%	3.6%	34.2%	40.1%
2013	MLB	25	88	3	10	14	2/0	.250	.699	.253	10.5%	2.1%	22.5%	48.8%
2014	MLB	26	520	13	77	52	18/7	.315	.837	.353	14.7%	4.0%	24.4%	37.9%
Proj.			500	8	73	53	19	.279						

Josh Harrison had an amazing year, but I don't think it's going to last because he BABIPed his way to good numbers. The image below shows his batting average and BABIP on his ground balls and fly balls for his entire Major League career.



We’re still dealing with a small sample size as he only had 284 ABs in 2014 and 318 ABs from 2011-13. So it’s possible his true talent level is an average of his career numbers on these types of batted balls. Also, it’s possible he got better and became a better baseball player. However, there is additional data to suggest that has not happened.

The table below shows his swing and miss percentage on balls in the strike zone (SwStr%) and contact on pitches in the strike zone for his career (Z-Contact%):

Year	SwStr%	Z-Contact%
2011	7.5%	87.9%
2012	8.3%	89.1%
2013	8.0%	87.4%
2014	9.9%	86.8%

You’ll notice he’s making less contact and swinging and missing more on pitches in the strike zone, which doesn’t fit the profile of someone who has dramatically improved.

On the positive side it looks as though he’ll get every opportunity to play at third base and fill-in elsewhere around the diamond. Also, he has stolen 15-plus bases in four of his past five seasons (in the majors and minors), and he should score a lot of runs since he is expected to hit atop the batting order.

Chase Headley

Bats: R | Age: 30 | Team: Padres | Position: 3B | RK: (132) | Player Rater: ESPN (159), NFBC (166)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	604	31	95	115	17/6	.286	.875	.337	22.5%	12.3%	27.4%	48.9%
2013	MLB	29	520	13	59	50	8/4	.250	.747	.319	23.7%	11.2%	22.6%	46.8%
2014	MLB	30	470	13	55	49	7/3	.243	.700	.301	23.0%	9.6%	22.9%	42.7%
Proj.			500	15	66	66	7	.265						

In mid-December the Yankees resigned **Chase Headley** to a reasonable four-year \$52M deal. As a Yankee (224 PAs) he hit .262 with six home runs (14.0% HR/FB rate) and three stolen bases. That may not seem like much, but if apply those numbers to a full season (and yes, I know this point is inherently flawed) he would've hit 21 home runs with 7-8 stolen bases. Those are pretty good numbers for someone you can grab late in your draft.

It's also important to note he was only hitting .229 with seven home runs and four stolen bases with the Padres before being traded to the Yankees. It's possible he wasn't healthy because he was dealing with a [calf strain](#) to begin the year.

With Headley it's all about health. In 2013 he fractured his thumb in Spring Training then he had a torn meniscus in his left knee that happened in March. For those reasons I gave Headley a mulligan and discounted that season in last years guide.

If you remove the fluke 2012 season fantasy owners should expect 12-15 home runs with 7-plus stolen bases. The big question is what type of batting average will he have? It all depends on his health; if he's healthy, .265 is his floor because he makes enough contact and his approach at the plate is conducive to an above average batting average.

Jason Heyward

Bats: L | Age: 25 | Team: Cardinals | Position: OF | RK: (36) | Player Rater: ESPN (73), NFBC (67)

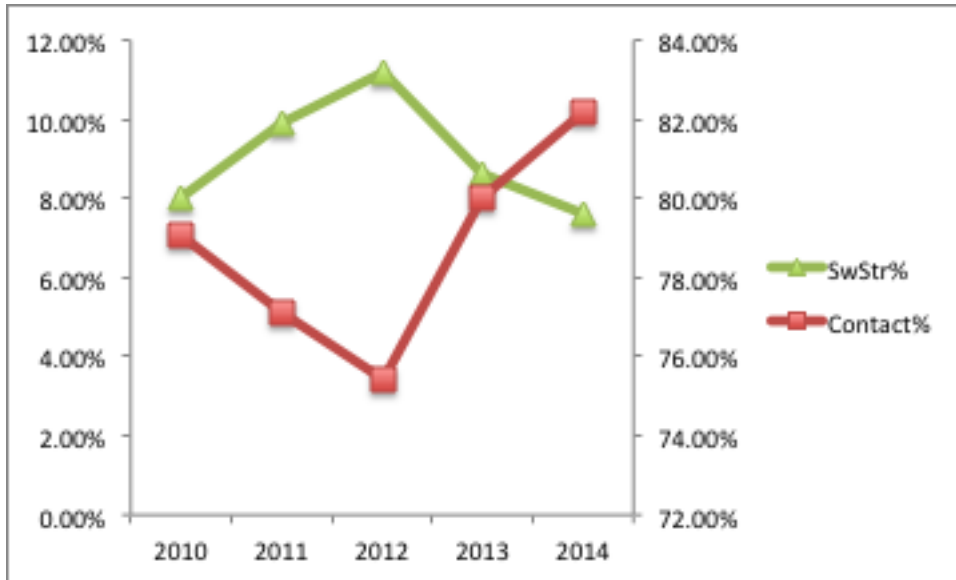
YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	587	27	93	82	21/8	.269	.814	.319	23.3%	8.9%	29.7%	44.1%
2013	MLB	23	382	14	67	38	2/4	.254	.776	.281	16.6%	10.9%	21.3%	44.2%
2014	MLB	24	573	11	74	58	20/4	.271	.735	.308	15.1%	10.3%	20.5%	45.6%
Proj.			550	16	70	85	21	.283						

After an injury plagued 2013 season, **Jason Heyward** played a full season. Unfortunately for his fantasy owners he didn't provide a lot of fantasy value; specifically in the power department.

His overall numbers were dampened by a brutal April. The table below shows his 2014 numbers for April compared to the rest of the year.

Splits	AVG	BABIP	HR	HR/FB
April	.206	.257	2	6.1%
Rest	.284	.318	9	6.5%

The biggest reason why I the "Rest" batting average can be repeated in 2015 is because the strikeout rate has declined year-over-year while the contact rates and swing and misses on strikes have improved year-over-year (image below).



In regards to the power, it's going to positively regress but the question is how much? I don't see 27 home runs coming back. The move to the St. Louis doesn't have a huge impact on his power, but the power alleys in right field are more favorable in Atlanta than St. Louis. I do think he can hit 15-19 home runs.

The biggest question is where will he hit in the lineup. I would bat him second and that would easily be the best spot in the lineup for his fantasy value. In regards to the stolen bases its possible he gets the green light more often, but there isn't a big difference in stolen base management between the Cardinals and Braves.

Aaron Hill

Bats: R | Age: 33 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: 2B | RK: (170) | Player Rater: ESPN (175), NFBC (189)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	609	26	93	85	14/5	.302	.882	.317	12.9%	7.8%	33.5%	35.0%
2013	MLB	31	327	11	45	41	1/4	.291	.818	.312	13.3%	8.0%	27.9%	38.2%
2014	MLB	32	501	10	52	60	4/3	.244	.654	.276	17.0%	5.2%	24.8%	34.6%
Proj.			520	15	60	60	1	.261						

There was no bigger believer in **Aaron Hill** last year than me. Since joining the Diamondbacks he was .290-plus hitter and he started hitting for power again. In 2013 he missed time because he was hit in the hand by James McDonald of the Pirates. After coming back he showed no ill-effect of the injury, hitting .295/.360/.452 in 239 PAs. However, last year he struggled the entire year. One of the reasons why he struggled was because he was fairly unlucky on any type of ball he hit into the field (table below shows his performance against ground balls and fly balls).

Year	FB AVG	GB AVG	AVG
2009	.328	.242	.286
2010	.279	.186	.205
2011	.184	.248	.246
2012	.280	.313	.302
2013	.338	.248	.291
2014	.217	.214	.244

Usually when he has struggled to hit for average he’s been brutal against either ground balls or fly balls, but not both at the same time, which either means he got incredibly unlucky and/or he stopped making harder contact. I believe it was a combination of both and some positive regression should occur.

From 2009-13 he has a 10.6% HR/FB rate and last year his HR/FB rate was 5.8%, but how much positive regression can he have when he’s going to turn 33 in late March?

Having Jekyll and Hyde seasons is not new for Hill. I wouldn’t be surprised if he bounces back next year when he gets a little luckier. He’s signed for another two years so he should be able to begin the year as the starting second baseman. The Diamondbacks are rebuilding and they want to trade Hill so they can allow some of their kids to play so I think Hill will get every chance to play so they can trade him at the trade deadline.

Matt Holliday

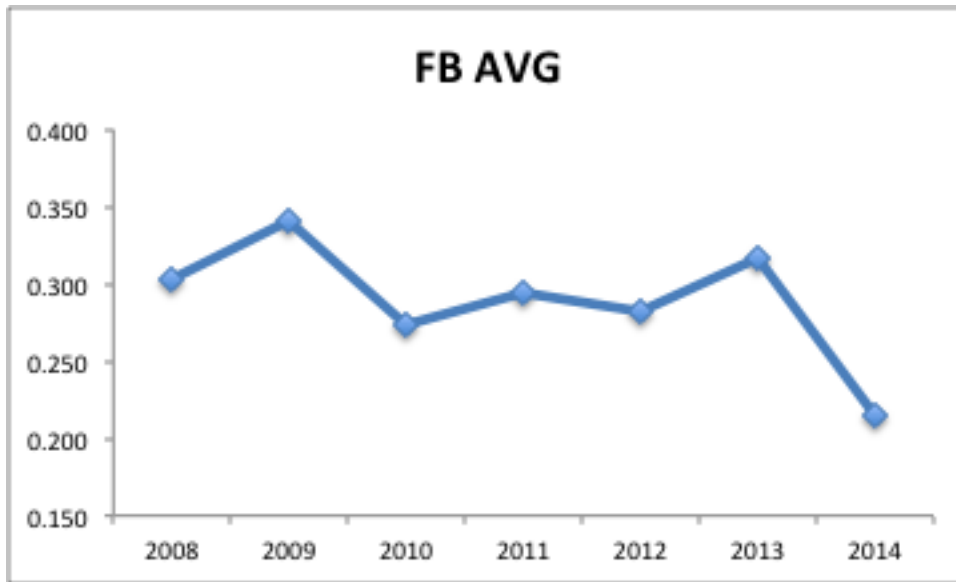
Bats: R | Age: 35 | Team: Cardinals | Position: OF | RK: (50) | Player Rater: ESPN (55), NFBC (53)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	32	599	27	95	102	4/4	.295	.877	.337	19.2%	10.9%	28.8%	45.8%
2013	MLB	33	520	22	103	94	6/1	.300	.879	.322	14.3%	11.5%	22.8%	45.9%
2014	MLB	34	574	20	83	90	4/1	.272	.811	.298	15.0%	11.1%	21.4%	45.8%
Proj.			540	19	84	93	2	.283						

Other than the batting average **Matt Holliday** had another Matt Holliday season; hitting 20-plus home runs, 90-plus RBIs, 80-plus runs and a couple of stolen bases. In January he is going to turn 35 years old, which means he’ll likely slip in drafts. The question is should he slip in drafts even though he’s been incredibly consistent for basically his entire career.

There’s an adage of “I rather sell a year too early than buy a year too late.” This makes sense because usually players start declining dramatically as soon as they reach their early 30s, but there are exceptions. It looks as though Holliday has been one of the exceptions so far. Even though the home run totals were low he still had the same extra base hit percentage as years past, which indicate he should continue to hit near 20 home runs.

Last years .272 batting average was the lowest of his career, which could cause some fantasy owners to think he is about to start his decline. However, the reason why his batting average was so low was he was incredibly unlucky on fly balls. The image below shows batting average on fly balls since 2008.



I think the batting average positively regresses, but there’s more data to suggest the batting average should improve. Despite the low batting average all the advanced statistics indicate his plate coverage and approach at the plate have improved. First, his swinging strike rate has decreased year-over-year since 2011. Second, his contact rate has improved year-over-year during that same time span.

Eric Hosmer

Bats: L | Age: 25 | Team: Royals | Position: 1B | Player Rater: (76) | ESPN (133), NFBC (138)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	535	14	65	60	16/1	.232	.663	.255	15.9%	9.4%	24.9%	54.2%
2013	MLB	23	623	17	86	79	11/4	.302	.801	.335	14.7%	7.5%	19.1%	54.0%
2014	MLB	24	503	9	54	58	4/2	.270	.716	.312	17.0%	6.4%	20.9%	51.4%
Proj.			550	17	75	75	6	.283						

Entering the 2014 season I wasn’t buying **Eric Hosmer** because he hits too many ground balls for him to have massive power potential.

In last years guide I said, “n the last two seasons, there were 65 players with 400+ plate appearances with a ground ball rate 49.5 percent or higher. Of those players, only one player hit more than 20 home runs (22 from Kendrys Morales). On average the 65 players had an average of 8.5 home runs, which makes me question how high Hosmer’s power potential could be. He has had a propensity for hitting ground balls his entire career: 51.5 percent and 45.7 percent in 2012 and 2011 respectively.”

In early August Hosmer went on the DL with a stress fracture in his hand. The injury [occurred on July 20](#) in Boston. Before the injury he only had six home runs, .272 batting average with six home runs. After coming off the DL he hit .290 with three home runs, which suggest suffered no ill effects from the stress fracture.

Last year his ground ball rate dropped, but it's still north of 50%. Therefore I still do not see him hitting more than 20 home runs in 2015. The batting average should positively regress, but his playoff performance and the elite prospect ranking will make him a very trendy player come draft day. Do not get caught up by the hype.

Ryan Howard

Bats: L | Age: 35 | Team: Phillies | Position: 1B | RK: (174) | Player Rater: ESPN (116), NFBC (98)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	32	260	14	28	56	0/0	.219	.718	.287	33.9%	8.6%	31.1%	43.9%
2013	MLB	33	286	11	34	43	0/0	.266	.784	.349	30.0%	7.3%	30.5%	40.6%
2014	MLB	34	569	23	65	95	0/0	.223	.690	.288	29.3%	10.3%	28.1%	43.0%
Proj.			500	22	60	80	0	.215						

After two injury marred seasons **Ryan Howard** played a full season last year and surprisingly knocked in 95 RBIs and 23 home runs. The reason why he finished as high as he did on the Player Rater was the RBI and home run totals. The reason why he had so many home runs was he played every day in the cleanup spot. Howard can no longer heat lefties and should be platooned at this point. If he does get platooned he's almost not ownable in most formats because he won't get enough RBIs and runs to compensate for the increase in batting average.

Torii Hunter

Bats: R | Age: 39 | Team: Tigers | Position: OF | RK: (126) | Player Rater: ESPN (63), NFBC (65)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	36	534	16	81	92	9/1	.313	.817	.389	22.8%	6.5%	25.4%	53.1%
2013	MLB	37	606	17	90	84	3/2	.304	.800	.344	17.3%	4.0%	21.7%	51.6%
2014	MLB	38	549	17	71	83	4/3	.286	.765	.311	15.2%	3.9%	22.1%	48.4%
Proj.			530	13	66	77	2	.274						

Torii Hunter is going to be 40 in July and he signed a one-year \$10.5M contract to have a farewell tour. In the past three years he has been incredibly consistent, hitting 16-17 home runs with a .286-plus batting average. After looking at the statistics I don't see any indication of him slowing down. That said, he did bat in front of the two best hitters in the game in **Mike Trout** and **Miguel Cabrera** which meant he probably saw a lot more fastballs than if anyone else was hitting behind him.

I'm projecting Hunter to put up numbers that are a little worse than the last couple of years. Even though there are no signs of him slowing down he provides moderate risk and a very low ceiling, which means if he's on your team he could potentially do more harm than good for your fantasy team.

Omar Infante

Bats: R | Age: 33 | Team: Royals | Position: 2B | RK: (173) | Player Rater: ESPN (153), NFBC (179)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	554	12	69	53	17/3	.274	.719	.291	11.1%	3.6%	31.1%	42.9%
2013	MLB	31	453	10	54	51	5/2	.318	.795	.333	9.2%	4.2%	27.9%	39.3%
2014	MLB	32	528	6	50	66	9/3	.252	.632	.275	11.8%	5.7%	26.1%	39.8%
Proj.			450	7	60	50	7	.279						

Last year I loved **Omar Infante** as greatly undervalued fantasy player because he provided a little bit of everything. Last year he dealt with various injuries to the lower back, the shoulder and hitting hit in the face. From 2008-13 he had a slash line of .296/.332/.413 and last year .252/.295/.338. Age may have contributed to the poor season, but I also think injuries played a role too. In an era where batting average is hard to find Infante could be a nice player to add to your roster in deeper mixed leagues.

Austin Jackson

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Tigers | Position: OF | RK: (85) | Player Rater: ESPN (104), NFBC (106)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	543	16	103	66	12/9	.300	.856	.371	21.7%	10.9%	33.8%	42.3%
2013	MLB	26	552	12	99	49	8/4	.272	.754	.333	21.0%	8.5%	25.6%	43.1%
2014	MLB	27	597	4	71	47	20/6	.256	.655	.325	22.0%	7.2%	24.2%	42.3%
Proj.			580	9	84	50	28	.264						

Last year **Austin Jackson** was having a slightly below average season, but after he was traded to the Mariners on July 31st his fantasy numbers got even worse (table below):

Splits	PA	AVG	BABIP	HR	SB	CS	HR/FB
DET	420	.273	.334	4	9	4	3.7%
SEA	236	.229	.309	0	11	2	0.0%

The biggest number that stands out is the extremely low HR/FB rate in both stints. Having a HR/FB that low isn't new to Jackson because he only had four home runs and a 3.3% HR/FB rate in his rookie season (at the age of 23). The following three years he went on to have a 8.8% HR/FB rate, which is probably his true talent level. I think the power should positively regress, but the ballpark is going to suppress a lot of his power. Maybe he hits ten home runs, but I don't think he'll come close to 16 again.

The positive takeaway from going to Seattle were the 11 stolen bases with the Mariners. At that clip he would have stole 33-36 stolen bases, which has value. Last year the Mariners were 9th in the majors in stolen base attempts (the Tigers were 7th and Jackson's stolen bases were way down, which is weird) so it's possible Jackson could steal 30 bases next year.

John Jaso

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Rays | Position: C | RK: (196) | Player Rater: ESPN (206), NFBC (222)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	294	10	41	50	5/0	.276	.850	.298	14.1%	15.5%	26.9%	46.6%
2013	MLB	29	207	3	31	21	2/1	.271	.759	.331	18.1%	15.3%	22.0%	40.9%
2014	MLB	30	307	9	42	40	2/0	.264	.767	.300	17.4%	8.1%	25.7%	36.9%
Proj.			400	12	55	45	0	.269						

For the second straight year **John Jaso's** season came to an end prematurely due to a concussion. For the first half of the year he had a .274/.353/.447 slash, but in the second half of the year he hit .235/.292/.383 (in 81 ABs). The biggest question moving forward is will he be able to catch again?

After being traded to the Rays his days of catching are probably long gone, but for this season he's going to be the DH against righties and he'll either bat leadoff or in the two spot, which has value in deeper mixed leagues. He has a career .273/.370/.426 slash line with a 8.3% HR/FB rate against righties. If he gets 420 at-bats he could have 10-15 home runs with 60-plus runs.

Desmond Jennings

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Rays | Position: OF | RK: (131) | Player Rater: ESPN (137), NFBC (132)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	505	13	85	47	31/2	.246	.702	.298	21.3%	8.2%	27.0%	44.1%
2013	MLB	26	527	14	82	54	20/8	.252	.748	.295	19.1%	10.6%	23.8%	48.6%
2014	MLB	27	479	10	64	36	15/6	.244	.697	.296	19.9%	8.7%	20.7%	52.2%
Proj.			500	12	78	46	20	.250						

This is what I wrote about **Desmond Jennings** in last year's fantasy guide, "I've never been a Jennings guy. He's always been one of those players who are drafted highly because of his scouting report as a prospect and not because of the actual production he's produced in the majors. For example in the last three seasons, he's never had a batting average above .259; he's never had more than 14 home runs; he's never scored more than 85 runs."

His 2014 season was so bad I can use the same analysis in last years fantasy guide for this year. His stolen bases and ground ball rate have decreased year-over-year and he's still not hitting for batting average (which is due to the high ground ball rate). He's fast enough to have an insanely high, fluky BABIP and could have a .280-plus batting average, but the smart money says he's not hitting more than .260.

Adam Jones**Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Orioles | Position: OF | RK: (11) | Player Rater: ESPN (18), NFBC (17)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	648	32	103	82	16/7	.287	.839	.313	18.1%	4.9%	23.1%	46.0%
2013	MLB	27	653	33	100	108	14/3	.285	.811	.314	19.7%	3.6%	23.7%	49.2%
2014	MLB	28	644	29	88	96	7/1	.281	.780	.311	19.5%	2.8%	21.8%	48.3%
Proj.			640	29	90	95	10	.283						

Adam Jones' approach at the plate isn't ideal (he doesn't walk and swings at a lot of pitches), but who cares. He's the model of consistency for fantasy; he hits .280-plus, hits 25-plus home runs and drives in and scores 80-plus runs every year.

The only quibble with his 2014 season was he stopped running. In the previous three seasons he averaged 14 stolen bases and last year he only provided seven. He had four in the first half and three in the second half so it appears he wasn't suffering from an injury. His stolen success rate has been exceptionally high the past two seasons so his stolen bases could easily positively regress next year.

Garrett Jones**Bats: L | Age: 34 | Team: Yankees | Position: 1B | RK: (182) | Player Rater: ESPN (164), NFBC (179)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	475	27	68	86	2/0	.274	.832	.293	20.0%	6.4%	37.5%	40.1%
2013	MLB	32	403	15	41	51	2/0	.233	.708	.271	23.0%	7.0%	23.2%	41.5%
2014	MLB	33	496	15	59	53	0/1	.246	.720	.290	21.2%	8.4%	26.8%	38.8%
Proj.			440	17	55	55	0	.262						

As of mid-February I have no idea how whose going to be the regular DH for the Yankees. It could be **Alex Rodriguez** or it could be **Garrett Jones**. If Jones finds his way to 450-plus at-bats he could be a sneaky 20-plus home run candidate. He's two years removed from a 27 home runs and the change in home ballparks could not be more dramatic. He'll likely be platooned against lefties, which is only increases his fantasy value; he's a career .268 hitter against righties and .200 hitter against lefties.

The biggest question is how obtainable is 20-plus home runs if given 450-plus at-bats? He's only hit 20-plus home runs once in the past four seasons and that season he had an incredibly high HR/FB rate. On the flip side he played in home ballparks that were incredibly hard to hit for power. The contrary to that is since 2009 his home HR/FB rate is 13.1% while his road HR/FB rate is only 13.6%. If the home ballparks were suppressing his home power then why didn't he hit for more power on the road? On top of all that he turns 34 in June; an age where power can drop off dramatically.

Some fantasy owners believe the home ballpark could cause an increase in home runs for Jones and I can see how that's possible. However, why didn't the ballpark dramatically help Brian McCann last year? I think Jones' realistic upside is 20 home runs.

Matt Joyce

Bats: L | Age: 30 | Team: Angels | Position: OF | RK: (198) | Player Rater: ESPN (187), NFBC (180)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	399	17	55	59	4/3	.241	.769	.281	22.1%	11.9%	33.4%	39.1%
2013	MLB	28	413	18	61	47	7/3	.235	.747	.251	18.1%	12.3%	30.9%	37.8%
2014	MLB	29	418	9	51	52	2/5	.254	.732	.316	22.5%	12.6%	23.7%	45.6%
Proj.			400	13	55	55	3	.240						

In mid-December the Angels acquired **Matt Joyce** to be their full time DH against right handed pitching (**C.J. Cron** will bat against lefties). For the past four seasons he's been in this platoon role and has been a usable player in deeper mixed leagues because his ability to hit 17-plus home runs. However, last year he had the lowest home run total in his career due to a career low 7.4% HR/FB rate, almost six percentage points less than his career rate. The HR/FB rate should positively regress, but how much?

The table shows his extra base percentage since 2008 (2009 was omitted because he only had 37 PAs).

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2008	61	31	50.8%
2010	52	28	53.8%
2011	128	53	41.4%
2012	96	38	39.6%
2013	97	40	41.2%
2014	106	34	32.1%

Since he didn't have any injuries it's hard to explain why he suddenly started to make less hard contact. It could be an outlier or it could be a sign he no longer has the power to smack 17-plus home runs. He's going to play most of next year at the age of 30 and considering the fact he hit so many ground balls (it increased ten percentage points from the previous year) leads me to believe the power should regress, but only to the 10-13 range.

In regards to the batting average I'm expecting it to regress back to the .240-249 range because the BABIP was 36 points higher than his career.

Matt Kemp

Bats: R | Age: 30 | Team: Padres | Position: OF | RK: (74) | Player Rater: ESPN (32), NFBC (31)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	403	23	74	69	9/4	.303	.906	.354	22.9%	8.9%	30.7%	44.9%
2013	MLB	28	263	6	35	33	9/0	.270	.723	.353	26.2%	7.6%	28.9%	40.5%
2014	MLB	29	541	25	77	89	8/5	.287	.852	.345	24.2%	8.7%	23.1%	43.8%
Proj.			540	19	73	80	5	.279						

On June 5 I wrote [Matt Kemp was a buy low](#) because he was making a lot of hard contact and had a low BABIP, which means a positive regression would occur. From that point on he went on to hit .311/.372/.561 with 20 home runs, three stolen bases and 74 RBI. I'm not trying to pat myself on the back ... ok, I am, but he was actually hitting in the month of May too. The table below shows his April and the rest of the year statistics for 2014.

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	HR
April	81	.225	.814	.273	28.4%	4
May-October	518	.296	.858	.354	23.6%	21

If you removed the first month of the year it was almost vintage Kemp (except for the stolen bases). There is another reason why I believe his 2014 season wasn't a fluke. The table shows his extra base percentage since 2008 and you'll notice it was the highest of his career.

Splits	XBH	XBH%
2008	61	34.7%
2009	58	32.2%
2010	59	39.3%
2011	76	39.0%
2012	47	38.5%
2013	21	29.6%
2014	66	42.6%

Obviously he missed a substantial amount of time in 2012 and 2013 with shoulder, ankle and hamstring injuries and the issue of having an injury in 2015 is higher than other players (especially since he'll play most of the year at the age of 30). Moving to to a corner position should reduce the wear and tear on his body, but rostering Kemp does come with risk. However, I think Kemp is back. By back I do not mean the 2011 near MVP season, but the 25-plus home run power.

In regards to the stolen bases it looks as though 10-14 may be his ceiling, especially since he only had a 61.5% stolen base success rate last year. Also, since he has dealt with ankle and hamstring issues the number of stolen base opportunities will most likely continue to be limited.

All of this is fine and good, but how does playing half his games in Petco Park affect his fantasy value? My original projection for Kemp was .300 AVG with 26 home runs 94 RBI, 82 runs and five stolen bases. After hearing he was traded my projection is now .279 AVG with 18 home runs, 80 RBI, 73 runs and five stolen bases. The reason for the drop was a combination of the ballpark and the ineptness of the offensive abilities of the rest of the lineup.

Howie Kendrick

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Dodgers | Position: 2B | RK: (116) | Player Rater: ESPN (50), NFBC (56)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	550	8	57	67	14/6	.287	.725	.347	19.4%	4.9%	20.0%	59.9%
2013	MLB	29	478	13	55	54	6/3	.297	.775	.340	17.3%	4.5%	17.7%	53.2%
2014	MLB	30	617	7	85	75	14/5	.293	.744	.347	16.3%	7.1%	14.1%	60.9%
Proj.			550	10	65	68	8	.289						

Last year I wrote **Howie Kendrick** was going way too late in drafts based on his overall potential to be a solid contributor in five categories. In 2013 he was coming off a down year with a myriad of injuries and missed a month with a hyperextended knee.

Last year he was healthy and provided similar numbers for the previous four years of his career (except for the injury shortened 2013 season, but even in that season he was on pace to put up similar numbers). The question is will he continue to post similar numbers with the Dodgers?

At the end of the season he’s going to be 32 years old and I wouldn’t be surprised if the stolen bases decrease. Also, he only had four stolen base attempts in the second half of the year.

In regards to the home run totals, seven was the lowest he’s hit since 2008. Not surprisingly his HR/FB rate was the lowest since 2008. Overall, a positive regression should occur, but the extra base hit percentage has been in decline for three years in a row (table below) leads me to believe he may only have 8-11 home runs.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2006	76	26	34.2%
2007	109	31	28.4%
2008	104	31	29.8%
2009	109	34	31.2%
2010	172	55	32.0%
2011	153	54	35.3%
2012	158	43	27.2%
2013	142	38	26.8%
2014	181	45	24.9%

There’s something to be said about reliability in fantasy. If you draft Kendrick he’s not going to win you

your league and at the same time he won't lose it for you too. When you draft him you're not going to get a lot of "oooooh's" and "ahhhhh's" from your league mates, but what you have to pay in order to get him will most likely net you a profit.

Ian Kinsler

Bats: R | Age: 32 | Team: Tigers | Position: 2B | RK: (89) | Player Rater: ESPN (20), NFBC (23)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	655	19	105	72	21/9	.256	.749	.270	12.3%	8.2%	30.8%	38.2%
2013	MLB	31	545	13	85	72	15/11	.277	.757	.288	9.6%	8.3%	24.0%	37.9%
2014	MLB	32	684	17	100	92	15/4	.275	.727	.288	10.9%	4.0%	28.7%	39.3%
Proj.			640	13	91	70	13	.255						

Even though he put up similar numbers to 2013, it was a tale of two halves for **Ian Kinsler**. The table below shows his numbers for the first three months of the year compared to the last three months.

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	Swng%	K%	GB%	FB%
First	.307	.830	.317	46.1%	9.9%	36.2%	46.0%
Second	.239	.627	.261	48.7%	11.8%	41.1%	40.4%

I wrote in last year's guide and at [Baseball Professor](#) that Kinsler is trending down and is a player with much more downside than upside. Despite his aggregated totals the warning signs are still there. He benefitted greatly from a .317 BABIP, which is extremely uncharacteristic. Since 2009 he's only had a BABIP greater than .300 once. The .261 BABIP the last three months is a little low, but the second half numbers are more indicative of this true talent level, which means I expect the overall batting average to drop 10-20 points.

In regards to his speed, it looks as though he's not going to slow down as his stolen base attempt ratio was similar in the first and second halves. After only hitting 13 home runs in 2013 he bounced back with 17, but that was more of a function of him playing the most games of his Major League career. Last year was the lowest HR/FB rate of his career (it was 6.4% in 2010 too), which is an indicator that his power is diminishing. Some will have him in the top 5-7, among second basemen but not for me.

Jason Kipnis

Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Indians | Position: 2B | RK: (22) | Player Rater: ESPN (128), NFBC (125)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	591	14	86	76	31/7	.257	.714	.291	16.2%	10.0%	26.5%	48.5%
2013	MLB	26	564	17	86	84	30/7	.284	.818	.345	21.7%	11.6%	25.0%	44.7%
2014	MLB	27	500	6	61	41	22/3	.240	.640	.288	18.0%	9.0%	23.3%	47.1%
Proj.			560	15	85	80	28	.265						

Last year **Jason Kipnis** was considered among some fantasy owners as the number one second baseman entering drafts last year. If you drafted him last year you probably do not want to own him in 2015, which could be a mistake because he’s going to be a draft day value in 2015.

In late April he went on the DL with an oblique injury and missed 26 games. Kipnis [said the injury](#) “bothered him all year.” The oblique bothered him so much he had to make daily adjustments to his swing. Presumably the oblique should get better in the offseason and he should be able to perform to the level prior 2014.

First of all his batting average; it was the lowest of his career. Last year he hit .208 with a .260 BABIP against lefties, but prior to that he was a .261 hitter with a .317 BABIP. That .261 batting average fueled by a .308 batting average in 2013 so maybe .261 is not his true average, but either way positive regression should occur because I don’t see him hitting .208 against lefties again.

In regards to the power, there’s no way he’s going to have a 4.8% HR/FB rate next year. He makes too much hard contact to have that repeat itself. The table below shows his extra base hit percentage since 2012.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2012	152	40	26.3%
2013	160	57	35.6%
2014	120	32	26.7%

The first thing I noticed was his extra base hit percentage was identical to 2012 and he hit 14 home runs that year. Therefore I believe he’ll hit 14-18 home runs next year. Despite the oblique injury he still had 22 stolen bases and had a stolen base success rate of 88%, which indicates he could steal 26-plus next year.

In mid-December he surgery to repair a damaged tendon in left ring finger; the Indians expect Kipnis to be ready when the season starts, but since the organization has so much invested in him it’s very possible they’re very cautious and he starts the season on the DL.

Adam LaRoche

Bats: L | Age: 35 | Team: Nationals | Position: 1B | RK: (53) | Player Rater: ESPN (62), NFBC (58)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	32	571	33	76	100	1/1	.271	.853	.298	21.3%	10.4%	34.2%	34.6%
2013	MLB	33	511	20	70	62	4/1	.237	.735	.277	22.2%	12.2%	31.3%	37.5%
2014	MLB	34	494	26	73	92	3/0	.259	.817	.277	18.4%	14.0%	26.6%	37.3%
Proj.			500	28	72	95	0	.269						

In mid-November the White Sox signed **Adam LaRoche** to a two year \$25M contract to serve as the DH. On draft day LaRoche is not going to get a lot of oooh’s and awww’s by your opponents but you’re

going to be getting a player who won't win you your league and most importantly, won't lose you your league.

For career he's basically averaged 25 home runs with .259-plus batting average for pretty much for his whole career and I do not see any indication he's going to stop in 2015.

After his worst fantasy season (where he played a full year) he had a nice bounce back season in 2014. The strikeout rate decreased four percentage points and it was the second lowest of his Major League career; also, the contact rate was the highest its been since 2008.

In regards to the power he should see an up-tick in power because he's moving to one of the best home run parks in the majors. In the last two years he's hit 162 fly balls and he has a career 15% HR/FB rate. Last year his HR/FB rate was 16% so even if that stabilizes in 2015 he's going to hit 26 home runs again (and with room for more).

LaRoche struggles against lefties. Since 2008 he has a .233/.288/.413 slash line against lefties (in 1,060 PAs) so he'll likely be platooned, which would increase his fantasy viability because he would hit 20-30points higher.

Brett Lawrie

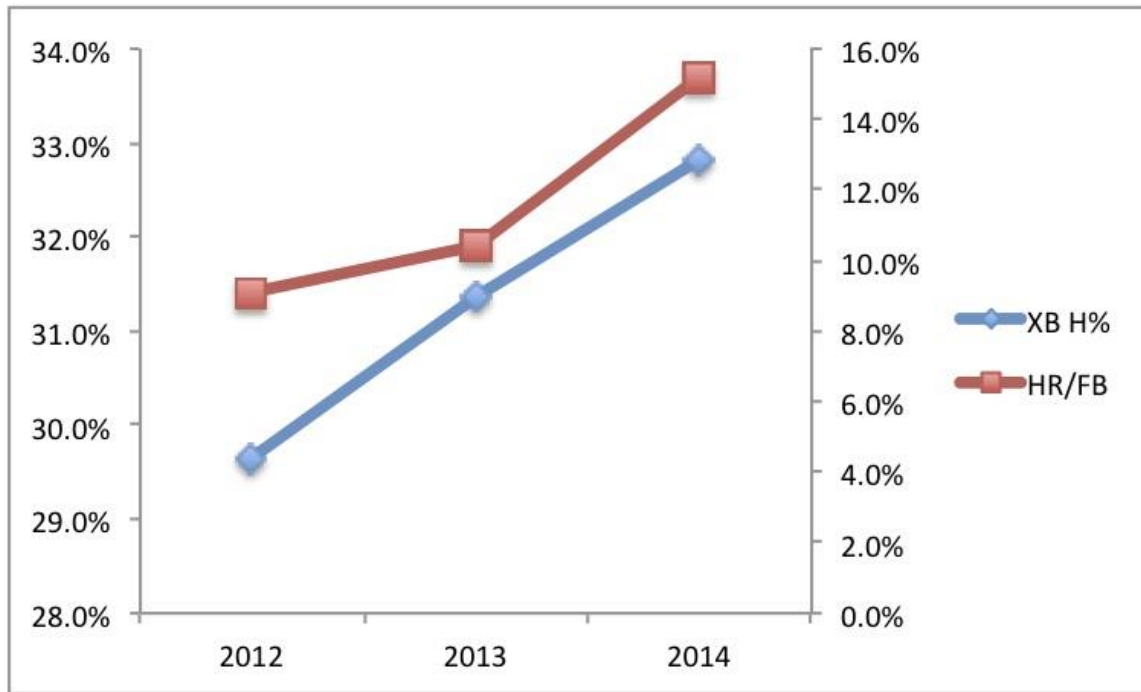
Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Athletics | Position: 3B | RK: (115) | Player Rater: ESPN (249), NFBC (247)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	494	11	73	48	13/8	.273	.729	.311	16.0%	6.2%	21.6%	50.7%
2013	MLB	23	401	11	41	46	9/5	.254	.712	.280	15.4%	6.8%	21.4%	49.6%
2014	MLB	24	259	12	27	38	0/0	.247	.722	.260	17.4%	5.7%	27.4%	47.2%
Proj.			490	18	75	75	5	.256						

Brett Lawrie had another injury-shortened season in 2014 — his [first injury](#), which cost him to miss 36 games, was fluky in nature as he was hit in the hand by a pitch. The, during his first game back he was removed from the game just three innings in and was placed on the DL with a [left oblique strain](#).

Since Lawrie has had trouble staying on the field he has been criticized for playing the game “too hard” or going 110%. The fact he has had trouble staying healthy is the reason why he didn't attempt one stolen base last year. If he doesn't steal bases that's going to severely lower his fantasy potential, but as we saw with [Todd Frazier](#) players can begin stealing bases on a whim and without any indicators from previous history.

What impressed me about Lawrie's season was he started to hit for more power. Some fantasy owners may discount the power as fluky because his HR/FB rate was substantially higher than his career norm (15.2% compared to 11.1%). However, he was making much more hard contact than ever before. The image below shows his HR/FB rate and extra base hit percentage since 2012 (I excluded 2011 because that season was incredibly fluky). It's important to remember we're only dealing with a small sample size, but the data shows a promising trend.



Any time I see an increase in power numbers and HR/FB rate the first thing I look at is the extra base hit percentage. If a player is making harder contact he should be hitting more doubles, triples and home runs. With Lawrie the power he posted last year looks legitimate. The power is going to be deflated by the ballpark, but if he can play 140-plus games he can hit 20-25 home runs.

In regards to his batting average I don't see him approaching .265 because the strikeout rate was two percentage points higher than the previous year (15.4% to 17.4%) and his swing rate on pitches outside of the strike zone increased nearly three percentage points (30.3% to 33.1%).

I love buying low on once highly touted prospects who haven't lived up to the lofty expectation and I have a strong feeling Lawrie is going to be on a lot of my fantasy teams in 2015. The power potential is real and he has the raw speed to steal 5-10 bases — let's not forget that he'll be just 25 years old.

Adam Lind

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Brewers | Position: 1B | RK: (159) | Player Rater: ESPN (168), NFBC (264)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	321	11	28	45	0/0	.255	.729	.282	17.3%	8.2%	28.1%	48.3%
2013	MLB	29	465	23	67	67	1/0	.288	.854	.324	19.8%	9.8%	24.3%	47.8%
2014	MLB	30	290	6	38	40	0/0	.321	.860	.369	15.1%	8.8%	24.8%	47.9%
Proj.			400	16	55	60	0	.280						

From 2008-14 **Adam Lind** has a slash line of .296/.358/.522 against right handed pitching so there's no question he can smash righties. He's moving from one hitter friendly ballpark to another one. In fact

Miller Park may be better for Lind because the ballpark is more conducive for left handed power. Last year he missed a lot of time with a foot fracture and lower back issues. If, and that's a big if, he can get 480 at-bats he could be a very good fantasy player in deep mixed leagues because of the ballpark and he's going to bat cleanup.

James Loney

Bats: L | Age: 30 | Team: Rays | Position: 1B | RK: (133) | Player Rater: ESPN (91), NFBC (95)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	434	6	37	41	0/3	.249	.630	.269	11.0%	6.0%	23.6%	45.6%
2013	MLB	29	549	13	54	75	3/1	.299	.778	.326	12.9%	7.4%	22.6%	43.0%
2014	MLB	30	600	9	59	69	4/0	.290	.716	.319	12.3%	6.3%	21.5%	43.9%
Proj.			570	10	60	70	3	.289						

After the dismantling of the Rays their lineup is going to be pretty bad next year. I wouldn't be surprised if they are the worst offense in the AL next year. Last year I thought **James Loney's** batting average would regress significantly because it was primarily fueled by an incredibly high .326 BABIP (most of which was front loaded during the first half of the 2013 season).

However, last year he sported a .290 batting average last year and this time he pretty much hit the same average the entire year so maybe he's now a safe .290-plus hitter. Other than batting average he doesn't offer a lot of power and stolen bases. Also, the Rays lineup is going to be bad so his RBI and run opportunities will be suppressed. Loney is only a replacement level first baseman in deeper leagues.

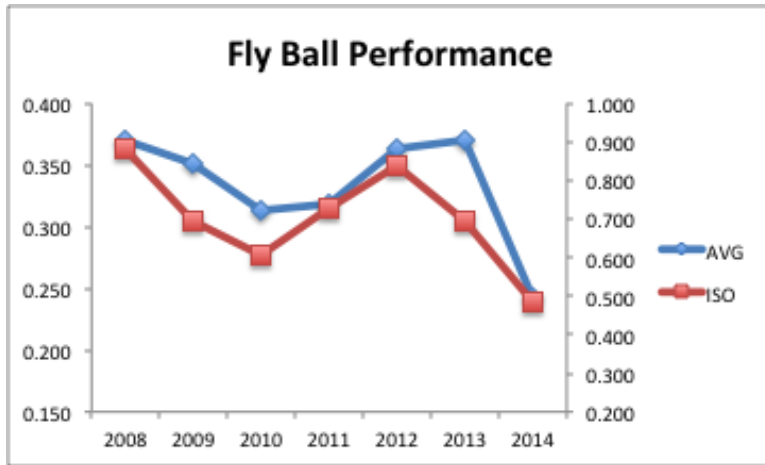
Evan Longoria

Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Rays | Position: 3B | RK: (66) | Player Rater: ESPN (71), NFBC (60)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	273	17	39	55	2/3	.289	.896	.313	19.6%	10.6%	33.5%	38.6%
2013	MLB	27	614	32	91	88	1/0	.269	.842	.312	23.4%	10.1%	37.6%	37.6%
2014	MLB	28	624	22	83	91	5/0	.253	.724	.285	19.0%	8.1%	29.5%	40.1%
Proj.			575	22	77	90	2	.267						

From 2011-12 **Evan Longoria** missed substantial amount of time with tissue injuries (oblique strain and hamstring strain), but in the past two seasons he's played 322 games and appears has found a way to stay healthy. Even though he played every game last year he didn't really do a whole lot especially in regards to the power.

The image below shows his fly ball batting average and ISO since 2008.



Obviously ISO is dependent upon batting average so if the batting average is low so will the ISO. That said, the trend does not look good. When a players power drops off the next thing I look at is the extra base hit percentage. The table below shows his extra base hit percentage and like the previous image the trend does not look good.

Year	XBH	XBH%
2008	60	49.2%
2009	77	47.0%
2010	73	43.2%
2011	58	49.2%
2012	31	39.2%
2013	74	44.8%
2014	49	31.0%

Not only did the home run power drop off significantly, so did the doubles and triples. The reason why he didn't hit a lot of extra base hits was due to the poor performance on fly balls (table below).

Year	AVG	OPS	XBH
2008	.370	1.599	37
2009	.351	1.383	47
2010	.313	1.209	42
2011	.318	1.352	37
2012	.370	1.421	55
2013	.242	.955	31

It looks like he had some bad luck and there should be some positive regression in the batting average and extra base hits, but last year his ground ball rate was the highest its been since 2009. He's going to play all of 2105 at the age of 29 so there is hope the power positively regresses, but the trend doesn't look good. Either way, I don't believe he hits more than 29 home runs next year.

In regards to his batting average, it should positively regress, but not as much as you think. If he's making less hard contact it's going to be more difficult for the .285 BABIP to positively regress significantly (because batting average is dependent on either making hard contact, being fast or being lucky).

Jed Lowrie

Bats: B | Age: 30 | Team: Astros | Position: SS | RK: (184) | Player Rater: ESPN (211), NFBC (237)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	340	16	43	42	2/0	.244	.769	.257	16.8%	11.1%	43.0%	31.0%
2013	MLB	29	603	15	80	75	1/0	.290	.791	.319	13.7%	7.6%	29.9%	34.3%
2014	MLB	30	502	6	59	50	0/0	.249	.676	.281	14.0%	9.0%	27.4%	33.6%
Proj.			480	11	55	65	0	.265						

In mid-December the Astros signed **Jed Lowrie** to a three-year \$23M deal, which is odd because they already have **Jose Altuve** at second base and **Carlos Correa**, the former number overall pick, is one year (maybe two) away from becoming the shortstop. Either way, he will be the starting shortstop for the Astros in 2015.

If you compare his 2013 season with 2014 the first number that jumps out is the 38 point decrease in BABIP. The logical conclusion would be the BABIP should positively regress next year and he should hit .280-plus. However, I think the 2013 season was his fluke year in regards to his batting average. Prior to 2014 his career slash line is .261/.331/.423, which represents his true talent level. Therefore, Lowrie did perform poorly, which it wasn't that far from his true talent level.

He suffered a fractured finger in mid-August and missed two weeks. It's possible that the injury negatively effected his batting average but it was the opposite. When he returned hit for a high average (.295) but it was mostly an empty batting average as only three of his 28 hits were hit for extra bases. Watching him hit it was obvious he wasn't able to hit the ball with any authority.

Prior to 2013 he has a career 7.0% HR/FB rate and last year it was 3.2% so positive regression should occur. Unlike with the A's, Lowrie will probably hit in the bottom third of the lineup or maybe in the sixth spot which means his RBIs and run totals will be suppressed. Overall, he'll hit 10-plus home runs with a .255-plus batting average without much else.

Jonathan Lucroy

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Brewers | Position: C | RK: (93) | Player Rater: ESPN (64), NFBC (71)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	316	12	46	58	4/1	.320	.881	.338	12.7%	6.4%	29.3%	42.8%
2013	MLB	27	521	18	59	82	9/1	.280	.795	.290	11.9%	7.9%	27.6%	40.2%
2014	MLB	28	585	13	73	69	4/4	.301	.837	.324	10.8%	10.1%	21.3%	42.6%
Proj.			540	15	65	72	4	.295						

Other than his wife [dropping a suitcase on his foot](#) Jonathan Lucroy has been relatively healthy in his Major League career. It was that fact I had him as my fifth highest ranked catcher in the preseason. Any time there is a hitter who is successful (in the aggregate) who plays half of his games in a bam-box of a home ballpark the first thing I look at are the home-road splits. With Lucroy this is not entirely the case (the table below shows his career stats).

Splits	AVG	BABIIP	HR/FB
Home	.285	.302	10.1%
Away	.285	.320	8.0%

Lucroy has a high floor and low ceiling. He's going to have a .285-plus batting average with 12-18 home runs with 70-plus RBIs and a couple of stolen bases. What gives Lucroy an advantage over other catchers is he will hit in the middle of the order, which will allow him plenty of RBI and run scoring opportunities. In 2013 he had nine steals (a career high) compared to only four in 2014. Last year he only had 50% (4 for 8) stolen base success rate, which means he may not run as much in 2015. However, prior to last year he has a 79.2% success rate so last year could be an outlier.

In mid-February it was announced Lucroy will miss 4-6 weeks of Spring Training because of a [strained right hamstring](#). The article goes on to say he started having issues with the hamstring this past August. Obviously this news doesn't bode well for his fantasy value, but the fact the injury occurred so early in the year I have optimism he'll be ready for Opening Day. That said, the fact he dealt with this injury last year means I wouldn't be surprised, because of the nature of playing catcher, if the injury reoccurs in 2015. If I was in a shallower league I would still draft him with the expectation he'll play 130-plus games, but in deeper formats he drops down a couple of spots.

Manny Machado

Bats: R | Age: 22 | Team: Orioles | Position: 3B | RK: (123) | Player Rater: ESPN (188), NFBC (228)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	19	191	7	24	26	2/0	.262	.739	.293	18.8%	4.5%	25.8%	47.1%
2013	MLB	20	667	14	88	71	6/7	.283	.746	.322	15.9%	4.1%	18.2%	49.8%
2014	MLB	21	327	12	38	32	2/0	.278	.755	.317	19.2%	5.6%	18.6%	49.0%
Proj.			500	15	71	68	1	.278						

Manny Machado has an inflated fantasy value within the fantasy community because fantasy owners take into account the elite defense he provides and neglect the subpar offense. For example, he's never hit more than 14 home runs, stole more than six bases, drove in more than 71 runs or had a batting average greater than .283.

On top of the lack luster production he's had two major knee surgeries within one calendar year. As of early November he is on track to be ready for Spring Training, but I have questions whether he can hold up for an entire season. If you watch how he got [injured last year](#) you'll see the injury happened on a seemingly routine play, which indicates there's a higher likelihood he'll reaggrevate it again. Also, since he's hurt his knee twice probably means he won't steal bases.

When he got hurt he had 12 home runs and was on pace to hit 20, which could create optimism his power in 2015. However, I'm not buying it. First, his HR/FB rate was 14.8%. His career rate before 2014 was 9.3%. He's still a high ground ball hitter (he hits ground balls 48% of the time) and in order hit 20-plus with a high ground ball rate he'll have to have another career high HR/FB rate.

If he can play a full year he'll perform slightly better than his 2013 numbers because he plays in a bam box and he'll be a year older and stronger, but he'll probably be over drafted again in 2015 and it certainly will not be me.

Nick Markakis

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Braves | Position: OF | RK: (105) | Player Rater: ESPN (90), NFBC (92)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	420	13	59	54	1/1	.298	.834	.310	10.8%	8.9%	27.5%	42.5%
2013	MLB	29	634	10	89	59	1/2	.271	.685	.291	10.9%	7.9%	20.3%	47.9%
2014	MLB	30	642	14	81	50	4/2	.276	.729	.299	11.8%	8.7%	23.4%	46.4%
Proj.			630	11	90	58	1	.289						

I don't understand why the Braves why signed **Nick Markakis** for as much and for long as they did, but that's inconsequential from a fantasy perspective. Since 2008-14 he has a 9.0% HR/FB rate at home compared to a 7.1% HR/FB rate on the road. That may not look like a lot, but that's a 21% decrease. He's moving from a great hitters ballpark to a pitchers park so his home runs are going to decrease.

At this point we know who **Nick Markakis** is. He's going to hit a lot of singles (due to a high contact and ground ball rates), hit 10-14 home runs with a .270-plus batting average and a .340-plus OBP. Since he's going to bat leadoff he's going to have 600-plus at-bats, which carries added value because his batting average will have a greater impact on your overall batting average. Markakis is more of a deep mixed league play as a fourth-fifth outfielder.

In mid-December Markakis had a successful [neck surgery to repair a herniated disc](#) in his neck. The recovery time is eight weeks, which means if everything occurs on that time line he should be able to resume baseball activities in time for Spring Training.

Starling Marte

Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Pirates | Position: OF | RK: (21) | Player Rater: ESPN (31), NFBC (29)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	167	5	18	17	12/5	.257	.737	.333	27.5%	4.4%	18.2%	59.5%
2013	MLB	24	510	12	83	35	41/15	.280	.784	.363	24.4%	4.4%	21.9%	54.4%
2014	MLB	25	495	13	73	56	30/11	.291	.808	.373	24.0%	6.1%	19.8%	50.5%
Proj.			530	13	67	74	35	.285						

Starling Marte has a very interesting profile because he has a very aggressive approach and subsequently strikes out a lot, but at the same time he hits for a high batting average. He's done this for two years in a row so it's reasonable to say this is true talent level and therefore, can be repeated. Last year I wasn't buying Marte because I thought he BABIPed his way to a good rookie campaign, but after last year I was clearly wrong.

The biggest question I have is there room for improvement with the power? He has a career 14.2% HR/FB rate on the road compared to only 9.7% at home so it's possible the home ballpark (which is a very pitcher friendly park) is suppressing his power. Marte turned 26 years old in October so it's possible there's an uptick in power, but I don't see it happening. Maybe he has a fluky HR/FB rate, but I wouldn't bank on it.

In terms of the stolen bases his stolen base success rate was identical the past two seasons (73.2%), which is not high enough to be successful in the long term (80% is the minimum threshold to provide a positive run expectancy over a substantial sample size). That may be why his stolen base attempts decreased so much last year. He has the pure speed to steal 40-plus, but at this point I don't think I can reasonably expect that next year. That said, stealing bases is a skill that can be learned and improved upon pretty quickly.

Leonys Martin

Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Rangers | Position: OF | RK: (137) | Player Rater: ESPN (69), NFBC (64)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	46	0	6	6	3/0	.174	.605	.229	23.1%	7.7%	19.4%	50.0%
2013	MLB	25	457	8	66	49	36/9	.260	.698	.319	20.5%	5.5%	17.4%	55.4%
2014	MLB	26	533	7	68	40	31/12	.274	.689	.336	19.6%	6.7%	15.2%	55.4%
Proj.			510	8	38	53	32	.270						

When I look at **Leonys Martin** (from a fantasy perspective) I think he's shown who he is; he'll provide 30-

plus stolen bases with an above average batting average without much else. He doesn't make enough hard contact to hit more than ten home runs. He doesn't have a high OBP so he'll likely be relegated to the bottom third of the lineup which will limit his RBI and run scoring opportunities. Also, he's struggled against left handed pitching in his Major League career with a .235/.279/.296 slash line in 300 PAs. This poor performance could lead to him being platooned against lefties.

Martin is the type of player who I avoid during drafts (based on where I have to get him) because he doesn't offer a lot of upside and is essentially a one-category player where that one category is not hard to find on the waiver wire as the year progresses. If he were to steal an elite level of bases (45-plus bases) I would consider drafting him, but I don't see him stealing that many in 2015.

Russell Martin

Bats: R | Age: 32 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: C | RK: (181) | Player Rater: ESPN (109), NFBC (131)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	422	21	50	53	6/1	.211	.713	.222	19.6%	10.9%	27.4%	49.2%
2013	MLB	30	438	15	51	55	9/5	.226	.703	.266	21.3%	11.5%	22.3%	51.2%
2014	MLB	31	379	11	45	67	4/4	.290	.832	.336	17.0%	12.8%	19.2%	50.3%
Proj.			420	20	53	63	3	.235						

From 2009-2013, in 2,113 ABs, **Russell Martin** has .234 batting average with a .263 BABIP, but in 2014 he had a .297 batting average with a .343 BABIP. In most cases it's easy to say that a player's season was entirely BABIP dependent, but that's the case with Martin. The hit type distribution and hit locations are all the same. Other than the batting average, the steals were way down. Going to Toronto helps his power potential and could hit 20-plus. In the last two years (with the Pirates) he hit 26 home runs with nine at home (with a 8.9% HR/FB rate) and 17 on the road (with a 17% HR/FB rate). He probably should be owned in a 10-team league, but I think fantasy owners are going to pay for what he did last year, which won't make him a value.

Victor Martinez

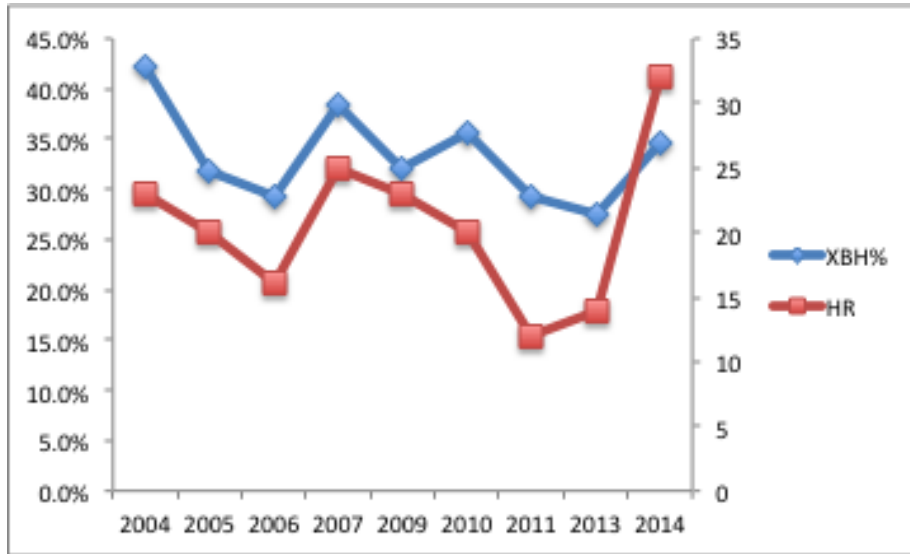
Bats: B | Age: 36 | Team: Tigers | Position: 1B | RK: (13) | Player Rater: ESPN (4), NFBC (6)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2011	MLB	32	540	12	76	103	1/0	.330	.850	.343	8.6%	7.7%	26.4%	44.2%
2013	MLB	34	605	14	68	83	0/2	.301	.785	.313	9.3%	8.1%	27.8%	43.2%
2014	MLB	35	561	32	87	103	3/2	.335	.974	.316	6.6%	10.9%	29.1%	42.1%
Proj.			570	25	88	98	0	.308						

Victor Martinez is really good and as I wrote in last years fantasy guide we saw how good he could be during the last three months of the 2013 season. That said, I didn't think he would hit a career high 32 home runs and .335 batting average. Usually when an older player (he turned 36 in December) has

career highs in those categories the fantasy community will assume a major regression is coming, but I don't see that happening.

Obviously there will be some regression in both the power and batting average, but it will not be significant. The image below shows his extra base hit percentage (XBH%) and his home runs since 2004. I did not include 2008 because he only had 270 PAs. The first thing I noticed was his home runs last year was a little fluky, but the extra base hit percentage suggests he was making a lot of hard contact and should be able to hit 23-28 home runs next year.



In regards to his batting average he hit .268 on ground balls, which is 25 points higher than his totals from 2009-13 so a regression in the batting average should occur. However, the batting average shouldn't regress below .300 mark because he's only hit below .300 once and that was in 2004 (.283 batting average).

In early February Martinez [tore the meniscus in his left knee](#) while working out. The extent of the injury is unknown. He could only be out a couple of weeks and still play in Spring Training. Another scenario is he begins the season on the DL. If begins the year on the DL it's hard to not think he'll get off to a slow start. He missed the entire 2012 season after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in the same left knee. In 2013 his numbers were pedestrian but he took off during the second half of the year.

This injury certainly doesn't improve his fantasy viability, but it may lower his value to the point where he may be a draft day value. As of early February I have no idea how severe the injury is. In general I avoid drafting players already injured because there is a higher likelihood of repeat injury and a decrease in production.

J.D. Martinez

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Tigers | Position: OF | RK: (47) | Player Rater: ESPN (42), NFBC (72)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	395	11	34	55	0/2	.241	.685	.290	21.9%	9.1%	22.6%	51.8%
2013	MLB	25	296	7	24	36	2/0	.250	.650	.319	26.5%	3.2%	25.3%	45.2%
2014	MLB	26	441	23	57	76	6/3	.315	.912	.389	26.3%	6.3%	29.6%	41.1%
Proj.			550	23	70	95	4	.285						

J.D. Martinez will likely be a value on draft day because a lot of fantasy owners are not going to believe the numbers he put up in 2014 are sustainable. I'll admit I was one of those owners, but after reading [the article](#) from Ryan Parker, the hitting guru, at Baseball Prospectus I'm sold on him for next year. Any time a player has a breakout performance I want to see if there was an adjustment he made; it could be a change in his swing; where he holds his hands before he swings; did he add a leg kick; and anything else in between.

Last year Martinez hit .336 on ground balls with a .336 BABIP, which is awfully high considering he's not a fast player. So I expect a batting average regression, but not as much as you may think. He'll probably hit in the .280-.290 range with 20-25 home runs and a couple of stolen bases.

Joe Mauer

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Twins | Position: 1B | RK: (150) | Player Rater: ESPN (148), NFBC (165)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	545	10	81	85	8/4	.319	.861	.364	13.7%	14.0%	23.0%	54.0%
2013	MLB	30	445	11	62	47	0/1	.324	.880	.383	17.5%	12.0%	23.7%	48.3%
2014	MLB	31	455	4	60	55	3/0	.277	.732	.342	18.5%	11.6%	18.6%	52.9%
Proj.			475	6	60	75	2	.288						

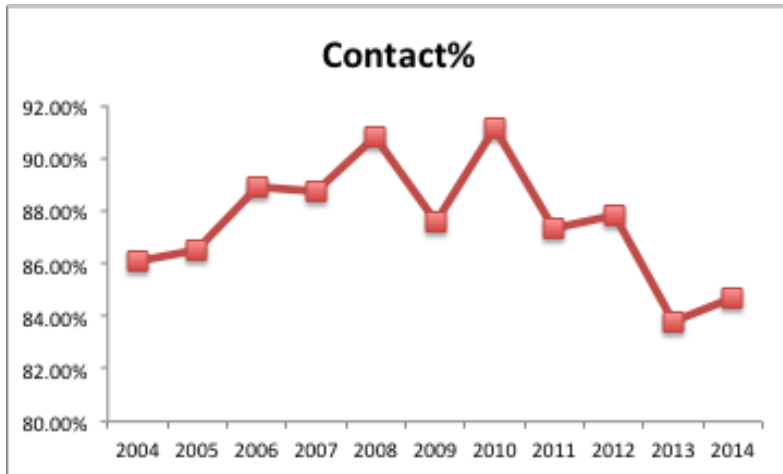
In the preseason I was a big believer in **Joe Mauer**. He was catcher eligible, he had a .323 career batting average, was going to bat third in the batting order and he permanently moving to first base so he would have 50-100 more plate appearances than his contemporaries.

And of course he goes ahead and has the worst season of his career. So what happened?

On July 2 he went on the DL with a [strained oblique](#). He suffered the injury the day prior. This injury put him on the shelf for a little more than five weeks. In three of the past four years he has gone on the DL and has missed a substantial amount of time. In 2013 it was a concussion and in [2011 it was Pneumonia](#), which was a fluky injury. The data below are his statistics before and after the injury.

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	WHAV	K%
Before	.271	.695	.335	.224	18.9%
After	.289	.805	.356	.197	17.9%

Based on the second half numbers it looks as though Mauer could be a buy low candidate next year. He hit .289 with a very high .356 BABIP, which on the surface looks high, but he has a career .348 BABIP. Since his batting average was only .289 and his career batting average is .319 something weird must have caused the low .289 batting average. Since he hits the ball on the ground 50% of the time he must have gotten bad luck on ground balls and good luck on fly balls and line drives. What has me worried is the contact rate was the second lowest in his career (image below), which doesn't make me optimistic he can hit .300-plus.



Other than the one fluky year he doesn't hit for a lot of power and he's no longer catcher eligible. Last year he only hit four home runs (with a 4.7% HR/FB rate), which is a clear candidate for regression. The reason why I think it should regress is his extra base hit percentage was stable (i.e. he still hit a lot of doubles).

Season	H	XBH	XBH%
2004	33	15	45.5%
2005	144	37	25.7%
2006	181	53	29.3%
2007	119	37	31.1%
2008	176	44	25.0%
2009	191	59	30.9%
2010	167	53	31.7%
2011	85	18	21.2%
2012	174	45	25.9%
2013	144	46	31.9%
2014	126	33	26.2%

Since he will not for a lot of power he's going to have to hit .310-plus and I do not see that happening. It's certainly possible, but I don't think it's going to happen.

Brian McCann**Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Yankees | Position: C | RK: (197) | Player Rater: ESPN (125), NFBC (120)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	439	20	44	67	3/0	.230	.698	.234	15.6%	9.0%	34.7%	40.2%
2013	MLB	29	356	20	43	57	0/1	.256	.796	.261	16.4%	9.7%	29.5%	37.0%
2014	MLB	30	495	23	57	75	0/0	.232	.692	.231	14.3%	5.9%	32.0%	34.1%
Proj.			480	19	50	68	0	.225						

Other than going on the [7-day concussion DL](#), **Brian McCann** was relatively healthy, playing in more games since 2010. Playing in the American League he was able to play 30 games first base and DH, which aided in his ability to play in so many games.

Since the 2011 season his offensive numbers have been in steep decline. Despite that, some fantasy owners thought his numbers would improve going to the Yankees and that ballpark (I was not one of these fantasy owners). Even though he played in more games last year there was only a marginal upgrade in his power and the batting average decreased 14 points from the year prior.

The big question is will his batting average improve? McCann is an extreme pull hitter (43.4% of batted balls went to right field) and faces the shift in the majority of his plate appearances. The evidence, from [Dan Barbarisi's story](#), suggests McCann is being hurt by the shifts:

"Across baseball, hitters pull about 27% of their hits. McCann, by contrast, has pulled 39% of his hits to right field in his decade-long career. When he was younger, those balls fell in for hits. In the age of shifting, with extra infielders crowding the area between first and second base, it's not quite so easy."

Let's expand on that with data. The table below shows his performance on balls hit to the right side of the field (all hit types are included).

Year	AVG	SLUG	BABIP	wOBA	ISO
2008	.364	.707	.308	.442	.343
2009	.358	.710	.291	.442	.352
2010	.349	.663	.288	.418	.314
2011	.373	.751	.291	.465	.379
2012	.251	.549	.178	.324	.297
2013	.311	.711	.217	.416	.400
2014	.286	.643	.195	.378	.357

The BABIP suggests he has gotten unlucky with hits to the right side of the field, but it's safe to assume the higher percentage of shifts he's facing means his BABIP will remain low. To his credit he's not pulling the ball nearly as much this season. From 2008-2013 he pulled the ball 46.1% of the time compared to 43.4%, which could help negate the shift and increase his batting average.

His extra base hit percentage was similar to the past five seasons, which indicates he's not hitting the ball with much power. Therefore, I do not see a massive uptick in home runs next year. Last year he only had a 4.7% HR/FB rate, which should positively regress, but that coincided with a high 17.1% HR/FB rate at home, which should regress.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2008	153	66	43.1%
2009	137	57	41.6%
2010	129	46	35.7%
2011	126	43	34.1%
2012	101	34	33.7%
2013	91	33	36.3%
2014	115	39	33.9%

Andrew McCutchen

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Pirates | Position: OF | RK: (3) | Player Rater: ESPN (9), NFBC (9)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	593	31	107	96	20/12	.327	.953	.375	19.6%	10.4%	29.2%	44.2%
2013	MLB	26	583	21	97	84	27/10	.317	.911	.353	15.0%	11.6%	24.5%	41.2%
2014	MLB	27	548	25	89	83	18/3	.314	.952	.355	17.7%	13.0%	24.8%	40.8%
Proj.			575	24	90	88	20	.315						

If **Andrew McCutchen** played in a better lineup he could arguably be the first player taken in drafts. Last year he had his first DL stint in the majors, but the injury was a result of the Diamondbacks [plunking him](#) because the day before **Paul Goldschmidt** got hit. Basically, this was a fluke injury. The only word of caution is I wouldn't expect him to hit 30-plus home runs again because it's looking more like the 2012 HR/FB rate is an outlier.

Devin Mesoraco

Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Reds | Position: C | RK: (152) | Player Rater: ESPN (80), NFBC (78)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	165	5	17	14	1/1	.212	.640	.234	17.9%	9.2%	25.6%	46.6%
2013	MLB	25	323	9	31	42	0/2	.238	.649	.264	17.3%	6.8%	21.3%	45.7%
2014	MLB	26	384	25	54	80	1/3	.273	.893	.309	23.4%	9.3%	29.2%	35.9%
Proj.			430	20	54	74	1	.252						

When evaluating **Devin Mesoraco** it all depends whether or not you believe the what did in 2014 is legitimate or not. In his first 538 at-bats in the majors he had 16 home runs with a 10.3% HR/FB rate, but in 2014 (371 ABs) he had 25 home runs with a 19.8% HR/FB rate. 13 of the 25 home runs (in 2014) came at home, which is less than what I thought it would be because he plays in a hitter friendly ballpark. Last year he had a 22% HR/FB rate at home, which is not sustainable.

At home he had a 22% HR/FB rate, which is not sustainable. I don't believe he'll hit 24-plus home runs again, but he can certainly hit 20 (if he plays a full year) because the raw power is legitimate. Another reason why he was a "late bloomer" was because unlike any other position, it takes longer for catchers to develop their hitting (because they have a lot on their plate with defense and game calling).

The biggest question is will he have a .275-plus batting average next year? Prior to 2014 he was able to mash lefties and struggled against righties. Prior to 2014 he only had .199 batting average against right handed pitching (413 ABs), but this year he hit .276. It's easy to cite his BABIP as the reason why his batting average increased (from .219 to .310), but he hit 20 doubles (53% more than the years prior), which suggests he made harder contact and harder hit balls are more likely to become hits. We're still dealing with a relatively small sample size so some regression in the batting average is going to occur, but it won't be that dramatic.

Overall, I believe in Mesoraco's talent, but I think he's going to be overvalued in drafts next year. He's probably going to be drafted as the .278 batting average and 25 home run player when in fact he's a .250 hitter with 20 home runs as a ceiling. For the first two months of the season he went on the DL twice with a strained oblique and a strained hamstring, which give me pause about his ability to play in 130-plus games because these are bodily injuries and game related injuries (getting hit in the hand by a baseball for example).

Yadier Molina

Bats: R | Age: 32 | Team: Cardinals | Position: C | RK: (167) | Player Rater: ESPN (196), NFBC (249)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	505	22	65	76	12/3	.315	.874	.316	9.8%	8.0%	29.3%	41.3%
2013	MLB	30	505	12	68	80	3/2	.319	.836	.338	10.2%	5.5%	21.9%	41.9%
2014	MLB	31	404	7	40	38	1/1	.282	.719	.307	12.4%	6.3%	19.1%	51.1%
Proj.			480	5	60	67	1	.285						

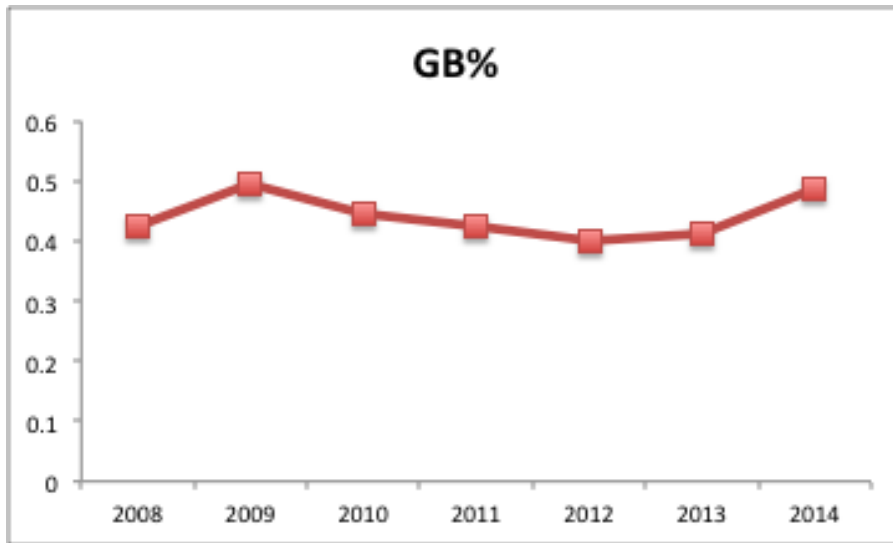
In 2014 **Yadier Molina** missed seven weeks of the season with a [torn ligament](#) in his right thumb. Not only did he miss time with injury he didn't provide a .300-plus batting average for the first time since 2010. It's possible the thumb injury affected his ability to hit, but he was only hitting .287 with a .310 BABIP (in 303 ABs) before the injury. Another possibility is this was a small sample size.

Not only did his batting average decline so did his extra base hit percentage (table below).

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2008	135	25	18.5%
2009	141	30	21.3%
2010	122	25	20.5%
2011	145	47	32.4%
2012	159	50	31.4%
2013	161	56	34.8%
2014	114	28	24.6%

You may be saying the injury sapped a lot of his power, which is why the extra base hit percentage was so low. However, he wasn't making a lot of hard contact before the injury as the extra base hit percentage was only 26.4%.

Lastly, another reason why the power is unlikely to return is he is hitting more ground balls (image below). Last year his ground ball rate was 48%, six percentage points higher than his average ground ball rate from 2010-13 (42%). It's important to note that before the injury his ground ball rate was 45.5%.



Molina will be 33 in July and catchers tend to age more quickly than other position players. Molina has a high floor, but with low upside; he'll provide a .280-plus batting average but with less than six home runs and maybe only a couple of stolen bases.

Miguel Montero**Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Cubs | Position: C | RK: (208) | Player Rater: ESPN (181), NFBC (199)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	486	15	65	88	0/0	.286	.829	.362	22.7%	12.7%	30.7%	43.0%
2013	MLB	29	413	11	44	42	0/0	.230	.662	.282	23.2%	10.7%	23.3%	47.6%
2014	MLB	30	489	13	40	72	0/4	.243	.699	.275	17.3%	10.0%	21.6%	47.0%
Proj.			455	12	44	62	0	.245						

After an injury plagued 2013 season I thought **Miguel Montero** would be a draft day value because I thought he would positively regress to the level of performance of the 2010-2012.

In 2014 he was healthy for the whole year and nearly played in 140 games. Unfortunately, he offense continued to look bad as he had another sub-.250 batting average. On the bright side his home run power positively regressed towards his totals pre-2013. However, I don't believe he has 15-plus home run power because he's going from a great hitter's park to a neutral ballpark. Also, his ground ball rate was just as high as 2013 (which was much higher than ever before in his career) and I never like higher ground ball rates because it's less conducive for home runs.

For the year Montero led all catchers in plate appearances with runners in scoring position, which is unlikely to reoccur again. Therefore, even though he had 70-plus RBIs I wouldn't expect more than 65 in 2015.

Overall, I no longer see much upside with Montero. Draft him expecting a .240-.250 batting average with 10-13 home runs and 60-plus RBIs. Those numbers sound pretty good for two-catcher leagues, but since the Cubs offense is going to be in transition next year I don't see him scoring more than 50 runs.

Kendrys Morales**Bats: B | Age: 31 | Team: Royals | Position: 1B | RK: (95) | Player Rater: ESPN (308), NFBC (265)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	484	22	61	73	0/1	.273	.787	.315	22.2%	5.9%	24.8%	51.5%
2013	MLB	30	602	23	64	80	0/0	.277	.785	.309	17.4%	7.5%	23.1%	49.5%
2014	MLB	31	367	8	28	42	0/0	.218	.612	.244	17.0%	6.7%	20.8%	49.2%
Proj.			500	20	65	83	0	.275						

Kendrys Morales' track record is so good that it's hard to believe he struggled so much in 2014.

Morales' season started weirdly as he only played 60% of a season and he didn't miss time because of injury. Instead, no team wanted to sign him because doing so would force the team to forfeit a first round draft pick and the draft money pool.

From 2008-13 he has a career .284/.337/.491 slash line and averaged 18-19 home runs. However, last year he hit .218/.274/.338 with only eight home runs (in 401 PAs).

There are two primary reasons why he could have had a down year and why he should improve. A) He didn't get a Spring Training and didn't have the time to gear up for the season. B) he had an uncharacteristically low BABIP that should positively regress. For example, he hit .224 on fly balls last year. From 2008-13 he hit .372 on fly balls.

Morales' track record suggests he should be able to positively regress. He may not be able to hit 20-22 home runs because the Royals ballpark is brutal against power, but he should be able to hit 17-19 home runs.

Justin Morneau

Bats: L | Age: 34 | Team: Rockies | Position: 1B | RK: (97) | Player Rater: ESPN (53), NFBC (59)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	505	19	63	77	1/0	.267	.773	.294	17.9%	8.6%	32.2%	42.1%
2013	MLB	32	572	17	62	77	0/0	.259	.734	.290	17.3%	7.9%	25.6%	41.5%
2014	MLB	33	502	17	62	82	0/3	.319	.860	.330	10.9%	6.2%	17.1%	44.2%
Proj.			480	16	62	80	0	.295						

Usually when a .256 player in the previous three seasons becomes a Colorado Rocky and suddenly has a .319 batting average it's easy to say it's an effect of the home ballpark. However, that may not be necessarily accurate in with **Justin Morneau**.

Let's take a deep dive into how he was able to generate the .319 batting average. He was a .309 hitter on the road so batting average was entirely due to the Coors Effect.

Morneanu has been brutal against lefties the past three seasons as he hit .206/.246/.274 with a .252 BABIP in 487 PAs, but last year he hit .254/.288/.377 with a .270 BABIP. Also, the strikeout rate against lefties decreased eight percentage points compared to the three years prior to 2014. His home-road splits didn't have a major effect against lefties so it's possible he has improved against lefties. All the data suggests he improved against lefties, but I'm still not buying it. I want to see him do it again before first.

The same trend happened against righties too. So let's take a deeper dive. FanGraphs shows he has been more aggressive at the plate, swinging at pitches five percentage points more than the previous year. Consequently, the contact rate also increased four percentage points. Therefore, it looks like he had a new approach at the plate and wanted to make more contact. However, there is still evidence his batting average was a fluke.

The table below shows how he performed with two-strikes.

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	Swng%	K%	GB%	FB%
2011-13	.196	.557	.296	63.1%	35.1%	39.5%	37.3%
2014	.258	.686	.338	63.9%	25.3%	49.7%	28.4%

The table below shows how he performed with an even count.

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	Swng%	K%	GB%	FB%
2011-13	.263	.809	.253	45.3%	7.8%	37.8%	39.1%
2014	.342	.969	.327	48.7%	5.7%	44.1%	28.8%

When I look at these two tables I cannot help but think his batting average was fluky and should regress in 2015. With two strikes the ground ball rate was much higher, but the BABIP was 40 points higher, which tells me a lot of ground balls found holes.

Overall, despite playing in a great home ballpark he didn't hit for a lot of power. If he's going to be rosterable in a 10-team league he's going to have to hit .300-plus in order to justify the lack of power. He'll probably be over drafted because of the high batting average, but I'm not buying it.

Michael Morse

Bats: R | Age: 33 | Team: Marlins | Position: OF | RK: (125) | Player Rater: ESPN (119), NFBC (129)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	406	18	53	62	0/1	.291	.791	.339	22.6%	3.7%	20.8%	54.6%
2013	MLB	31	312	13	34	27	0/0	.215	.651	.254	25.8%	6.2%	27.4%	45.1%
2014	MLB	32	438	16	48	61	0/0	.279	.811	.348	25.1%	6.4%	22.4%	45.8%
Proj.			480	17	62	80	0	.270						

When **Michael Morse** is healthy he can flat out hit a baseball and with power; he has a career slash line of .281/.335/.473 in 2,509 PAs. With the Marlins outfield already full Morse is going to play his ideal position of first base (ideally he should be a DH). Morse has gone on to say he hits the best when he's playing first base and the numbers bear that out as he has a .322/.378/.558 slash line (in 595 PAs) while manning first base.

Like I said earlier, he's always dealt with various issues so I wouldn't expect more than 120 games played, but when he does play he should be able for to hit for power and with an above average batting average. The past two years he's dealt with various hand and wrist issues but that hasn't affect his ability to hit for power. Also, he'll likely fourth or fifth in the lineup so he could have 90-plus RBIs with a shortened season.

Brandon Moss**Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Indians | Position: 1B, OF | RK: (72) | Player Rater: ESPN (97), NFBC (87)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	265	21	48	52	1/1	.291	.954	.359	30.4%	8.8%	40.1%	33.9%
2013	MLB	29	446	30	73	87	4/2	.256	.859	.301	27.7%	9.9%	35.0%	31.4%
2014	MLB	30	500	25	70	81	1/0	.234	.772	.283	26.4%	11.6%	34.0%	32.6%
Proj.			475	27	73	87	1	.259						

In late September Brandon Moss revealed he played much of the year with [torn cartilage in his hip](#). To quote from the article, “He [Moss] didn’t want to blame his second-half numbers dip on the problem but Moss said that he does not have much range of motion or strength in the joint as a result.” In late October Moss had the torn labrum repaired as well as a cleanup procedure to an impingement in his hip.

I don’t know when the injury started to bother him, but I’m guessing it started to occur sometime in June. My guess is based purely on his statistical data and how he started to trend significantly down in June.

Moss’ season was so bad you could break down his 2014 season and create a narrative based on that data. The next two tables will provide two different cuts of his 2014 season to give you some perspective.

The first table looks at is his performance for the first two months of the season compared to the last four months.

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	wOBA	K%	HR/FB
April-May	.276	.934	.290	.391	19.7%	17.6%
June-September	.210	.678	.278	.301	30.2%	12.8%

The second table shows his performance for the first three months of the season compared to the last three months.

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	wOBA	K%	HR/FB
April-June	.268	.876	.302	.370	23.1%	17.3%
July-September	.190	.637	.256	.289	30.5%	10.9%

Some fantasy owners never believed in **Brandon Moss** to begin with and they could have the belief that his spiral in the second half of the season was due to the regression that was bound to happen. However, if you compare his first three months of 2014 and compare them to his 2013 season they look eerily similar (table below).

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	wOBA	K%	HR/FB
2013	.256	.859	.301	.363	27.7%	18.1%
April-June 2014	.268	.876	.302	.370	23.1%	17.3%

I have no idea how much the injury effected Moss' play on the field but the poor performance in the second half of the season suggests it had a major impact on him. Assuming he's healthy and looks good in Spring Training I'm going to believe Moss can bounce back to the player he was in 2013. Leaving Oakland provides a boost to his home run potential, but it's not a big boost.

Mike Moustakas

Bats: L | Age: 26 | Team: Royals | Position: 3B | RK: (201) | Player Rater: ESPN (243), NFBC (148)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	563	20	69	73	5/2	.242	.708	.274	20.2%	6.4%	34.0%	34.9%
2013	MLB	24	472	12	42	42	2/4	.233	.651	.257	16.1%	6.2%	28.4%	37.1%
2014	MLB	25	457	15	45	54	1/0	.212	.632	.220	14.8%	7.0%	22.9%	40.5%
Proj.			470	15	55	55	1	.235						

Even though **Mike Moustakas** had a great postseason that doesn't take away he has a career .236/.289/.378 slash line in 1,992 plate appearances. His performance in the postseason may cause some fantasy owners to believe he's turning the corner. That may be true and if it is, I'll gladly miss on him in 2015.

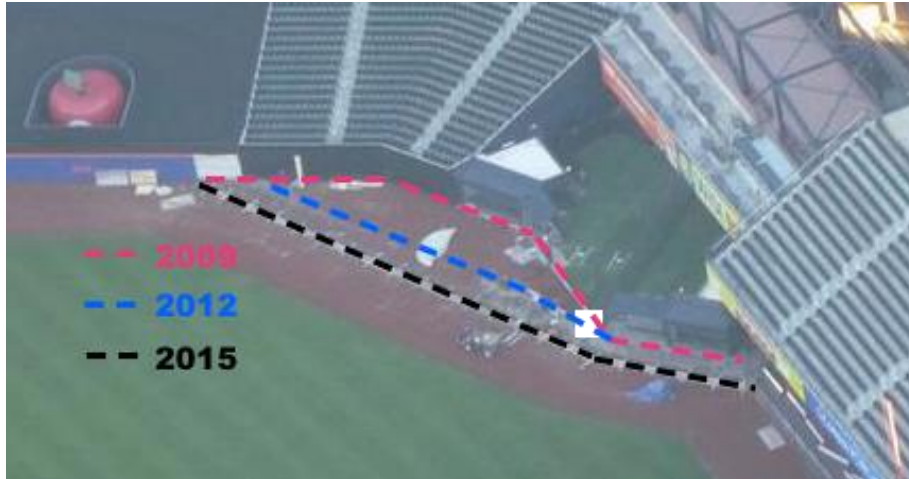
Daniel Murphy

Bats: L | Age: 30 | Team: Mets | Position: 2B | RK: (52) | Player Rater: ESPN (72), NFBC (73)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	571	6	62	65	10/2	.291	.735	.329	13.4%	5.9%	22.9%	51.5%
2013	MLB	28	658	13	92	78	23/3	.286	.733	.315	13.6%	4.6%	27.5%	43.5%
2014	MLB	29	596	9	79	57	13/5	.289	.734	.322	13.4%	6.1%	21.4%	42.5%
Proj.			610	13	89	68	13	.289						

In four of the past five seasons **Daniel Murphy** has played in 143 games or more. During those five years seasons he has a .289/.329/.417 slash line with 9.2 home runs, 11 stolen bases 62 RBI and 68.4 runs. That may not sound like a lot, but I love consistency and there is room for improvement.

First, the Mets are bringing in the fences [primarily in right field](#), which will absolutely help Murphy because 80.4% of his home runs (since 2009) have been hit to right and right-center field. Second, if (and that's a big if) **David Wright** can even resemble his pre-2014-self Murphy should be able to approach 95-plus runs.



In regards to his stolen base potential the days of 23 are probably over because last years stolen base success rate (72%) was far less compared to the previous two seasons (87%).

Overall, I expect him to have another solid year with room for improvement in regards to the runs and home run totals.

Wil Myers

Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Padres | Position: OF | RK: (117) | Player Rater: ESPN (271), NFBC (232)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	22	252	14	44	57	7/1	.286	.876	.335	24.6%	10.0%	29.4%	42.2%
2013	MLB	22	335	13	50	53	5/2	.293	.831	.362	24.4%	8.8%	22.2%	47.2%
2014	MLB	23	325	6	37	35	6/1	.222	.614	.286	24.9%	9.4%	26.2%	48.9%
Proj.			500	17	69	75	4	.266						

Last year I wasn't buying **Wil Myers** (on where he was going in drafts) because his 2013 numbers were inflated by an unsustainable .362 BABIP and 16% HR/FB rate. I also wrote he was a bad defender in right field and it made sense for him to stay in Triple-A for as long as he did. It's possible that inexperience caused him to run into **Desmond Jennings** and cause Myers to miss 70 games with a [wrist fracture](#) (I saw the replay and it looks like Jennings was more at fault).

The injury wasn't the sole cause for his poor numbers because he was bad before and after the injury. Young players struggling early on in their Major League careers is not new. In fact it's quite common.

Usually when a highly touted prospect such as Myers performs really well in one year and then struggles the following year. I rely on the scouting reports. Myers has tremendous raw tools and there's no doubt he will actualize on them eventually. 2015 is going to be a transitional year where he builds upon the promise of his rookie year, but he's still far away from fully actualizing that promise.

Going to the Padres hurts his fantasy value more than the other parade of outfielders the Padres acquired (**Matt Kemp** and **Justin Upton**) in the offseason. His raw power is good enough it shouldn't have a big effect on his power, but it's going to have a negative impact on the batting average. Originally I projected a .275 batting average but I lowered it to .266.

Mike Napoli

Bats: R | Age: 33 | Team: Red Sox | Position: 1B | RK: (190) | Player Rater: ESPN (147), NFBC (150)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	352	24	53	56	1/0	.227	.812	.273	30.0%	13.4%	37.6%	41.0%
2013	MLB	31	498	23	79	92	1/1	.259	.842	.367	32.4%	12.6%	32.4%	37.8%
2014	MLB	32	415	17	49	55	3/2	.248	.789	.321	26.6%	15.6%	27.0%	46.0%
Proj.			420	16	51	61	1	.247						

In the winter of 2012 **Mike Napoli** was diagnosed with a degenerative hip condition and his contract with the Red Sox was delayed. He's been treating it ever since and on September 1, 2014 [he said](#), "it's still there, but it's not getting bigger, it's getting smaller."

He ended up having a nice bounce back 2013 season. It's likely that bounce back season is the reason why fantasy owners took him in 2014. Even though he was only on the DL once he missed a lot of time with various nagging injuries.

His approach at the plate improved last year as the strikeout rate decreased six percentage points. However, the ground ball rate was the highest of his career and the HR/FB rate was the lowest it's been since 2010. On top of all that he stopped making hard contact. The table below shows his extra base percentage and you'll see it dropped off significantly last year.

Season	H	XBH	XBH%
2006	61	29	47.5%
2007	54	22	40.7%
2008	62	30	48.4%
2009	104	43	41.3%
2010	108	51	47.2%
2011	118	55	46.6%
2012	80	35	43.8%
2013	129	63	48.8%
2014	103	37	35.9%

Dioner Navarro**Bats: B | Age: 31 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: C | RK: (188) | Player Rater: ESPN (123), NFBC (127)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	69	2	6	12	0/0	.290	.755	.321	16.4%	2.7%	25.4%	35.6%
2013	MLB	29	240	13	31	34	0/1	.300	.856	.307	13.5%	8.6%	22.4%	42.9%
2014	MLB	30	481	12	40	69	3/0	.274	.712	.301	14.6%	6.2%	25.1%	41.6%
Proj.			465	12	40	68	0	.275						

After a breakout 2013 season the Toronto Blue Jays gave **Dioner Navarro** a two-year \$8M contract, which is a lot considering the once top prospect turned into a journeyman. The reason why he was considered a journeyman before 2013 was because he had problems making consistent contact, didn't hit for much power and had poor plate discipline. It was probably that fact why fantasy owners didn't believe his 2013 season and why he was the 16th catcher taken in ESPN drafts.

If you happened to draft him in that range you made a huge profit because he very quietly he finished 8th among catchers on ESPN's Player Rater because he hit for average, power and drove in a lot of runs. Toronto plays in a bam box and Navarro benefitted playing in that bam box hitting .308/.340/.467 with a .335 BABIP. On the road he hit .247/.301/.329 with a .271 BABIP. In regards to which split represent his true talent level I'm inclined to side with his road numbers. However, he's signed for another year in Toronto so his numbers are going to be boosted by the home ballpark.

For a majority of the year Navarro hit 5th-6th in the order, which provided him numerous RBI opportunities. In fact he had the 6th highest amount of plate appearances among catchers for the season. With the addition of **Josh Donaldson** that number is sure to increase.

Overall, Navarro has a relatively high floor and low upside. Considering how frequently Blue Jays players are on the DL Navarro will have plenty of opportunities to have 10-15 games at DH, which allow him to have 450-plus ABs. On draft day you will not receive any "ooooh's" and "awww's" from other owners in your draft, but based on where you get him you'll likely make a profit. Ideally I recommend streaming him when he's at home, but in leagues with small benches that's not a viable strategy.

Derek Norris**Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Padres | Position: C | RK: (187) | Player Rater: ESPN (158), NFBC (177)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	209	7	19	34	5/1	.201	.625	.255	28.4%	9.1%	22.2%	38.9%
2013	MLB	24	264	9	41	30	5/0	.246	.754	.301	23.1%	12.0%	24.0%	37.8%
2014	MLB	25	385	10	46	55	2/2	.270	.763	.324	19.5%	12.2%	20.6%	45.8%
Proj.			400	12	50	59	3	.265						

Before the 2014 season began I thought Derek Norris would be a nice value in two-catcher leagues

because I was expecting him to take a huge step forward offensively. For the first half of the season it looked as though he took that step as he had a .294/.402/.477 slash line (with a .336 BABIP), which also earned him an All-Star appearance. However, in the second half he had a .242/.308/.326 slash line with a .308 BABIP.

Before the season began Norris struggled against righties and I thought he would improve. Prior to 2014 he had a .173 batting average against righties and a .280 batting average against lefties. In the first half of the year he hit .358 against lefties and .250 against righties; in the second half .262 against lefties and .230 against righties. The takeaway is he regressed against both pitching sides, but most of it came against lefties. The more important takeaway was he was able to become respectable against righties, which bodes well for him to play against righties and to have a batting average greater than .250.

Overall, his strikeout rate has decreased year-over-year while the walk rate has stabilized, which is a very good positive step. However, in 2014 his ground ball rate increased ten percentage points, which is not good if you expect him to hit for power (like I did). Next year the batting average will be in the .260-.270 range, but I don't a lot of power potential.

Rougned Odor

Bats: L | Age: 21 | Team: Rangers | Position: 2B | RK: (163) | Player Rater: ESPN (192), NFBC (198)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	19	134	6	20	19	5/2	.306	.884	.337	16.7%	6.3%	25.5%	49.1%
2014	AA	20	129	6	21	17	6/3	.279	.763	.294	15.9%	5.1%	37.6%	38.5%
2014	MLB	20	386	9	39	48	4/7	.259	.698	.294	17.0%	4.1%	18.2%	51.2%
Proj.			500	13	60	60	5	.264						

It's hard to believe **Rougned Odor** played the entire 2014 season as a 20 year old and he did more than hold his own at the highest level in baseball. If you read his [scouting report](#) you'll see that he has the potential to be an all-star caliber player. In regards to his fantasy potential he's more likely to be a player who provides all around production in every category rather than dominant in any particular category (except for batting average possibly).

In 2013 he stole 32 bases, but he only stole ten last year (four in the majors). He is a 50 runner (on the 20-80 scouting scale) so he has the speed to increase last year's stolen base totals. Last year he only had a 36.4% stolen base success rate, which tells me he needs to improve on the art of stealing bases (i.e. reading pitchers tendencies, knowing when to run and etc). I'm sure as time goes on he'll become better at base stealing, but it's hard to see more than ten stolen bases in 2015.

David Ortiz**Bats: L | Age: 39 | Team: Red Sox | Position: DH | RK: (19) | Player Rater: ESPN (47), NFBC (41)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	36	324	23	65	60	0/1	.318	1.026	.316	13.3%	14.6%	33.7%	36.6%
2013	MLB	37	518	30	84	103	4/0	.309	.959	.321	14.7%	12.7%	29.7%	40.2%
2014	MLB	38	518	35	59	104	0/0	.263	.873	.256	15.8%	12.5%	31.5%	38.5%
Proj.			520	27	75	105	0	.290						

For the past three years I've been saying **David Ortiz** is going to eventually decline and even if he doesn't decline there is no upside and a lot of downside. Obviously I've been way wrong, but after a down 2014 I'm jumping on the positive regression bandwagon for Ortiz for 2015.

Last year he had the lowest batting average and BABIP of his Red Sox career (.263 and .256 respectively). Other than age concerns the first thought I had was he lost a lot of hits due to the shift. The table below shows his batting average on balls hit to the right, left and center part of the field since 2008. (**These numbers exclude strikeouts, which is why the batting averages are higher than usual**).

Year	LF AVG	CF AVG	RF AVG
2008	.250	.341	.329
2009	.489	.330	.256
2010	.441	.404	.323
2011	.468	.380	.323
2012	.535	.377	.310
2013	.377	.417	.330
2014	.383	.273	.354

The numbers tell us that balls hit up the middle is the reason why his batting average was so low last year. It's possible the shift contributed to the low batting average but if that's true then why did he have an all-time high in batting average on balls hit to right field? I don't know the answer, but I'm assuming the batting average positively regresses.

The 35 home runs are going to regress, but I don't see a major regression occurring. His extra base hit percentage is almost identical to the past three seasons. I wouldn't draft him expecting 35 home runs, but 25-30 is very reasonable.

Season	H	XBH	XBH%
2003	129	72	55.8%
2004	175	91	52.0%
2005	180	88	48.9%
2006	160	85	53.1%
2007	182	88	48.4%
2008	110	54	49.1%
2009	129	64	49.6%
2010	140	69	49.3%
2011	162	70	43.2%
2012	103	49	47.6%
2013	160	70	43.8%
2014	136	62	45.6%

Chris Owings

Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: SS | RK: (146) | Player Rater: ESPN (220), NFBC (242)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	21	546	12	104	81	20/7	.330	.841	.386	17.2%	3.8%	26.3%	49.7%
2014	AAA	22	40	0	6	1	3/0	.250	.525	.323	22.5%	0.0%	25.8%	45.2%
2014	MLB	22	310	6	34	26	8/1	.261	.706	.314	20.2%	4.8%	21.9%	45.3%
Proj.			500	11	55	55	18	.267						

Last year **Chris Owings** had a lot of hype during drafts because he was a shortstop who had the potential to hit .290 with 15 homers and 15 steals. With **Didi Gregorius** in New York Owings now has the starting shortstop gig all to himself. The question is this the year he starts to become fantasy relevant in 12-team mixed leagues?

He has a career .266/.309/.403 slash line in the majors (393 PAs) with six home runs and ten stolen bases (91% stolen base success rate). Last year he was only able to play in 91 games was because with a [shoulder strain](#). Before going on the DL he had a .278/.312/.462 slash line with six home runs. After he came off the DL he had a .208/.256/.236 slash line with only one extra base hit (in 78 PAs).

Since we're dealing with a small sample size (in the majors) I revert to his [scouting](#) reports to get a better idea of how he could perform in the future. The fact he strikes out so much gives me pause he can approach a .275 batting average let alone the .300-plus batting averages he showed in the minors, but I think he can hit 10-plus home runs with 15-plus stolen bases.

Marcell Ozuna**Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Marlins | Position: OF | RK: (88) | Player Rater: ESPN (66), NFBC (63)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	42	5	6	15	1/0	.333	1.193	.310	19.1%	6.4%	47.1%	41.2%
2013	MLB	22	275	3	31	32	5/1	.265	.693	.326	19.6%	4.5%	23.7%	47.5%
2014	MLB	23	565	23	72	85	3/1	.269	.772	.337	26.8%	6.7%	21.4%	50.2%
Proj.			550	23	68	85	5	.257						

In September I was on the Baseball Professor podcast and I said **Marcell Ozuna** was a favorite of mine entering drafts next year. After only hitting three home runs in 2013 he exploded for 23 last year. Some fantasy owners may discount the home run power because of the home ballpark (12 came at home), but if you read the [scouting reports](#) he has 70-grade raw power (on the scouting scale), which means the ballpark should not negatively impact his power dramatically.

The scouting reports also say the biggest flaw in his offensive game is the batting average. There are concerns his swing can be too long, which would make him susceptible to breaking balls and offspeed pitches. For his career he has a .229 batting average against these pitches, which is below average. I have to assume pitchers will throw less fastballs and try to exploit him. Therefore, he may lose some points in batting average if he doesn't make the necessary adjustments.

The big fantasy wild card is the stolen bases. Even though he is a large man he's actually a 50 runner (on the scouting scale), which means he has the speed to swipe 10-plus bases. In 2011 he stole 17 bases in A-ball so it's possible he has a **Todd Frazier** like season where he unexpectedly starts stealing bases.

Angel Pagan**Bats: B | Age: 33 | Team: Giants | Position: OF | RK: (177) | Player Rater: ESPN (115), NFBC (161)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	605	8	95	56	29/7	.288	.778	.329	14.7%	7.3%	27.4%	43.4%
2013	MLB	31	280	5	44	30	9/4	.282	.749	.307	11.8%	7.5%	24.4%	44.3%
2014	MLB	32	383	3	56	27	16/6	.300	.731	.339	12.8%	6.1%	17.7%	46.4%
Proj.			400	5	60	33	15	.285						

For two years in a row **Angel Pagan** has missed substantial amounts of time due to tissue injuries. In 2013 it was a hamstring surgery and last year it was a bulging disk in his back. He had surgery in late September and will require [three months of rehab](#). By that time line he should be done rehabbing by January, which means he'll have time to get ready for Spring Training and the season.

When Pagan plays he's pretty good; he hits for an above average batting average, steals a lot of bases and scores a lot of runs. He will be 34 in July coming off two major surgeries and there's no way I can safely project more than 400 ABs. If he's ready for the Opening Day he should be a fifth outfielder for a 12-team mixed league, but be prepared for that DL trip (i.e. draft sixth outfielder).

Joc Pederson**Bats: L | Age: 22 | Team: Dodgers | Position: OF | RK: (107) | Player Rater: ESPN (628), NFBC (617)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	21	439	22	81	58	31/8	.278	.878	.327	22.0%	13.5%	28.5%	45.2%
2014	AAA	22	445	33	106	78	30/13	.303	1.017	.385	26.9%	18.1%	32.4%	42.8%
2014	MLB	22	28	0	1	0	0/0	.143	.494	.235	28.9%	23.7%	27.8%	38.9%
Proj.			500	14	65	65	20	.259						

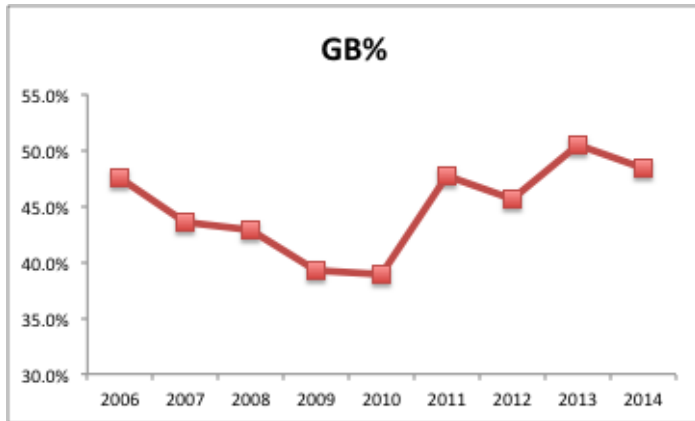
Based on **Joc Pederson's** scouting reports ([here](#) and [here](#)) and the numbers he put up in Triple-A last year he has the potential to be a legitimate 20/20 player with a .270-plus batting average. With the trade of **Matt Kemp** it looks like Pederson will get every opportunity to be the every day center fielder for the Dodgers. Usually when it comes to prospect projections I err on the side of caution and conservatism because very rarely do prospects come up to the majors and instantly hit.

Dustin Pedroia**Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Red Sox | Position: 2B | RK: (100) | Player Rater: ESPN (107), NFBC (117)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	563	15	81	65	20/6	.290	.797	.300	9.6%	7.7%	29.2%	46.1%
2013	MLB	29	641	9	91	84	17/5	.301	.787	.326	10.4%	10.1%	22.5%	52.4%
2014	MLB	30	551	7	72	53	6/6	.278	.712	.307	12.3%	8.4%	21.8%	48.8%
Proj.			585	9	78	66	11	.280						

Last year **Dustin Pedroia** had the worst fantasy season of his career as he had career lows in home run, stolen base and batting average. On top of all that, his home runs and stolen bases have decreased year-over-year for the past three seasons. The question every fantasy owner will be asking is can he bounce back in 2015? If so, how much?

First, his contact rates have been relatively the same since 2011, which is a good start, but what type of contact is he making? The image shows his ground ball rate for his entire Major League career. You'll notice in 2011 the ground ball rate jumped way up and has never dropped down to pre-2011 levels. This indicates he's hitting for less power; and by power I do not mean home run power. Instead, I mean hitting the ball with authority.



In September he had [successful surgery](#) on his left thumb/wrist and is expected to make a full recovery. At the end of the 2013 season he had thumb surgery. He played with this injury the entire 2013 season. In 2014's home opener he fell awkwardly on his wrist and reagravated the injury. Since 2013 he's played with a left wrist issue so it's possible there's an opportunity for positive regression assuming he's fully healthy. However, he reagravated the injury fairly easily at the beginning of the 2014 so there's higher probability he reagravates it sooner rather than later.

Depending on where he gets drafted he's either going to provide a huge profit or loss. Obviously this is true for every player, but the floor and ceiling are so high with Pedroia. He'll probably be drafted between the 5-7 range among second basemen and I can see the scenario where he's a top 3 second baseman. I can also see a scenario where he is the 12-14 second baseman. If I'm in a 10-team mixed league I am more inclined to take a shot on him, but in 12-team or anything deeper I would be more hesitant.

Hunter Pence

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Giants | Position: OF | RK: (42) | Player Rater: ESPN (25), NFBC (28)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	617	24	87	104	5/2	.253	.743	.290	21.1%	8.1%	27.7%	52.5%
2013	MLB	30	629	27	91	99	22/3	.283	.822	.308	16.7%	7.6%	22.8%	47.4%
2014	MLB	31	650	20	106	74	13/6	.277	.777	.318	18.4%	7.3%	18.2%	52.4%
Proj.			625	18	85	90	12	.271						

Hunter Pence's power has been incredibly consistent. He's hit at least 20 home runs for seven years in a row while also providing 5-plus stolen bases. Despite his consistency there are signs the soon to be 32 year old is starting to slow down. First, most of his batting average occurred in the first three months of the season.

Splits	AVG	BABIP	HR	SB	CS	HR/FB
First 3 Months	.295	.335	11	7	2	13.1%
Last 3 Months	.262	.305	9	6	4	9.9%

After looking at the data it looks like he basically had the same production (other than batting average) the entire year, but he still had the lowest home run total since his rookie season and on top of that he had the lowest extra base hit percentage of his career (table below).

Splits	XBH	XBH%
2008	63	39.4%
2009	56	33.9%
2010	57	32.9%
2011	65	34.2%
2012	54	34.6%
2013	67	37.6%
2014	59	32.6%

It could be argued that he low home run total contributed the low extra base hit percentage and that argument could be correct. However, I think this shows that he’s making less hard contact and the days of 25-plus home runs are over.

David Peralta

Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: OF | RK: (172) | Player Rater: ESPN (165), NFBC (213)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AA	26	202	6	33	46	2/0	.297	.839	.307	9.4%	8.1%	28.6%	48.4%
2014	MLB	26	329	8	40	36	6/3	.286	.770	.328	17.2%	4.6%	15.1%	49.1%
Proj.			420	9	60	45	10	.271						

Last year **David Peralta** almost came out of nowhere. He began his career as a pitcher and lost several seasons in the late ‘00s due to injuries. In 2013 he was finally healthy and since then all he has done was hit. It’s important to note he was 25 years old when he played in High A and 26 when he played in Double A so he was much older than most of the players he was playing against. The left-handed hitting Peralta has shown a pretty pronounced platoon split in the minors so I wouldn’t be surprised if he’s platooned with **Cody Ross**.

It’s a big mistake to look at the eight home runs he hit in limited playing time and think he has 15-plus home run power because his minor league track record doesn’t indicate he has that kind of power. That said, I wouldn’t be surprised if he hits 9-12 though.

Jhonny Peralta

Bats: R | Age: 33 | Team: Cardinals | Position: SS | RK: (148) | Player Rater: ESPN (86), NFBC (80)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	531	13	58	63	1/2	.239	.689	.275	17.9%	8.4%	34.0%	42.7%
2013	MLB	31	409	11	50	55	3/3	.303	.815	.374	21.9%	7.8%	29.3%	39.2%
2014	MLB	32	560	21	61	75	3/2	.263	.779	.292	17.8%	9.2%	24.1%	40.3%
Proj.			550	18	62	70	2	.260						

After hitting 24 home runs the previous two seasons **Jhonny Peralta** hit 21 home runs last year. This isn't that big of anomaly as he hit 20-plus home runs four other times in his career. However, only one of those seasons occurred in the past five seasons, which makes the power surge in 2014 more remarkable. The question is will he continue to hit for more in 2015?

I wrote last year that leaving Detroit's ballpark would benefit his ability to hit for power, but I didn't see 21 coming. The table below shows the percentage of extra base hits since 2005. The first thing I noticed was the percentage was the highest it's been since 2008, which indicates the power could be legit.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2005	147	63	42.9%
2006	146	44	30.1%
2007	155	49	31.6%
2008	167	69	41.3%
2009	148	47	31.8%
2010	137	47	34.3%
2011	157	49	31.2%
2012	127	48	37.8%
2013	124	41	33.1%
2014	147	59	40.1%

Everything else in his offensive profile looks good. He never gets hurt as he plays 146-plus games every year and should hit in a good RBI position in a batting lineup that should be improved. The batting average should easily be in the mid-.250s with room for more.

Salvador Perez

Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Royals | Position: C | RK: (134) | Player Rater: ESPN (114), NFBC (116)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	289	11	38	39	0/0	.301	.798	.299	8.9%	3.9%	26.8%	44.9%
2013	MLB	23	496	13	48	79	0/0	.292	.757	.311	12.0%	4.0%	22.1%	48.2%
2014	MLB	24	578	17	57	70	1/0	.260	.692	.278	14.0%	3.6%	22.8%	39.3%
Proj.			550	18	52	69	0	.285						

Before the 2014 season began **Salvador Perez** had a career .301 batting average with a 10.5% HR/FB rate (in 933 ABs). The fact he had such a good batting average is why I projected him to have a .289 batting average for 2014.

Last year he only had a .260 batting average with only 16 home runs. The drop in batting average came primarily against lefties. Before 2014 he had a .351 batting average (in 251 ABs), but last year he only hit .220 batting average against southpaws. His batting average against righties was stable so it's safe to assume some positive regression in his batting average next year.

His fly ball rate increased and the percentage of extra base hits increased slightly, which indicates he should at least maintain the same power numbers next year. Overall, he is going to bat in the sixth of the order and will play mostly every day, which gives him a huge advantage after you get past the first tier of catchers.

Brandon Phillips

Bats: R | Age: 33 | Team: Reds | Position: 2B | RK: (149) | Player Rater: ESPN (180), NFBC (204)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	580	18	86	77	15/2	.281	.750	.298	12.7%	4.5%	24.6%	48.6%
2013	MLB	32	606	18	80	103	5/3	.261	.706	.281	14.7%	5.9%	22.3%	46.6%
2014	MLB	33	462	8	44	51	2/3	.266	.678	.298	14.8%	4.6%	15.7%	45.2%
Proj.			500	12	70	70	2	.264						

After hitting 18 home runs per season from 2010-13 **Brandon Phillips** only hit eight last year. Since he's going to be 34 in June some fantasy analysts are saying the eight he hit last year is about what he'll hit in 2015, but I believe he could hit 10-15 next year. Last year was the lowest HR/FB rate since his rookie season back in 2003. Obviously Phillips age could have contributed to the low HR/FB rate, but the reason why I believe there is room for improvement in home runs is because he actually hit more doubles in 2014 than 2013. Phillips doesn't run anymore but I wouldn't be surprised if he ends up hitting in the middle of the order eventually for the Reds. Phillips doesn't have a lot upside, but based on where's he likely to go drafts he's worth a flyer in deeper mixed leagues.

Trevor Plouffe

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Twins | Position: 3B | RK: (160) | Player Rater: ESPN (102), NFBC (97)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	422	24	56	55	1/3	.235	.756	.244	19.8%	8.0%	33.7%	38.3%
2013	MLB	27	477	14	44	52	2/1	.254	.701	.301	21.5%	6.5%	27.6%	39.7%
2014	MLB	28	520	14	69	80	2/1	.258	.751	.299	18.7%	9.1%	27.6%	39.9%
Proj.			500	14	71	61	2	.257						

After hitting 24 home runs in 2012 (with a 16.2% HR/FB rate) **Trevor Plouffe** has hit 14 home runs the past two seasons (with a 9.4% HR/FB rate). Plouffe made some positive adjustments at the plate as the walk rate increased and the strikeout rate decreased while the contact rate stabilized. Also, very quietly he had 80 RBIs last year. Considering the lack of offense punch in the lineup it's very possible he'll get an opportunity to bat fourth or fifth and if **Joe Mauer** positively regresses he'll bat with a lot of men on-base.

Gregory Polanco

Bats: L | Age: 23 | Team: Pirates | Position: OF | RK: (63) | Player Rater: ESPN (184), NFBC (145)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	21	243	6	36	41	13/7	.263	.762	.282	12.6%	12.6%	29.2%	45.0%
2014	AAA	22	274	7	51	51	16/6	.328	.894	.377	16.1%	9.2%	22.5%	50.7%
2014	MLB	22	277	7	50	33	14/5	.235	.650	.272	18.9%	9.6%	18.5%	50.0%
Proj.			520	12	68	68	35	.252						

At the time of **Gregory Polanco's** call-up [I wrote](#) he should be traded in redraft formats because his value is as high as its ever going to be. By the end of the season my advice was vindicated somewhat because he didn't for average, but he quietly posted seven home runs and 14 stolen bases in only 277 ABs.

At the start of the year Polanco should be the primary right fielder for the Pirates (because it's safe to say **Travis Snider** is a bust) and my analysis assumes that's the case.

Odds are if you're reading this you know he was one of the best prospects at the beginning of last year because his raw tools and on field performance were elite. He has the raw speed to steal 40-plus bases; the bat speed and bat control to his .280-plus; the body to grow into 20-plus home runs. However, the odds he does all those things in 2015 are low because he does have flaws in his game.

His swing can be long, which makes him susceptible on pitches on the inner half (especially from lefties). Also, I'm not sold he can lefties at this point in his career so he could find himself in a platoon (that probably won't happen because the only way he'll improve is by facing lefties). For 2015 he's going to put up **Starling Marte** numbers without the batting average. Polanco may BABIP his into a .2805-plus batting average, but something in the .245-.255 range is more plausible.

A.J. Pollock

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: OF | RK: (64) | Player Rater: ESPN (138), NFBC (183)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	81	2	8	8	1/2	.247	.710	.257	11.8%	9.7%	26.0%	50.7%
2013	MLB	25	443	8	64	38	12/3	.269	.730	.314	17.0%	6.8%	21.1%	48.5%
2014	MLB	26	265	7	41	24	14/3	.302	.851	.344	16.0%	6.6%	20.0%	52.7%
Proj.			540	11	80	54	22	.287						

A.J. Pollock appeared to be in the midst of a breakout season until he broke his hand in June. He didn't return back to the lineup until rosters expanded in September. Because of the production he provided in his shortened season some fantasy analysts are saying he could have a [Michael Brantley breakout season](#). I think that's a little extreme, but I can definitely see Pollock increasing his fantasy production in 2015.

Obviously the first number that stands out about his 2014 season is the .344 BABIP. Odds are that probably will not repeat, but he's a fast runner, makes a lot of contact and has shown to have high BABIPs in the minors so a complete regression to the .300s isn't likely either. I think his batting average floor is .275, which is really good considering how hard it is to find batting average; I think he's a safe bet to hit .285-plus. Since he's so fast he's almost a lock to steal 18-plus bases with room to steal 30-plus if he allowed to run wild. Even though Diamondbacks offense won't be very good, he's still going to bat leadoff in a hitter's ballpark so he could score 80-plus runs.

The biggest wild card is the home runs. He only has 862 Major League plate appearances so there isn't a big sample size to gleam from, but he has a career 8.0% HR/FB rate so I'll assume that's his true talent level. He's basically a 32% fly ball hitter, which means if he plays a full season I estimate he'll hit 140 fly balls. At an 8% HR/FB rate he'll hit 11-12 home runs. If he's able to hit that many home runs he's an above average contributor in two categories and average contributor in two categories.

Dalton Pompey

Bats: B | Age: 22 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: OF | RK: (145) | Player Rater: ESPN (464), NFBC (495)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AA	21	112	3	20	12	8/5	.295	.851	.330	14.2%	11.0%	35.1%	51.1%
2014	AAA	21	53	0	15	5	6/0	.358	.846	.442	17.9%	5.4%	25.6%	34.9%
2014	MLB	21	39	1	5	4	1/0	.231	.738	.308	27.9%	9.3%	25.9%	37.0%
Proj.			500	9	55	55	25	.255						

Dalton Pompey could provide similar fantasy to **Joc Pederson** in 2015, but Pompey will likely come at a discount because of the teams they play for and Pompey wasn't a heralded prospect coming into the 2014 season. According to the scouting reports ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) he could be a 10 home run,

25-plus stolen base player. Like with Pederson, Pompey doesn't have a lot of competition for the center field job. Pompey started 2014 in High-A and made his way to the majors by the end of the year. Usually when a player climbs quickly through the minors it's a combination of how well he's performing and a need at the big league level. Ideally, it would be beneficial for Pompey to get a full year at Triple-A to work on some things; if not, I got a feeling this could be a **Aaron Hicks** situation where Pompey isn't ready to fail yet when the lights are the brightest. Therefore, unlike Pederson, Pompey carries more risk because there is a wider range of outcomes for 2015.

Buster Posey

Bats: R | Age: 28 | Team: Giants | Position: C | RK: (67) | Player Rater: ESPN (37), NFBC (40)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	530	24	78	103	1/1	.336	.957	.368	15.7%	11.3%	27.1%	47.4%
2013	MLB	26	520	15	61	72	2/1	.294	.821	.312	11.8%	10.1%	25.6%	46.8%
2014	MLB	27	547	22	72	89	0/1	.311	.854	.319	11.4%	7.8%	24.7%	43.0%
Proj.			540	19	65	81	1	.301						

After a "down" 2013, **Buster Posey** had a great bounce back year, hitting for more power and driving in more RBIs. In 2013 his home run totals were down due to a career low in the HR/FB rate (9.7%) while this year the HR/FB positively regressed to his career average (12.8%). Posey is the best player at the catcher position and is relatively safe. By safe I mean he'll provide a .290-plus batting average with 15-22 home runs and 80-plus RBIs. I would not draft him based on his 2012 stats because the .336 batting average was fueled by an unsustainable .385 batting average and a .423 BABIP in the second half of the year.

What makes safe is last year he spent more time at first base than ever before in his career. **Brandon Belt** is capable of playing an average left field and most importantly, the Giants have two capable young in-house catchers in **Hector Sanchez** (assuming he has fully recovered from his concussion) and **Andrew Susac**. I wouldn't be surprised if Posey receives the Carlos Santana treatment and starts to spend half of this time at first base.

Martin Prado

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Marlins | Position: 3B, 2B | RK: (109) | Player Rater: ESPN (100), NFBC (111)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	617	10	81	70	17/4	.301	.796	.322	10.0%	8.4%	25.1%	49.2%
2013	MLB	29	609	14	70	82	3/5	.282	.750	.288	8.0%	7.1%	20.6%	48.0%
2014	MLB	30	536	12	62	58	3/1	.282	.733	.310	14.0%	4.5%	17.8%	49.8%
Proj.			570	13	85	68	3	.274						

Martin Prado is exceptional at hitting the baseball. Since 2008 he has a .292/.340/.431 slash line. However, other than positional flexibility he doesn't provide much of anything overwhelming from a fantasy perspective. In 2012 he had 17 stolen bases, which, if you look at the other seasons, looks like a

complete outlier. Some fantasy owners may overrate his brief 37 game sample he hit with the Yankees (.316 with seven home runs with a 16.7% HR/FB rate), but I'm not buying it.

Even though it looks as though he had another typical season last year there are some red flags. The strikeout rate and swinging strike percentage (SwStr%) was the highest of career while the contact rate dropped three percentage points. So basically, he's making less contact and he's striking out more, which not trends I want to see in a player.

Going from the Yankees to the Marlins hurts his fantasy value but not as much as you may think. You could argue he's going to hit in a better lineup and he'll likely bat fifth, which means he'll have a lot more RBI opportunities.

Yasiel Puig

Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Dodgers | Position: OF | RK: (20) | Player Rater: ESPN (39), NFBC (37)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	147	8	26	37	13/5	.313	.982	.339	17.4%	9.0%	28.3%	54.2%
2013	MLB	22	382	19	66	42	11/8	.319	.925	.383	22.5%	8.3%	20.5%	52.1%
2014	MLB	23	558	16	92	69	11/7	.296	.863	.356	19.4%	10.5%	17.8%	52.9%
Proj.			560	22	90	90	11	.275						

Judging by all the hype surrounding **Yasiel Puig** I thought he finished the year with at least a 20/20 season. However, he didn't have more than 20 of either category. Judging by his first half performance (.309 batting average with 12 home runs and seven stolen bases) his fantasy owners were probably expecting a 20/20 season. In the second half of the season he played well, but his numbers were pretty empty as he hit .274 with only four home runs and stolen bases.

For his Major League career he has a 58% stolen base success rate, which is extremely low. Even though he was 4 for 4 in stolen bases during the second half of 2014, but the fact he only had four stolen base attempts is probably due to the low success rate for his career. I've clocked him at 4.06 home-to-first from the right side of the plate, which is really fast (plus-plus territory) so he has the raw speed to steal 20-plus bases.

Even though he's really fast he has an extremely high batting average on ground balls, which doesn't look sustainable. For his career he has a .366 batting average on ground balls. To put that into context let's look at the ground ball batting averages of other high batting average players with a lot of speed when they were at their physical peak. You'll notice there are three slappy speed hitters, but I also added **Albert Pujols** who had the same body type.

Player	Years	GB AVG
Puig	2013-14	.366
Ichiro	2008-10	.321
Michael Bourn	2009-11	.280
Juan Pierre	2008-10	.286
Albert Pujols	2008-10	.287

It is possible Puig continues to have a high batting average on ground balls, but the smart money says some regression should occur eventually. Since he hits the ball on the ground 51% of the time a regression in his batting average will occur.

From July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014 he hit 23 home runs with a 16.7% HR/FB (in 616 ABs), which best represents his true talent level. I excluded June 2013 because he had a .500 BABIP and was on fire. I excluded the last three months of 2014 because he only had five home runs with a 7.8% HR/FB rate. I know I'm picking arbitrary end points for this data, but with a small sample I have to make the best-educated estimate what his true talent level is. Last year he hit 133 fly balls and if he has a 16.7% HR/FB rate he'll hit 22.2 home runs, which seems about right.

Albert Pujols

Bats: R | Age: 35 | Team: Angels | Position: 1B | RK: (18) | Player Rater: ESPN (21), NFBC (22)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	32	607	30	85	105	8/1	.285	.859	.282	11.3%	7.8%	30.5%	41.3%
2013	MLB	33	391	17	49	64	1/1	.258	.767	.258	12.4%	9.0%	29.7%	38.8%
2014	MLB	34	633	28	89	105	5/1	.272	.790	.265	10.2%	6.9%	22.4%	47.1%
Proj.			580	26	86	110	2	.272						

After coming off his worst statistical season **Albert Pujols** had really good bounce back season. The power, batting average, stolen base and RBI totals all rebounded to 2012 levels. The question is will his resurgence continue in 2015?

His 2013 season was a lost one because the plantar fasciitis, which he dealt with for the majority of his career, finally started to become problematic. Ultimately he was shut down and he had the worst season of his career.

He's going to turn 35 in January and I believe he's older than that. This is speculative, but when he was originally signed out of the Dominican Republic the forging of ages was very common. I'm [not the only one who believes this](#).

Last year he had the third most plate appearances with runners in scoring position. Also, he only hit .256, which means if the batting average positively regresses he could drive in 115-120 runners.

Overall, Pujols has a weird profile. His walk rate was the lowest of his career (which is unusual because his contemporaries usually see an [uptick in walk rate](#) as they age), but the strikeout rate has been stable. He's swinging at more pitches out of the strike zone, but his overall contact rates have not decreased.

Overall, I cannot find any statistical reason why Pujols should significantly regress, but I have an uneasy feeling about how he'll perform next year.

Alexei Ramirez

Bats: R | Age: 33 | Team: White Sox | Position: SS | RK: (58) | Player Rater: ESPN (40), NFBC (35)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	593	9	59	73	20/7	.265	.651	.290	12.4%	2.6%	26.0%	46.6%
2013	MLB	31	637	6	68	48	30/9	.284	.693	.309	10.1%	3.9%	18.2%	49.7%
2014	MLB	32	622	15	82	74	21/4	.273	.713	.292	12.3%	3.7%	19.6%	48.9%
Proj.			620	12	75	71	24	.270						

Alexei Ramirez has a little bit of **Alex Rios** in him. By that I mean his fantasy performances vary wildly from year-to-year. For example, in 2011 he hits 15 home runs but only steals 7 bases. In 2013 he only hits 6 home runs, but steals 30 bases. Both years provided good fantasy value, but he most likely didn't provide what his fantasy owners were expecting (which probably caused his owners to augment their teams to compensate for the lost statistical categories).

When I look at last seasons statistics he shows no signs of slowing down. The strikeout rate, walk rate, BABIP, contact rates are almost identical to his career numbers. The power looks legit as he had eight home runs in the first half of year and seven in the second half. Also, eight home runs came and home and seven on the road, which indicates he didn't specifically benefit from the home ballpark.

In regards to the batting average he should see some regression. From 2008-13 he hit .256 when he hit the ball on the ground, but last year hit .279 when the ball was put on the ground.

If he plays a full year he's almost a lock for 20-plus stolen bases, but the biggest question will be the power. I think the six in 2013 is the outlier and he should be able to hit at least 9-13.

Aramis Ramirez

Bats: R | Age: 36 | Team: Brewers | Position: 3B | RK: (153) | Player Rater: ESPN (95), NFBC (99)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	34	570	27	92	105	9/2	.300	.901	.310	13.0%	7.0%	31.7%	38.8%
2013	MLB	35	304	12	43	49	0/1	.283	.831	.308	15.7%	10.3%	28.6%	42.1%
2014	MLB	36	494	15	47	66	3/0	.285	.757	.310	14.1%	4.0%	25.1%	39.1%
Proj.			500	15	49	69	1	.281						

The big question with **Aramis Ramirez** is will be able to stay healthy. In 2013 he missed more than 50 games with a knee strain. In 2014 he missed 22 games with a hamstring strain. In 2012-13 he played in 149 games (at the age of 33-34).

Last year I wasn't buying Ramirez because he always starts seasons off slowly and it was my contention that if he started slowly his fantasy owners wouldn't know if positive regression was going to occur in the second half of the season.

Last year he was consistent the entire season hitting .280-plus. However, that batting average was fairly empty as he only hit 15 home runs while posting the lowest HR/FB rate and ISO of his career. The HR/FB rate was low on the road and at home (10% and 8% respectively), which is another indication the lack of power may be the start of his decline.

In his prime he was a lock for 25-plus home runs with .285-plus batting average, but at this point in his career I no longer see 25-plus home runs as a reasonable ceiling. If, and that's a big if, he's able to play 145 games he could hit 20 if everything bounces right. If he played in the AL and was able to play at DH I would have him as a sleeper candidate.

Hanley Ramirez

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Red Sox | Position: SS | RK: (39) | Player Rater: ESPN (74), NFBC (66)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	604	24	79	92	21/7	.257	.759	.290	19.8%	8.1%	26.1%	47.2%
2013	MLB	29	304	20	62	57	10/2	.345	1.040	.363	15.5%	8.0%	19.7%	40.9%
2014	MLB	30	449	13	64	71	14/5	.283	.817	.323	16.4%	10.9%	18.6%	45.9%
Proj.			450	22	72	82	12	.290						

When first evaluating **Hanley Ramirez** you have to first consider his health. Health is always a factor with Ramirez, and nagging injuries have been there throughout his career with fluctuating performances as a result. He has played in more than 128 games only once in the past four seasons. Moving to the AL where he can play in the outfield should provide a higher likelihood of him staying on the field. That said, he's going to be 31 next season I find I hard to believe moving to a new team and position he suddenly becomes immune to the DL.

Other than health he's an All Star caliber hitter and fantasy player when he's healthy. Last year he had the lowest HR/FB rate since his rookie season (back in 2006) and looks like it should positively regress next year especially in that ballpark. Last year he only had five home runs on the road (7.6% HR/FB rate). He has a career HR/FB rate of 13.7% so if he hits at that clip next year he should hit 17-19 home runs (assuming he gets 450 ABs). Also, that projection doesn't assume he gets a bump from the home ballpark, which he surely will.

It's also important to note Ramirez has never played in a hitter friendly home ballpark, which makes his career .300 batting average and 191 home runs much more impressive. He's going to hit in the middle of the lineup so he should have plenty of RBI and run scoring opportunities. He's not going to steal 20-plus bases again, but 10-15 is certainly reasonable.

Ramirez’s value varies depending on the league format. The shallower the league, the more valuable he becomes because there are better replacements available on the waiver wire. If it’s a deep mixed league he loses value because if he goes on the DL you will probably have play **Yunel Escobar** for 2-4 weeks. Like with **Troy Tulowitzki**, if you roster Ramirez grab a shortstop for your MI slot.

Wilson Ramos

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Nationals | Position: C | RK: (209) | Player Rater: ESPN (205), NFBC (229)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	83	3	11	10	0/0	.265	.752	.306	19.8%	12.5%	20.0%	66.2%
2013	MLB	25	287	16	29	59	0/1	.272	.777	.270	13.9%	5.0%	17.5%	57.7%
2014	MLB	26	341	11	32	47	0/0	.267	.698	.290	15.8%	4.7%	12.2%	57.5%
Proj.			355	12	33	50	0	.268						

The biggest roadblock for **Wilson Ramos** having fantasy relevance has been due to injury. Since 2011 he has missed a substantial amount of time. In 2012 it was a torn ACL. In 2013 he went on the DL twice with hamstring injuries. In 2014 it was a hamstring strain again and a broken hamate bone in his hand (which was fluky).

In ESPN leagues he was drafted as the 10th catcher primarily due to the fact he hit 16 home runs in 287 ABs in 2013. In last year’s guide I said I wasn’t buying it because of the high 54% ground ball rate and the 25% HR/FB rate will not be repeatable.

Last year the HR/FB rate regressed significantly to his true talent level and he only hit 11 home runs. Since he’s a high ground ball rate hitter his batting average is going to be more BABIP dependent, which means a higher degrees of variance in the batting average. Or in other words, I wouldn’t be surprised if he hits .290 or .240 next year.

Colby Rasmus

Bats: L | Age: 28 | Team: Astros | Position: OF | RK: (151) | Player Rater: ESPN (198), NFBC (134)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	565	23	75	75	4/3	.223	.689	.259	23.8%	7.5%	32.0%	39.6%
2013	MLB	26	417	22	57	66	0/1	.276	.840	.356	29.5%	8.1%	32.2%	34.6%
2014	MLB	27	346	18	45	40	4/0	.225	.735	.294	33.0%	7.7%	27.5%	36.5%
Proj.			440	26	65	65	4	.220						

Last year I said if you’re desperate power then **Colby Rasmus** is someone you should target. Before the 2013 season he was relatively healthy and he plays in a bam box of a home ballpark. Oddly he’s been a much better hitter on the road than at home (table below).

Splits	AVG	SLUG	OPS	HR/FB
Home	.237	.429	.731	15.3%
Away	.244	.458	.764	16.0%

Last year he missed 33 games with a [hamstring strain](#) and in 2012 it was [oblique strain](#) that cost him 29 games and missed the remaining ten games [after getting hit in the eye](#) while warming up with another Blue Jays player (that seriously happened). Those injuries (other than the eye injury) could be attributed to age and/or having to play on turf at home.

In regards to his on the field play I didn't think his strikeout rate would continue to increase. However, to be fair, I should've seen this coming because last year I said his approach changed into an entirely pull-happy home run swing. He had the same approach last year and I expect him to continue to have that approach in 2015. If he can play a 145-plus games he should easily hit 30-plus home runs.

The question is what kind of batting average will he have? Last year he struck out 33% of the time, had a normal .295 BABIP and only had a .225 batting average. If he has any type of bad luck with BABIP he could be a .200 hitter, which would make him almost unusable despite the home runs.

Josh Reddick

Bats: L | Age: 28 | Team: Athletics | Position: OF | RK: (71) | Player Rater: ESPN (156), NFBC (154)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	611	32	85	85	11/1	.242	.768	.269	22.4%	8.2%	35.3%	30.1%
2013	MLB	26	385	12	54	56	9/2	.226	.686	.255	19.5%	10.4%	26.7%	36.8%
2014	MLB	27	363	12	53	54	1/1	.264	.763	.289	15.9%	7.1%	29.4%	32.7%
Proj.			500	20	80	80	7	.265						

I was a big believer in **Josh Reddick** at the start of the season because he was finally healthy (he was hurt most of 2013 with a wrist sprain) and was a year removed from hitting 32 home runs. However, that didn't happen as he had an extremely brutal start to the season.

Then in early June he was placed on the DL with a hyper extended knee. He came off the DL after 23 days and proceeded to play in a couple games before being placed on the DL again for the knee. He would go on to miss another 23 days. Once he was fully healthy he started to hit and looked like the player in 2012. The table below shows his first half and second half splits for 2014.

Splits	PA	AVG	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	GB%	FB%
First Half	196	.229	.280	21.9%	8.2%	6.8%	36.8%	43.4%
Second Half	200	.299	.296	10.0%	6.0%	9.5%	27.7%	56.0%

The biggest number that stands out was how much the strikeout rate decreased and how many more fly balls he was hitting. Also, what’s not shown is how much more contact he was making. Since we’re dealing two equally small sample sizes it’s easy to create multiple narratives. I’m a bigger believer in the second half data than the first because a change in approach at the plate must have occurred for the strikeout rate to be cut in half. Maybe he doesn’t hit .299 again, but if he’s making a lot of contact he’s going to have a .260-plus batting average.

In regards to his power numbers, I no longer believe he has the raw power to be a 30-plus home run hitter because in 2012 the average home run distance of his home runs were 376.2 feet and the average for his career is 379.6 feet, which is in the bottom 10% of home run distances. That said, if he’s going to hit fly balls more than 50% of the time he can walk to 20-25 home runs with a 9-10% HR/FB rate.

Since he missed nearly two months of the season with a hyperextended knee that could be the reason why he only stole one base last year, but why did he only have one stolen base before the injury? I can’t point to the low OBP because even in 2013 when he had a .307 OBP he had nine stolen bases. If he can steal 8-plus bases he could be a fifth outfielder in a 10-team mixed league. If he only has 1-3 stolen bases he’s only a deep mixed league option.

Anthony Rendon

Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Nationals | Position: 2B | RK: (10) | Player Rater: ESPN (12), NFBC (13)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	23	116	6	17	24	1/0	.319	1.064	.352	16.4%	19.7%	52.1%	29.8%
2013	MLB	23	351	7	40	35	1/1	.265	.725	.307	17.5%	7.9%	23.5%	41.5%
2014	MLB	24	613	21	111	83	17/3	.287	.824	.314	15.2%	8.5%	23.4%	41.3%
Proj.			580	23	100	90	15	.285						

When I compare **Anthony Rendon’s** first two seasons in the majors all I see is a player who has improved immensely as a hitter. He struck out less, walked more while still maintaining the same contact rate.

In the preseason I was afraid he would either miss a lot of time due to injury (he has missed a lot of time in his college and pro career due to ankle injuries) and/or take longer to adjust to Major League pitching because of the lack of at-bats in the minor leagues.

Well, the opposite happened. He stayed healthy and quickly adjusted to the adjustments pitchers made on him. He never stole a lot of bases in the minor leagues (probably due to the higher probability he would reaggravate his ankle injuries) so the fact he stole 17 under new manager **Matt Williams** leads me to believe he can repeat the same totals in 2015.

What I love about Rendon is he hits the ball to all fields. In his Major League career only 40% of his hits were to left field. Also, only 35% of the balls he put in play were hit to left field. Other than injury, the only downside with Rendon for 2015 is about 80% of his home runs were hit to left field or left center so

he may only has pull-side power. However, as he gets older and stronger he's going to eventually have opposite field power, which could make him a 30-plus home run candidate in 3-4 years.

Ben Revere

Bats: L | Age: 26 | Team: Phillies | Position: OF | RK: (99) | Player Rater: ESPN (17), NFBC (20)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	511	0	70	32	40/9	.294	.675	.325	9.8%	5.2%	14.6%	68.7%
2013	MLB	25	315	0	37	17	22/8	.305	.691	.344	10.7%	4.8%	10.9%	61.6%
2014	MLB	26	601	2	71	28	49/8	.306	.686	.330	7.8%	2.1%	9.6%	65.5%
Proj.			550	0	70	29	35	.298						

When you draft **Ben Revere** you know what you're going to get, which is a .290-plus batting average and 30-plus stolen bases. On thing to note about Revere is even though he played in 151 games he only started in 132 of them. He had a stomach virus that cost him a few games, but overall he was healthy. For some strange reason they were playing **Tony Gwyn Jr.** [ahead of him](#) randomly throughout the year.

You would think that since he hits for a high batting average and steals so many bases he would have 90-plus runs scored. However, the Phillies offense was so inept that when Revere was on-base he never scored any runs as he only scored 71 runs.

Revere provides good production in two categories and provides almost nothing else in the other three categories. If you roster him make sure you have a lot of power already because he's not going to hit two again.

Jose Reyes

Bats: B | Age: 31 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: SS | RK: (41) | Player Rater: ESPN (26), NFBC (30)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	642	11	86	57	40/11	.287	.780	.298	7.8%	8.8%	23.8%	47.4%
2013	MLB	30	382	10	58	37	15/6	.296	.780	.315	11.2%	8.1%	20.5%	47.8%
2014	MLB	31	610	9	94	51	30/2	.287	.726	.312	11.1%	5.8%	19.2%	42.0%
Proj.			550	9	90	53	30	.289						

After suffering a brutal, freak ankle strain in 2013 **Jose Reyes** bounced back and nearly played a full season. In early April he missed 16 games with a hamstring strain. Since 2009 he's only averaged 115 games played. Other than 2013 ankle strain all of his injuries have been tissue-based injuries. For example, an oblique strain in 2010, hamstring strains in 2011 (twice) and in 2014. These types of tissue injuries means there's a higher likelihood of re-injury in the future because these injuries are due to the body breaking down. And since he'll turn 32 in June the probability of tissue injuries reoccurring again in 2015 are high.

Some fantasy owners may bucket Reyes as a speed-first player and usually these types of players see a dramatic drop in fantasy production after they turn 31 (the best current example is **Michael Bourn**). However, Reyes does have a lot of speed, but he has a little pop too, averaging nearly 10 home runs a year. The question is there a chance he could go back to the 16-19 home runs he hit in his early 20s?

Last year he had 4.7% HR/FB rate, which is 1.3 percentage points lower than his career rate. What's also odd about the low HR/FB rate is he plays in a bam box of a home ballpark. Last year his home HR/FB rate was 5.4%, which is still below the career rate. He's hitting more fly balls, which is great because if the HR/FB positively regresses and he plays in 140 games (which is a big if) he could hit 13-15 home runs.

Like **Troy Tulowitzki**, if you draft Reyes you want to draft another shortstop and put him in your middle infield spot because if Reyes gets hurt you'll have more options on the waiver wire. Considering his propensity of tissue injuries I cannot project to play more than 130 games, but if he can play that many games I can see him nearly repeating 2013s numbers with room for a little more pop.

Alex Rios

Bats: R | Age: 34 | Team: Royals | Position: OF | RK: (70) | Player Rater: ESPN (98), NFBC (100)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	605	25	93	91	23/6	.304	.850	.323	14.4%	4.1%	29.5%	40.3%
2013	MLB	32	616	18	83	81	42/7	.278	.756	.311	16.3%	6.2%	24.5%	44.3%
2014	MLB	33	492	4	54	54	17/9	.280	.709	.335	17.9%	4.4%	22.5%	44.1%
Proj.			550	14	70	70	20	.274						

After averaging neraly19 home runs the previous four seasons, **Alex Rios'** power was almost depleted. He was bothered by nagging [ankle](#) and [thumb](#) injuries throughout the season so it's possible those injuries contributed to his down season. Not only did he hit for less home runs, his overall extra base hit percentage was the lowest its been since his rookie season (table below).

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2004	122	33	27.0%
2005	126	49	38.9%
2006	136	73	53.7%
2007	191	98	51.3%
2008	185	85	45.9%
2009	144	67	46.5%
2010	161	74	46.0%
2011	122	50	41.0%
2012	184	95	51.6%
2013	171	73	42.7%
2014	138	46	33.3%

Since his home runs were so much than previous years it had a huge impact on the extra base hit numbers. Last year he had 30 doubles. In 2013 33 and in 2012 37, which indicates he got unlucky with the HR/FB rate. The question is how much will it positively regress? I think 20 is his ceiling, especially considering the ballpark he's going to call home, but he should be able to hi 13-16 with room for a little more.

Usually when a player has shown his true talent level then suddenly falls off a cliff and injuries played a big role I usually tend believe a bounce back the following season and Rios is no exception.

Historically, Rios has been Jekyll and Hyde from a fantasy perspective. One year he'll be a 20/20 player and the following season he'll only be an 13/11 player. Since he only signed a one-year deal provides extra optimism he can have a bounce back year especially in the stolen bases department. The Royals love to run the bases and if he can stay healthy, 30 is his floor.

Rene Rivera

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Rays | Position: C | RK: (259) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2011	MLB	27	104	1	9	5	0/0	.144	.412	.194	28.1%	7.0%	39.7%	43.8%
2013	MLB	29	67	0	4	7	0/0	.254	.596	.321	22.5%	2.8%	28.3%	47.2%
2014	MLB	30	294	11	27	44	0/0	.252	.751	.301	23.1%	8.2%	29.6%	36.3%
Proj.			400	10	40	40	0	.235						

Last year the career journeyman **Rene Rivera** hit 11 home runs in 329 plate appearances. He'll enter Spring Training as the everyday catcher for the Rays, which is causing some fantasy analysts to say he's a sleeper for power. I'm not buying it. In his entire professional career he's never hit more than 11 home runs (in the minors and majors) and has averaged 5-10 home runs each year. Last year he had a 12% HR/FB rate, which is a very solid rate, but for his Major League career his HR/FB rate is 8.2%. He has a 41.5% career fly ball rate. Next year he'll hit about 120-130 fly balls, which means he'll hit between 9-11 home runs, which is about right for me.

Anthony Rizzo

Bats: L | Age: 25 | Team: Cubs | Position: 1B | RK: (25) | Player Rater: ESPN (19), NFBC (21)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	337	15	44	48	3/2	.285	.805	.310	16.8%	7.3%	24.3%	47.1%
2013	MLB	23	606	23	71	80	6/5	.233	.742	.258	18.4%	11.0%	26.2%	42.8%
2014	MLB	24	524	32	89	78	5/4	.286	.913	.311	18.8%	11.9%	26.0%	37.6%
Proj.			550	24	90	90	4	.279						

Since 2012 **Anthony Rizzo** has had the following BABIPs: .310, .258 and .311. I excluded his 2011 numbers because he was called up before he was ready. In 2013 his BABIP was extremely low. This was

because he got extremely unlucky on batting average on line drives (.606). In 2014 the batting average on line drives positively regressed to .713. Therefore, I believe last year's .286 batting average reflects his true talent level.

The big question about Rizzo is was the 30 home run power legit? Is there room for more in 2015?

First, since 2012 his fly ball rate has increased year over year for three years in a row, which means there will be more opportunities for balls to leave the park. Second, the distance on fly balls actually decreased last year. From 2012-13 the average fly ball distance was 395. Last year it was only 391. Third, the HR/FB rate shot up more than six percentage points in 2014, which is a gigantic jump. In 2013 he had 40 doubles and 23 home runs; last year 28 doubles and 32 home runs. You could read that statistic in two ways. A) a lot of those doubles turned into home runs or B) some of those balls that should've been doubles were home runs. I fall into the ladder category.

Last year he missed 18 games with a [lower back strain](#), which isn't overly concerning because the injury doesn't seem to be systemic. That said, anyone with back problems would tell you once you have back problems they never fully go away.

Overall, I do not believe the 30 home run power is legitimate and I expect him to regress to the 23-26 range, which is still really good. However, he is going to be drafted as a 30-35 home run hitter, which means he's going to be over drafted.

Alex Rodriguez

Bats: R | Age: 39 | Team: Yankees | Position: SS | RK: (104) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2011	MLB	35	373	16	67	62	4/1	.276	.823	.311	18.7%	11.0%	31.1%	49.0%
2012	MLB	36	463	18	74	57	13/1	.272	.783	.323	21.9%	9.6%	27.8%	45.5%
2013	MLB	37	156	7	21	19	4/2	.244	.771	.292	23.8%	12.7%	29.2%	38.9%
Proj.			520	23	72	72	9	.245						

If you remove the controversy you'll see **Alex Rodriguez** is an interesting fantasy option for 2015. In his last full season (2012) he hit .272 with 18 home runs and 13 stolen bases. How much different is that compared to the numbers **Kyle Seager** provides? Granted Rodriguez accumulated these statistics three years ago at the age of 36/37 and in 2015 he's going to be 39/40 years old. Even in a brief sample in 2013 his ISO (.179) was similar to Kyle Seager's career totals in the majors (.172).

His contact rates have been in decline for four straight years while during the same time frame the strikeout rate has been increasing, which indicates he'll probably have a batting average in the .240-.250 range, but if he can play 140 games he could have 23-plus home runs with 4-10 stolen bases.

On a pure talent level Rodriguez is one of the 5-10 best players in Major League history and based on where he's likely to go in drafts he has the ability to be provide a tremendous ROI on your investment.

Remember, based on where you'll likely draft him he doesn't have to do a lot to provide a positive ROI. Also, if he flames out after the first month you can drop him and move on. It will not be hard to drop him because the cost it took acquire him was so little.

Jimmy Rollins

Bats: B | Age: 36 | Team: Phillies | Position: SS | RK: (127) | Player Rater: ESPN (59), NFBC (49)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	632	23	102	68	30/5	.250	.743	.262	13.7%	8.9%	27.4%	39.9%
2013	MLB	34	600	6	65	39	22/6	.252	.667	.288	14.0%	8.9%	24.2%	38.8%
2014	MLB	35	538	17	78	55	28/6	.243	.717	.269	16.4%	10.5%	25.5%	42.1%
Proj.			550	11	70	65	22	.240						

After an extremely bad 2013 season I wrote in last year's guide that father time was starting to catch up to **Jimmy Rollins**. All the signs were there: the strikeout rate was climbing, the batting average was decreasing and he had the lowest home run total of his career.

Instead of continuing his decline he rebounded nicely in 2014, hitting 17 home runs and stealing 28 stolen bases. Even though he had a good year I'm still not buying him. The strikeout rate continued to climb and the contact rate continues to decline, which indicates he's becoming an all or nothing player. This approach doesn't necessarily mean his power will decrease, but it will have a dramatic effect on his ability to hit for average.

In regards to his batting average I don't see a lot of upside because of the aforementioned talking points and his inability to hit lefties. Since 2011, in 737 PAs he has a .239 batting average and only 11 home runs. If he played on a more progressive team he would be platooned against lefties, which would positively impact his fantasy value.

All that said, he's going to bat leadoff for the Dodgers so he could score 100 runs if he can play a full season (which is a big if considering his age) even if the OBP drops 10-15 points.

Wilin Rosario

Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: Rockies | Position: C | RK: (121) | Player Rater: ESPN (157), NFBC (164)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	396	28	67	71	4/5	.270	.843	.289	23.2%	5.9%	29.9%	45.8%
2013	MLB	24	449	21	63	79	4/1	.292	.801	.344	23.4%	3.2%	25.2%	41.9%
2014	MLB	25	382	13	46	54	1/0	.267	.739	.293	17.1%	5.6%	17.4%	51.4%
Proj.			420	18	63	70	1	.280						

After a breakout 2013 season where **Wilin Rosario** hit .292 with 21 home runs, fantasy owners had high hopes entering the 2014 season (including myself). Unfortunately, he struggled for the first two months of the season before ultimately finding his way.

During the first two months of the year he had a .225/.261/.395 slash line with a .240 BABIP. In the last four months of the season he had a .289/.328/.446 slash line with a .322 BABIP.

For his career he's always been a better at home (.305/.346/.540) compared to the road (.243/.267/.422). However, those away numbers were dragged down by last season where he hit .186 with a .209 BABIP.

One of the biggest criticism's about Rosario is he's a free swinger and doesn't take a walk. Some fantasy owners may believe his free swinger tendencies created his low BABIP, but that's not the case. Just because a batter doesn't walk doesn't mean they can't hit. During Ichiro's prime he never walked and he consistently had 200 hits. Rosario dramatically improved his approach at the plate as the strike out rate decreased six percentage points while the contact rate increased two percentage points.

So far we know Rosario had:

1. An incredibly low BABIP on the road
2. After a low BABIP during the two months of the season he provided numbers similar to 2013
3. His approach at the plate improved

Even though he provided a higher batting average the last four months of the season he didn't provide a lot of power. Perhaps injuries sapped his power?

In early May he was placed on the DL with [a viral infection](#) and only missed the minimum 15 days. In late August he was put on the DL with [inflammation in his left wrist](#) and again, only missed the minimum amount of time.

Any time a hitter has a wrist injury my first inclination is this bothered him all year and sapped his power. However, if that's true then why was he only on the DL for 15 days? If it was more severe wouldn't his DL stint been longer? As a fantasy community we may have to wait for more information to come out before we have a better idea how much this affected his power.

For his career, before the 2014 season, he had a career 20.3% HR/FB rate. That number may look high, but it wasn't a result of Coors Field as he has a 19.7% HR/FB rate on the road. Last year he only had a 12% HR/FB rate, which indicates he should positively regress in 2015.

What happened to Rosario in 2014 was a combination of bad luck and injuries. I expect the batting average to bounce back in 2015, but I don't see him coming close to the 28 home runs he hit in 2012 again. I would expect 18-22 with upside for more.

Pablo Sandoval**Bats: B | Age: 28 | Team: Red Sox | Position: 3B | RK: (68) | Player Rater: ESPN (83), NFBC (85)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	396	12	59	63	1/1	.283	.789	.301	13.3%	8.6%	28.2%	42.7%
2013	MLB	26	525	14	52	79	0/0	.278	.758	.301	13.5%	8.0%	23.5%	40.9%
2014	MLB	27	588	16	68	73	0/0	.279	.739	.300	13.3%	6.1%	22.5%	43.5%
Proj.			550	18	74	90	0	.285						

I was never a **Pablo Sandoval** fan as a fantasy or real life player. Since 2009 he's never driven in more than 79 runs; hasn't stolen more than two bases since 2010; hasn't had a batting average greater than .283 since 2011; he has below average range at third base (which has no bearing for fantasy); is a knuckle head off the field.

After signing with the Red Sox some fantasy owners may think his offensive numbers should see a boost because he's changing ballparks. However, he's been a far better hitter at AT&T Park than on the road (table below).

Splits	AVG	OPS	BABIP	wOBA	ISO	HR/FB
Home	.312	.852	.326	.362	.175	10.3%
Away	.277	.772	.300	.331	.166	10.1%

If the Giants ballpark negatively impacted Sandoval's statistics I can't evidence to support that notion. When Sandoval signed with the Red Sox Keith Law [said this](#) in regards to Sandoval's power, "I think the power is in there physically (to hit 5-10 more home runs); his approach just doesn't allow for it, as he prefers to go the other way and hit line drives." So it's possible he makes a change in his approach and starts to hit for more power, but to this point he's shown no signs of a change in his approach thus far.

Sandoval won't hit for much power or steal any bases so his fantasy value is going to be dependent upon his ability to hit for a high average, drive in and score a lot of runs. The last two should be fairly easy for him to do because of the home ballpark the caliber of hitters that will be hitting ahead of him. Since he signed for a lot of money and since he's playing in Boston he'll likely be drafted as player who can 20-plus home runs, but I don't think he'll hit that many.

Carlos Santana**Bats: B | Age: 28 | Team: Indians | Position: 3B, 1B | RK: (94) | Player Rater: ESPN (84), NFBC (77)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	507	18	72	76	3/5	.252	.785	.278	16.6%	14.9%	28.7%	44.2%
2013	MLB	27	541	20	75	74	3/1	.268	.832	.301	17.1%	14.5%	22.5%	43.4%
2014	MLB	28	541	27	68	85	5/2	.231	.792	.249	18.8%	17.1%	22.6%	42.1%
Proj.			540	26	70	83	3	.245						

Before the 2014 season [I wrote](#) **Carlos Santana** could have best fantasy season because he was rarely going to catch games. The table below provides the data I provided in the article I linked to.

Splits	PA	AVG	OBP	SLG	OPS
as C	1295	.246	.365	.436	.801
as 1B	461	.267	.373	.492	.865
as DH	336	.263	.360	.412	.772

Santana could not have a more brutal month than this past April as he had a .151/.313/.280 slash line with a .164 BABIP. After that month he had a slash line of .250/.380/.464 slash line with a .268 BABIP. That stat line looks very similar to the stat lines the past two seasons, which leads me to believe that's his true talent level. Also, he hit .212 against righties last year while he had a career .238 batting average prior to last year. Since his batting average was slow he may be a draft day value because other fantasy owners may be worried about the low batting average.

As I predicted last year moving off of catcher would allow him to provide better power numbers. For three years in a row his HR/FB and extra base hit percentage has increased, which implies he's growing into his power. On the flip side the home run distance has decreased during that same time span (table below).

Year	H	XBH	XBH%	HR/FB	HRDST
2011	132	64	48.5%	16.1%	382.52
2012	128	47	36.7%	11.3%	391.99
2013	145	60	41.4%	13.0%	385.83
2014	125	52	41.6%	15.5%	381.91

Danny Santana

Bats: B | Age: 24 | Team: Twins | Position: SS | RK: (91) | Player Rater: ESPN (60), NFBC (90)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	539	2	66	45	30/13	.297	.719	.353	16.0%	4.1%	26.0%	54.2%
2014	AAA	23	97	0	15	7	4/1	.268	.692	.377	26.7%	5.7%	29.6%	47.9%
2014	MLB	23	405	7	70	40	20/4	.319	.824	.405	22.8%	4.4%	17.4%	49.4%
Proj.			580	9	75	55	27	.265						

Before 2014 began **Danny Santana** projected, for some, to be a utility player in the majors, but last year, in 430 PAs, had a great year. He hit for power, average and stole bases.

He has plus-plus (on the scouting scale) speed, which means his stolen base totals last year were legit and he is a candidate to steal 30-plus next year. Last year he had a .405 BABIP, which is not going to repeat in 2015, but since he's such a fast player he's going to have a higher than normal BABIPs Since he's so fast his batting average floor will be .250, but I still have major concerns about his ability to hit for a high average because of his approach.

First, he struck out nearly 23% of the time, which is really high for a player who projects to be a leadoff hitter. Second, his approach with two-strikes needs a lot of improvement. Last year he struck out 39.4% of the time with two strikes. To put that number into perspective the bottom 25% of batters struck out that often with two strikes (i.e. 75% of batters had a lower strikeout rate than Santana).

Since he wasn't a highly regarded prospect he may fall deep enough into drafts where he could be a bargain. He offers a power and speed combo that is becoming harder to find, but I would be careful about the batting average. It could regress to the .250-.260 range because his approach still needs work.

Michael Saunders

Bats: L | Age: 28 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: OF | RK: (75) | Player Rater: ESPN (208), NFBC (233)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	507	19	71	57	21/4	.247	.738	.297	23.9%	7.8%	26.3%	47.2%
2013	MLB	26	406	12	59	46	13/5	.236	.720	.298	25.2%	11.5%	26.4%	42.7%
2014	MLB	27	231	8	38	34	4/5	.273	.791	.327	22.4%	9.9%	26.4%	46.6%
Proj.			480	22	75	75	11	.258						

Michael Saunders was traded to the Blue Jays and is likely going to be on the better end of a timeshare with **Kevin Pillar**. Determining how effective he'll be against right handed pitching depends on how big of a sample you want to look at. The table below shows his various numbers against righties including: his career on the road and his aggregated numbers from 2012-14.

vs. RHP	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB
Career	1,297	.235	.709	.288	24.1%	10.1%	11.2%
Road Career	692	.253	.769	.312	24.1%	10.1%	12.4%
2012-14	869	.251	.755	.303	23.6%	9.9%	13.8%

In regards to the batting average I think his road numbers are more indicative of what I'm expecting him to hit next year. In fact I think he'll add 5-10 points because of the home ballpark and the other good AL East ballparks he'll get to hit in. I also think he'll hit an extra 2-5 home runs too because of the ballparks.

In 2012 he was one home run away from being a 20/20 player so it's possible he could still do it again, but I have doubts if the stolen bases can approach those stolen base totals. First, his stolen base totals and stolen base success rate have decreased significantly year-over-year the past three seasons. Second, the Blue Jays ranked 24th in the majors in stolen base attempts last year; the counter to that is they ranked 6th in 2013 so it's possible the team will return to its stealing ways.

If there's a player who could have a 2012 **Josh Reddick** breakout season it's Saunders.

Jonathan Schoop**Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Orioles | Position: 2B | RK: (192) | Player Rater: ESPN (251), NFBC (146)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	AA	20	485	14	68	56	5/3	.245	.710	.282	18.6%	9.0%	27.5%	46.1%
2013	AAA	21	270	9	30	34	1/2	.256	.697	.290	19.0%	4.5%	26.8%	40.7%
2014	MLB	22	455	16	48	45	2/0	.209	.598	.249	25.4%	2.7%	19.8%	51.5%
Proj.			500	18	60	60	1	.230						

Okay, **Jonathan Schoop's** .209 batting average doesn't look very appealing, but he just turned 23 (in October) and was rushed through the high minors and missed a substantial amount of time (in the minors) during the 2013. So last year he played the entire year at the Major League level at the age of 22 with only half of a year playing time the year prior.

His approach at the plate needs to improve, especially with two strikes, but if you're at the end of your draft and you need a player who could hit 20-plus home runs then Schoop could do that for you. You may be thinking his 16 home runs last year was aided greatly by his home ballpark, but in fact 11 of his home runs were on the road. The swing and miss will be part of his game, but I think the batting average reaches the .230s and he could hit for even more power as adds more good weight.

Kyle Seager**Bats: L | Age: 27 | Team: Mariners | Position: 3B | RK: (65) | Player Rater: ESPN (45), NFBC (42)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	594	20	62	86	13/5	.259	.738	.286	16.9%	7.1%	34.3%	35.9%
2013	MLB	25	615	22	79	69	9/3	.260	.764	.290	17.6%	9.8%	28.1%	35.5%
2014	MLB	26	590	25	71	96	7/5	.268	.788	.296	18.0%	8.0%	26.7%	38.9%
Proj.			590	22	74	90	5	.264						

What's not to like about **Kyle Seager**? His home run numbers and batting average has increased year-over-year for three straight years. However, there signs he will regress next year.

First, his HR/FB rate at home was 15.4%, more than five percentage points higher than his career rate. Second, he's an extreme pull hitter. Nearly 47% of the balls he puts in play are to right field. I have to believe he'll eventually succumb to the defensive shift and become more of a batting average liability.

Third, he hit .300 (with a .318 BABIP) at home, which is much higher than his career at home (.228 batting average with a .262 BABIP). Since the ballpark is so pitcher friendly I have to assume those numbers are going to regress. Fourth, his stolen base totals have decreased year-over-year and last year his stolen base success rate was only 54%. If this trend continues he may only steal 4-5 next year.

All that said, I don't see a big regression occurring. Even though the strikeout rate is increasing, it's still at a level that won't drive his batting average to the sub-.240s. The contact and swing rates are stable

and the swinging strike rate has been decreased year-over-year, which indicates he's becoming better at identifying his pitch.

Jean Segura

Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Brewers | Position: SS | RK: (106) | Player Rater: ESPN (143), NFBC (147)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	151	0	19	14	7/1	.258	.640	.302	13.9%	7.8%	12.3%	65.4%
2013	MLB	23	588	12	74	49	44/13	.294	.752	.326	13.5%	4.0%	13.2%	59.4%
2014	MLB	24	513	5	61	31	20/9	.246	.614	.275	12.6%	5.0%	12.1%	60.9%
Proj.			530	6	65	55	30	.269						

When trying to ascertain **Jean Segura's** true talent level based on his 2013 numbers you either believed the first three months when he was exceptional or the last three months when he was a bad Triple-A player. Last year I believed in the latter because the first half of the season was fueled by an extremely high .349 BABIP that was not going to be repeated in 2014. Even though I thought he would regress, I didn't think he would fall off significantly.

His year was not without injury as **Ryan Braun** hit him in the face with his baseball bat (seriously, that actually happened) and the death of his son July 16.

What's strange about his 2014 season was he didn't hit in the first half, but hit in second half. What's even stranger is even though the batting average improved, the stolen base attempts decreased significantly (table below).

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	SB	CS
1st Half	361	.232	.582	.257	12.5%	15	8
2nd Half	196	.271	.675	.309	12.8%	5	1

It doesn't make sense his stolen base attempts dropped off so much even though he was getting on-base at a much higher clip. In early August he missed one game with quadriceps strain, but there wasn't any reported injury to suggest that was the reason for the lack of stolen base attempts. My hunch is he had an injury and the stolen base attempts should increase.

Segura is a high ground ball rate hitter so he is going to be susceptible to variations in BABIP, but the ballpark is bam box and his speed is good enough he should have a BABIP in the low .300s.

He has the true talent to be a .265-.275 hitter and to steal 30-plus bases, but what's going to suppress his fantasy value is he's going to hit at the bottom of the lineup (probably 8th), which will lower his RBI and run scoring opportunities.

Marcus Semien

Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Athletics | Position: SS | RK: (199) | Player Rater: ESPN (287), NFBC (283)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AAA	23	303	15	57	52	7/2	.267	.881	.282	16.1%	14.5%	38.2%	31.3%
2013	MLB	22	69	2	7	7	2/2	.261	.673	.348	31.0%	1.4%	27.1%	29.2%
2014	MLB	23	231	6	30	28	3/0	.234	.673	.310	27.5%	8.2%	26.4%	40.5%
Proj.			500	8	60	55	6	.245						

Marcus Semien comes over to the A's via the **Jeff Samardzija** trade in December. Semien is penciled in as the starting shortstop for the A's for 2015 and probably the next 2-3 years (I've seen **Daniel Roberston** play I wouldn't be shocked if he moves to second base).

The scouting reports ([here](#) and [here](#)) suggest he's not going to hit a lot of home runs, but he hit 23 in 2013 (15 came at Double-A) and 21 in 2014 (15 came at Triple-A). In 300 ABs in the majors he has a 9.6% HR/FB rate. During that time he has hit 83 fly balls. Suppose he got 500 Abs he would roughly hit 138-139 fly balls. If he maintains that rate he would hit 12 home runs. Obviously I'm not projecting 12 home runs because he's moving from a great hitters park to one of the best pitcher's park and of the eight home runs he hit in the majors, only two were hit on the road.

Since Semien doesn't have any loud tools he's going to have more real life value than fantasy value. He doesn't hit for a lot of power and doesn't have a lot of speed. If you're in a deep mixed league he is usable in the MI slot as a warm body who will get at-bats every day.

Andrelton Simmons

Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Braves | Position: SS | RK: (194) | Player Rater: ESPN (222), NFBC (252)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	166	3	17	19	1/0	.289	.751	.310	11.5%	6.6%	19.6%	56.8%
2013	MLB	23	606	17	76	59	6/5	.248	.692	.247	8.4%	6.1%	22.7%	42.9%
2014	MLB	24	540	7	44	46	4/5	.244	.617	.263	10.4%	5.6%	20.9%	53.1%
Proj.			560	10	60	55	5	.249						

At the end of 2013 **Andrelton Simmons** provided statistical numbers different from his minor league numbers. For example, he never hit for power in the minors, but he hit 17 home runs. He stole bases 18-plus bases twice in the minors but only stole six. He also had a .248 batting average with an unusually low .247 BABIP.

Those numbers made it difficult to project what he was going to do in 2014 because there were wide variances in his performances in the majors and minors. Last year I didn't think the power was legit, but I thought the batting average would increase. In 2014 the former happened and his batting average declined.

What's odd is his ground ball rate increased ten percentage points and the BABIP increased 16 percentage points, which implies his batting average was driven on his BABIP on ground balls. Even though he doesn't strike out at high rate I don't see a lot of room for improvement in the batting average department. He doesn't mash lefties and hits the ball on the ground too much.

In regards to his speed, he could steal 15-20 bases, but since he only has a 50% stolen base success rate in the majors he may not get enough opportunities to steal 10-plus bases.

If he continues to hit the ball on the ground more than 50% of the time I don't see any more than 10-11 home runs. Since he hits in the bottom of the lineup he won't have a lot of RBI and run scoring opportunities. Combine that with the low batting average, he's only rosterable in 14-team mixed leagues.

Jonathan Singleton

Bats: L | Age: 23 | Team: Astros | Position: 1B | RK: (207) | Player Rater: ESPN (304), NFBC (186)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	21	245	6	31	31	1/0	.220	.687	.314	30.3%	15.6%	37.1%	39.0%
2014	AAA	22	195	14	37	43	1/1	.267	.941	.292	21.8%	17.6%	36.1%	37.5%
2014	MLB	22	310	13	42	44	2/3	.168	.620	.238	37.0%	13.8%	29.9%	40.7%
Proj.			550	20	60	64	2	.202						

When **Jon Singleton** got called up [I said](#) he would be a top 15-18 first baseman and based on how well he performed I was too optimistic. Obviously his final numbers were really bad but there are signs of optimism.

First, when he is able to make contact it very loud and hard. Second, he signed a five-year contract worth \$10 million (with three club options which will make the contract worth \$35 million) so the Astros are going to give him every opportunity to be successful (i.e. he's going to play every day).

In regards to his 2015 fantasy value I am still not a believer he will turn it around. He struck out 37% of the time and it's hard to be successful striking out that much. Also, it's not like the strikeout rate was front loaded; the strikeout rate was consistent the entire year. I watched his at-bats and I didn't see any improvement in his approach at the plate.

Against non-fastballs he only had a .134 batting average. Next year pitchers will challenge him and the walk rate will plummet. Lastly, I don't think he's going to be able to hit lefties so he will most likely end up in a platoon, which will lower his at-bat totals.

Jorge Soler**Bats: R | Age: 22 | Team: Cubs | Position: OF | RK: (140) | Player Rater: ESPN (307), NFBC (355)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AA	22	65	6	13	22	0/0	.415	1.355	.457	19.0%	15.2%	40.4%	32.7%
2014	AAA	22	110	8	22	29	0/1	.282	.996	.303	20.5%	13.4%	35.7%	46.4%
2014	MLB	22	89	5	11	20	1/0	.292	.903	.339	24.7%	6.2%	20.9%	53.7%
Proj.			500	20	62	77	2	.251						

In regards to 2015 fantasy value **Jorge Soler** will provide very similar production as **Marcell Ozuna**; Soler will hit 20-plus home runs with a .250-.260 batting average. Its very possible Soler will be drafted ahead of Ozuna because of the team he plays for, how he performed in his brief 24 game sample and because he hasn't failed yet in the majors. The ladder is important to note because not failing in a brief sample allows the fantasy owner to have unencumbered dreams about what he can realistically produce.

His [scouting report](#) suggests he's going to have a significant adjustment period at the big league level so his batting average floor is going to be a lot lower when compared to other young hitters. Odds are he's going to be drafted as a player who will hit .275 with 25-plus home runs and I do not believe that is a realistic ceiling for him.

Steven Souza**Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Rays | Position: OF | RK: (98) | Player Rater: ESPN (523), NFBC (522)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	24	273	15	54	44	20/6	.300	.953	.360	23.5%	12.7%	36.3%	42.3%
2014	AAA	25	346	18	62	75	26/7	.350	1.022	.398	18.4%	12.8%	31.4%	41.5%
2014	MLB	25	23	2	2	2	0/0	.130	.622	.071	26.9%	11.5%	25.0%	50.0%
Proj.			500	18	65	65	18	.255						

Based on the scouting reports I've read ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) **Stephen Souza** is going to be this year's **Kole Calhoun**. First, they both dominated the minors when they were young for the level. Second, they were middling prospects before making it to the majors. It's important to note that Souza didn't even make Baseball America's or Baseball Prospectus' Top 10 lists for the Nationals before the 2014 season began. Third, the scouting reports are mixed on what he'll do in the majors. I think the fact the Rays got him also enhances his perceived fantasy value because there's still this narrative in the fantasy community that if the Rays did then it's super smart. Of course, forget the fact they haven't produced any quality Major Leaguers from any of their drafts since 2008.

Obviously the Rays must have liked Souza a lot if they were willing to trade Wil Myers for him. It's also important the Rays organization has had more looks at Souza than the aforementioned the authors of the aforementioned scouting reports. His numbers in Triple-A last year were really good, but he was able to put up those numbers with a .398 BABIP. If a player in the majors had a .398 BABIP we would all

be saying major regression is coming. I think he could be a 15/15 player but I don't think the batting average is going to be really high (he still plays in an extreme pitcher's park).

Some fantasy owners are already saying he's a 20/20 candidate, which is crazy to me. Last year there were only five players who had 20/20 seasons ... seriously, only five! For someone to expect a career "old" (he turns 26 at the end of April) minor leaguer to come to majors and put up those types of numbers is crazy to me.

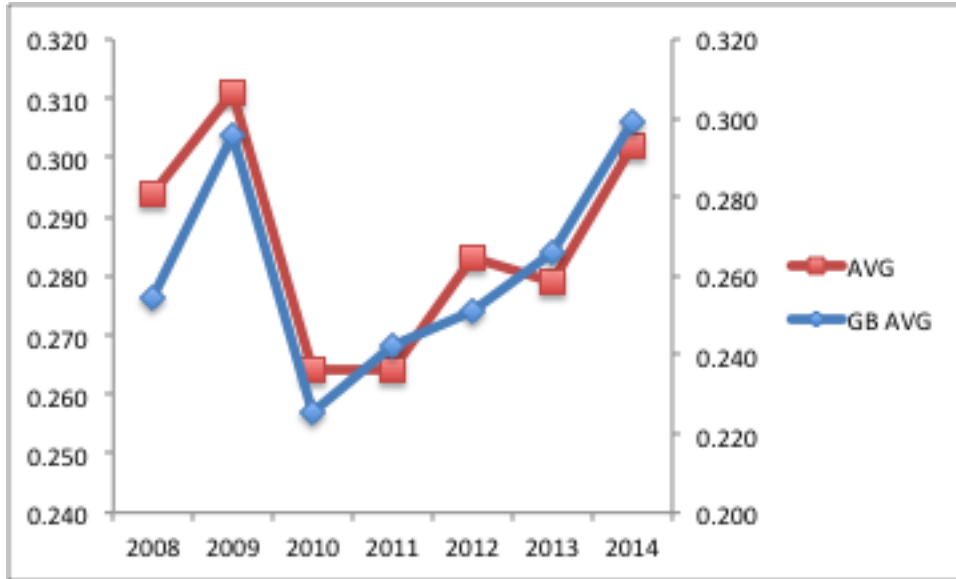
His hype is also going to be fueled by the simple fact he has not failed yet in the majors. Last year every one loved Brad Miller so much they were taking him over stable and unspectacular players like **Neil Walker** and **Erik Aybar**. Now no one is going to want to draft Miller because of how much he sucked last year. Sure, it's possible he could put up a 20/20 season, but for me, if a player has that potential he would have made it to the majors three, four years ago.

Denard Span

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Nationals | Position: OF | RK: (92) | Player Rater: ESPN (28), NFBC (33)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	516	4	71	41	17/6	.283	.738	.315	10.9%	8.3%	17.9%	57.3%
2013	MLB	29	610	4	75	47	20/6	.279	.707	.313	11.6%	6.3%	15.7%	55.5%
2014	MLB	30	610	5	94	37	31/7	.302	.771	.330	9.7%	7.5%	17.4%	48.6%
Proj.			590	4	85	44	25	.281						

At this point we know who **Denard Span** is. He'll hit .280-plus with 20-plus stolen bases and 70-plus runs. After four years of not hitting .300-plus he was able to hit .302 last year. The increase in batting average also came with an uptick in BABIP. Last year he hit .299 on ground balls. From 2008-13 he hit .256. The image below shows how batting average on ground balls strongly influences his overall batting average. Therefore, I believe the batting average regresses, which means the OBP should regress and subsequently the runs scored.



George Springer

Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Astros | Position: OF | RK: (38) | Player Rater: ESPN (154), NFBC (114)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	23	219	18	50	53	22/3	.311	1.050	.362	24.3%	15.4%	35.3%	42.3%
2014	AAA	24	51	3	17	9	4/0	.353	1.106	.455	24.6%	14.8%	41.7%	33.3%
2014	MLB	24	295	20	45	51	5/2	.231	.804	.294	33.0%	11.3%	25.1%	46.4%
Proj.			550	28	84	84	22	.232						

George Springer is a really good hitter; when he makes contact it’s usually hit with a lot of authority. However, the number of times he makes contact is not very often as evidenced by the .231 batting average and 33% strikeout rate. Despite those numbers he was still able to hit 20 home runs in 345 PAs, which is quite remarkable. Some may say the 27% HR/FB rate is unsustainable and should regress, but he makes so much hard contact I don’t think it’s going to regress that much.

If you watch him hit he’s always trying to make hard contact, which is why the HR/FB rate is so high. However, this approach makes him susceptible to off speed pitches and vulnerable with two strikes. Last year he hit .114 with two strikes. Last year among qualified hitters they on average only hit .196 with two strikes. His batting average with two strikes was so low he ranked in the bottom 10% of qualified hitters. If he can refine his approach at the plate he’s going to be a monster fantasy player.

Despite being an above average runner he only had five stolen bases, which is quite low considering he stole 45 bases in 2013 (in the minors). In late July he was placed on the [DL with a quad strain](#), which he sustained 2-3 weeks prior. It doesn’t make sense that he would stop running all of a sudden. I think there must have been an injury that wasn’t disclosed because it doesn’t make sense he would stop running all together.

Giancarlo Stanton**Bats: R | Age: 25 | Team: Marlins | Position: OF | RK: (6) | Player Rater: ESPN (5), NFBC (4)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	449	37	75	86	6/2	.290	.969	.344	28.5%	9.2%	33.6%	36.2%
2013	MLB	23	425	24	62	62	1/0	.249	.845	.313	27.8%	14.7%	21.0%	44.1%
2014	MLB	24	539	37	89	105	13/1	.288	.950	.353	26.6%	14.7%	21.6%	42.6%
Proj.			520	38	90	106	8	.270						

After having his best fantasy season of his career **Giancarlo Stanton** has a lot of “if’s” for 2015 (and yes, I still feel that way even after he got his big contact ... oh yeah, it’s not as big as you think. The contract is very back loaded. During the first two years he’ll be underpaid and then he’ll become very expensive and that’s when he’ll be traded.).

First, will he bounce back after getting in the face at the end of the season? Odds are he will, but there have been players who couldn’t play again after having this injury so it’s not 100% he’ll bounce back. Second, is the .288 batting average sustainable? In five seasons he’s hit .262 or lower three times and .288 and .290 the other two seasons. The table below shows his batting average on ground balls and his final batting averages.

Year	GB AVG	AVG
2011	.264	.262
2012	.322	.290
2013	.238	.249
2014	.331	.288

Based on the data he either performs really well or poorly on ground balls. Also, his performance on ground balls has a tremendous effect on his overall batting average. Third, how legitimate are the stolen bases? He never stole more than six in a season then all of a sudden he doubles his output? Since his success rate was so good I don’t see why doesn’t provide similar numbers next year.

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	HR
Home	1,134	.299	.997	.357	25.6%	71
Away	1,110	.247	.835	.305	29.6%	61

If you play in daily leagues he’s a far better hitter at home than on the road, which is counterintuitive because he plays in such a pitcher friendly ballpark. The table below shows his home-road splits since 2011.

Kurt Suzuki

Bats: R | Age: 31 | Team: Twins | Position: C | RK: (260) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	408	6	36	43	2/0	.235	.605	.269	16.5%	4.5%	31.1%	42.4%
2013	MLB	29	285	5	25	32	2/0	.232	.627	.245	11.1%	7.0%	30.1%	38.3%
2014	MLB	30	452	3	37	61	0/1	.288	.727	.310	9.1%	6.8%	20.3%	45.9%
Proj.			430	5	40	40	0	.232						

From 2010 to 2013 **Kurt Suzuki** had a .237 batting average with a .251 BABIP. In 2014 he hit for .291 with a .313 BABIP. He performed so well the Twins gave him a [two-year \\$12M contract](#) with a club option. Suzuki isn't very good and hasn't been good for awhile. This contract means Suzuki becomes the primary catcher and the prospect **Josmil Pinto** will likely be only get 200-250 ABs next year.

Nick Swisher

Bats: B | Age: 34 | Team: Indians | Position: 1B | RK: (161) | Player Rater: ESPN (317), NFBC (258)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	537	24	75	93	2/3	.272	.837	.324	22.6%	12.3%	30.8%	39.1%
2013	MLB	32	549	22	74	63	1/0	.246	.763	.288	21.8%	12.1%	31.8%	39.0%
2014	MLB	33	360	8	33	42	0/0	.208	.608	.273	27.7%	9.0%	24.0%	39.0%
Proj.			400	17	65	65	0	.250						

Nick Swisher was awful last year. Prior to 2014 he hit at least 20 home runs in every season since he was a full time player in the majors (which is basically every year except for the 2004 season where only played in 20 games). Then suddenly last year the power dropped off dramatically. What I think happened was he was dealing with knee problems all year.

In late May he hyperextended his left knee. He only missed 14 games but he wasn't the same player. Eventually he was shut down in early August and subsequently had surgeries [on both knees](#). Specifically he had the meniscus in both knees repaired. Coming back from knee injuries will be difficult, but he should be [ready for Spring Training](#).

The reason why I believe the knee issues affected him so much is evidenced by the strikeout rate. When he went on the DL in May his strikeout rate was 22.5%, which is almost exactly the same strikeout rate he showed from 2008-13. After coming off the DL his strikeout rate was 33.9%.

Any time a player who has been consistent but suddenly falls off due to injury is someone I want to target because his ADP will be suppressed. The fact he had surgery on both knees gives me pause, which means I'm going to wait until Spring Training before I decide if he should be rostered in a 12-team mixed league.

Mark Teixeira**Bats: B | Age: 34 | Team: Yankees | Position: 1B | RK: (175) | Player Rater: ESPN (162), NFBC (172)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	32	451	24	66	84	2/1	.251	.807	.250	15.8%	10.3%	33.9%	41.3%
2013	MLB	33	53	3	5	12	0/0	.151	.609	.156	30.2%	12.7%	25.7%	31.4%
2014	MLB	34	440	22	56	62	1/1	.216	.711	.233	21.5%	11.4%	27.5%	42.4%
Proj.			470	20	62	64	0	.235						

I wasn't high on **Mark Teixeira** because he missed the majority of the 2013 season (with wrist surgery) and was already in decline for four years. In April he went on the DL with a hamstring strain, but after that he didn't go on the DL the rest of the year (he various minor injuries that forced him to miss 2-4 games at a time).

2014 was his worst statistical year, but there is hope he could rebound in 2015. The .216 batting average looks fluky because it was primarily driven by left handed pitching. He has always been able to mash lefties. For example, from 2008-13 he has a .291 batting average with a .294 BABIP. Last year it was only a .220 batting average with a .242 BABIP against lefties.

I expect the batting average to rebound to the .230 range and for the power to be relatively stable, but at this point fantasy owners cannot expect more than 125 games played at this point, which makes him a deep mixed league play.

Yasmany Tomas**Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: 3B | RK: (110) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
Proj.			500	24	70	70	7	.248						

I have not had a lot of looks at **Yasmany Tomas** so thank goodness for scouting reports: [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Two of the scouting reports are behind a pay wall (you should totally sign up for all of this information!), but I'll quote from them. Keith Law said, "Tomas might get paid like **Jose Abreu** or **Yasiel Puig**, but he's not in their class as a prospect." Nick Faleris said, "That means the home run totals will be dependent on Tomas' natural bat-to-ball, as well as his ability to put together quality at-bats that help him sniff out offerings in his kill zone—two areas of his game that evaluators are still split on ..."

Mike Trout

Bats: R | Age: 23 | Team: Angels | Position: OF | RK: (1) | Player Rater: ESPN (2), NFBC (2)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	20	559	30	129	83	49/5	.326	.963	.383	21.8%	10.5%	29.7%	46.4%
2013	MLB	21	589	27	109	97	33/7	.323	.988	.376	19.0%	15.4%	29.3%	42.3%
2014	MLB	22	602	36	115	111	16/2	.287	.939	.349	26.1%	11.8%	27.8%	34.3%
Proj.			600	36	115	113	16	.293						

Mike Trout is the best player in baseball and should be the first pick overall, but there are red flags. First, his stolen base totals have decreased year-over-year. Second, His strikeout rate spiked from 19.0% to 26.1%, and his popup rate almost doubled from 5.0% to 9.5%. Third, the last three months of the season was a merely average offensive player and struck out a lot (table below):

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	HR	SB
1st 3 Months	344	.314	1.017	.367	23.3%	18	10
2nd 3 Months	361	.263	.866	.332	28.8%	18	6

Mark Trumbo

Bats: R | Age: 29 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: OF | RK: (124) | Player Rater: ESPN (195), NFBC (149)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	544	32	66	95	4/5	.268	.808	.316	26.1%	6.1%	30.0%	45.0%
2013	MLB	27	620	34	85	100	5/2	.234	.747	.273	27.1%	8.0%	23.0%	45.9%
2014	MLB	28	328	14	37	61	2/3	.235	.707	.274	24.6%	7.7%	22.5%	44.7%
Proj.			540	25	65	81	2	.239						

Mark Trumbo's primary fantasy asset is his power. Last year the power dropped off significantly and there is reason to believe the power may continue to be down.

Trumbo missed half of the 2014 season with stress fracture in his foot; the MRI also found that he was [suffering from plantar fasciitis](#). When the injury occurred no one knows, but Trumbo thought, "he was overcompensating due to the plantar fasciitis."

Comparing the HR/FB rates of 2014 versus all the years' prior it's easy to say he will positively regress, but it's possible the plantar fasciitis caused the decrease in power. **Albert Pujols** played with plantar fasciitis for the majority of his career and his numbers fell off a cliff as it got progressively worse. Only once it finally teared/ripped apart and he had time to rehab it he was able to return to his production levels. Basically, the plantar fasciitis could continue to bother him in 2015 and sap into his power.

The plantar fasciitis is something to monitor in Spring Training because by all accounts it has teared yet so its possible it could continue to sap into his power in 2015. Why does plantar fasciitis sap a player's power? Please read this helpful analysis from [Stuart Wallace from Beyond the Box Score](#):

“Yes, and it can explain the lack of power along with his previous bout with plantar fasciitis. The lead foot is a critical cog in the kinetic chain, with the lead leg transfer of power generated by the lower half up to the upper body and into the swing. Mechanics-wise, the front foot strides out, allowing for the closing of up of his hips, and a weight shift of nearly 100% to the front leg. From here, the front leg firms up, allowing his hips to rotate towards the ball and accelerate rapidly in order to get his hands through the swing plane. In the follow-through phase of his swing, rotation of the hips continues, with all of his weight completely transferred to the lead leg and foot, with the leg at maximal extension, and swing deceleration continues. The fasciitis and stress fracture arising from it prevent the above from really being initiated completely, with pain and tenderness of the area potentially leading to Trumbo being apprehensive and slow to get his front foot down with any authority, thereby creating a weak anchor point for the kinetic chain, creating less power and bat speed.”

Troy Tulowitzki

Bats: R | Age: 30 | Team: Rockies | Position: SS | RK: (49) | Player Rater: ESPN (61), NFBC (94)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	181	8	33	27	2/2	.287	.846	.284	9.4%	9.4%	28.8%	46.6%
2013	MLB	28	446	25	72	82	1/0	.312	.931	.334	16.6%	11.1%	21.3%	41.0%
2014	MLB	29	315	21	71	52	1/1	.340	1.035	.355	15.2%	13.3%	25.9%	38.8%
Proj.			425	28	70	70	1	.311						

Since 2008 **Troy Tulowitzki** has averaged only 111.5 games played. In the past three seasons only 88 games played. There's no denying his talent level and if he played a full season he would be a top ten fantasy player. However, the odds of him playing 150-plus games seems are likely as me going on a date with **Jessica Chastain**.

If I'm in a 10-team mixed league I'm more inclined to draft him because replacement level players are better, but in a deeper league I'm avoiding him unless I get a substantial discount. If I do get him at that discount and he plays 150-plus games I'm also assured of finishing in the top three. Also, if I'm drafting him I want to get another shortstop and use him in my MI slot to give me more options on the waiver if he goes on the DL.

B.J. Upton

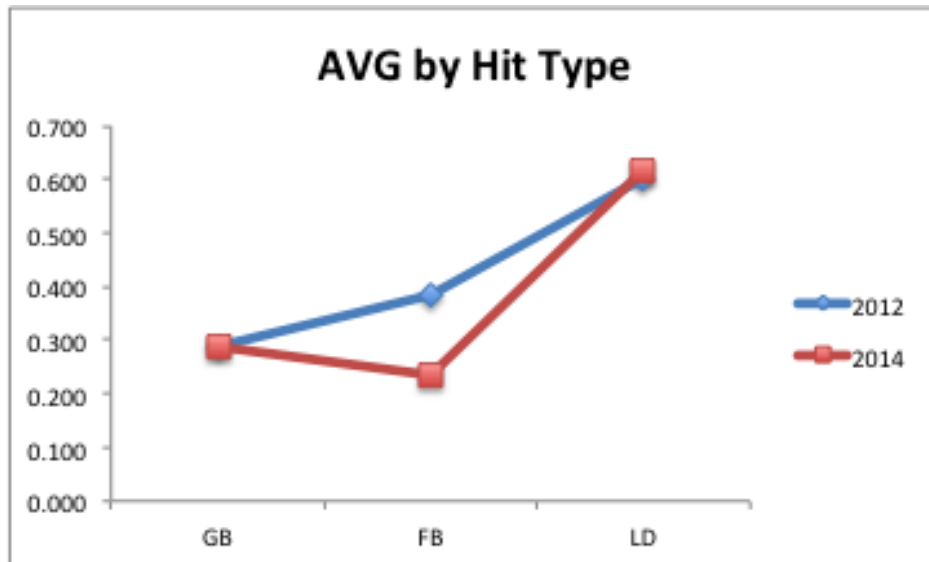
Bats: R | Age: 30 | Team: Braves | Position: OF | RK: (178) | Player Rater: ESPN (169), NFBC (156)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	573	28	79	78	31/6	.246	.752	.294	26.7%	7.1%	31.3%	41.8%
2013	MLB	28	391	9	30	26	12/5	.184	.557	.266	33.9%	9.9%	25.5%	45.7%
2014	MLB	29	519	12	67	35	20/7	.208	.620	.286	29.7%	9.8%	25.6%	44.4%
Proj.			500	14	52	55	22	.221						

Is it possible for **B.J. Upton** to return back to the 20/30 player he was before joining the Braves? My initial response without doing any research was, “No way. He has been bad for two years and there’s no way he’s going to improve.”

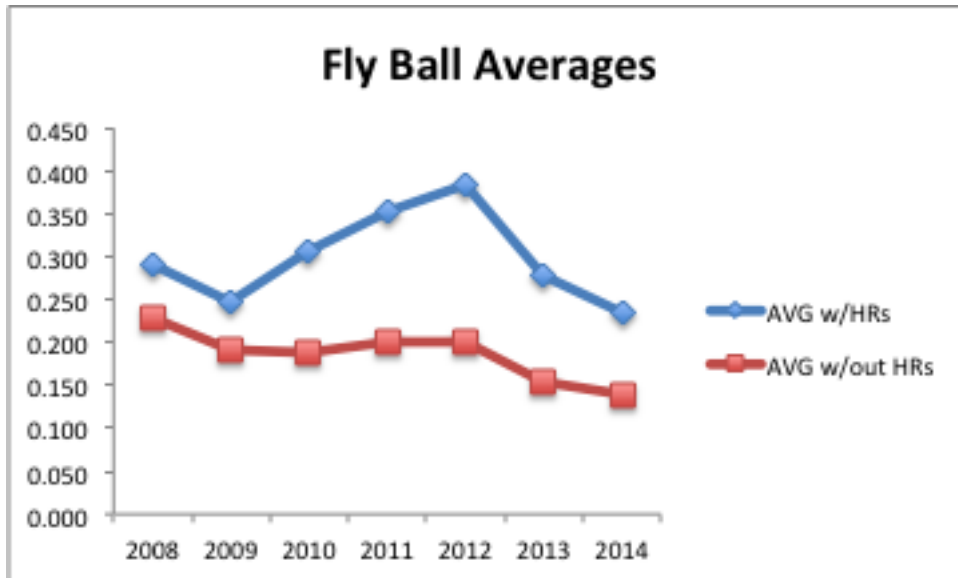
When I compared his 2014 statistics to his 2012 season (his last with the Rays) I didn’t see a lot of differences. Sure the HR/FB rate was much higher and the strikeout rate was three percentage points higher, but the increase in strikeouts alone does not explain why there was a 38 point drop in batting average especially considering the BABIPs and pop up rates were relatively the same.

The image below compares the batting averages by hit type; I’m only comparing his 2012 and 2014 seasons.



The biggest drop off in 2014 was the performance on fly balls. In 2012 he had .385 batting average on fly balls, but only .235 last year. The next logical question is .385 abnormally high? Is .235 abnormally low?

The image below attempts to answer that question; below you will see the batting averages on fly balls with and without home runs.



Was the .385 batting average abnormally high? Yes. Was the .235 batting average abnormally low? Yes and in fact that was the lowest of his career.

The table below shows the percentage of extra base hits since 2008. I love looking at extra base hit percentage to get a gauge of how much hard contact a hitters is making.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2007	142	50	35.2%
2008	145	48	33.1%
2009	135	48	35.6%
2010	127	60	47.2%
2011	136	54	39.7%
2012	141	60	42.6%
2013	72	23	31.9%
2014	108	36	33.3%

There are two ways to interrupt last years extremely low .235 fly ball batting average and his 33.3% extra base hit percentage. One narrative could be the fly ball batting average should positively regress because he's still making enough hard contact and it was the lowest of his career. The other narrative could be the reason why the fly ball batting average was so low was because he's not making as much hard contact anymore. There's no right or wrong answer, but I'll conclude with this. If he just hit .285 on fly balls, which is basically what he did in 2013, his batting average would have been .218. That doesn't look like much, but if you're in a deeper format that could be useful considering he could be a 15/15 player with room for more.

Lastly, the Braves are going to be bad in 2015. From a fantasy standpoint that is great news for Upton. He's signed through 2017 and since the Braves are rebuilding they want to get rid of that contract. The best way to regain his value is to give him every day at-bats and even if he stinks it won't matter

because they're not contending. I'm not saying he's going to bounce back, but if I'm in a deep league I'll gladly take a shot because I think the batting average ticks up a little.

Justin Upton

Bats: R | Age: 27 | Team: Padres | Position: OF | RK: (31) | Player Rater: ESPN (27), NFBC (24)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	554	17	107	67	18/8	.280	.785	.327	19.3%	10.0%	27.8%	44.4%
2013	MLB	25	558	27	94	70	8/1	.263	.818	.321	25.0%	11.7%	27.6%	41.0%
2014	MLB	26	566	29	77	102	8/4	.270	.833	.332	26.7%	9.4%	26.8%	39.5%
Proj.			560	25	90	85	12	.259						

Justin Upton has a very interesting profile. He strikes out more than 25% of the time, but he's able to hit .260-plus while still hitting for power. For two years in a row he's had a 17.9% HR/FB rate so at this point projecting 26-33 home runs would make sense if he wasn't playing in Petco Park. His raw power is good enough he shouldn't be negatively affect that much by the ballpark, but it's still going to have a negative effect.

Even though he's been relatively safe the past two years he doesn't come without risk. Since 2009 he's never hit below .263, but if for some reason he has a low BABIP year and you combine that with the high strikeout rate he could easily be a .240ish hitter. Before being traded to the Padres I projected Upton to have a .264 batting average, but I dropped it to .259.

This is the last year of his contract so it's possible his steals tick back up this year to increase his value on the open market. Also, he's still a young; he's going to play the majority of the year at the age of 27.

There are not any immediate fantasy implications, but Upton tends to struggle with runners in scoring position. The table below provides his cumulated statistics from 2008-14; it compares his performance with runners in scoring position and the bases empty or with only a runner on first base.

Splits	AVG	OBP	SLUG	OPS	K%	BB%
RISP	.250	.355	.422	.778	21.7%	13.8%
Empty or 1B Only	.285	.357	.499	.856	24.5%	9.1%

Chase Utley**Bats: L | Age: 36 | Team: Phillies | Position: 2B | RK: (138) | Player Rater: ESPN (78), NFBC (76)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	301	11	48	45	11/1	.256	.793	.261	11.9%	11.9%	30.3%	43.9%
2013	MLB	34	476	18	73	69	8/3	.284	.823	.305	14.9%	8.5%	28.9%	38.6%
2014	MLB	35	589	11	74	78	10/1	.270	.746	.295	12.8%	8.0%	24.4%	40.4%
Proj.			450	9	73	65	9	.267						

After battling injuries the past four seasons and only averaging 104 games played **Chase Utley** played in 155 games last year. Even though he was able to stay on the field he didn't provide a lot of power. His HR/FB rate was the lowest of his career (I'm excluding the 43 game season in 2003). What's also troubling is extra base hit percentage was the second lowest of his career (table below), which implies he's not making as much hard contact as before.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2004	71	26	36.6%
2005	158	73	46.2%
2006	203	76	37.4%
2007	176	75	42.6%
2008	177	78	44.1%
2009	161	63	39.1%
2010	117	38	32.5%
2011	103	38	36.9%
2012	77	28	36.4%
2013	135	49	36.3%
2014	159	53	33.3%

In regards to his batting average it's possible it could regress. If he's healthy he's going to play no matter whose pitching. That could be a mistake because since 2011 he has a slash line of .224/.320/.367 against lefties (in 644 PAs).

Overall he doesn't have much upside and has a lot of downside (injury, age and the ineptitude of the Phillies lineup), which isn't the type of player I want to roster. He may get a slight uptick in his value in a shallower format, but not a lot.

Luis Valbuena

Bats: L | Age: 29 | Team: Astros | Position: 3B | RK: (202) | Player Rater: ESPN (139), NFBC (141)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	265	4	26	28	0/2	.219	.650	.260	18.2%	11.9%	27.8%	43.9%
2013	MLB	27	331	12	34	37	1/4	.218	.708	.233	16.1%	13.6%	30.3%	41.7%
2014	MLB	28	478	16	68	51	1/2	.249	.776	.294	20.7%	11.9%	28.3%	33.8%
Proj.			470	15	55	50	1	.240						

Luis Valbuena's fantasy value is entirely dependent upon **Kris Bryant**. If Bryant makes the team out of Spring Training he will almost assuredly become the every day third baseman for the Cubs. Even if Bryant doesn't make the Major League team out of Spring Training, it's possible he joins the team after 7-10 games have been played (this allows the team to get an extra year of control). This same scenario/question happened last year with **Trevor Plouffe** and **Miguel Sano**. Fantasy owners were totally neglected Plouffe because they thought Sano would get called up quickly and Plouffe would be out of a job. Well, Sano had Tommy John Surgery and Plouffe was the every day third baseman.

Back to Valbuena; he doesn't offer a lot of upside in any category. He'll provide 15-plus home runs, but will be a batting average risk. Last year he atop the batting order, but this year he'll likely hit in the bottom third and possibly eighth.

Christian Vazquez

Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Red Sox | Position: C | RK: (212) | Player Rater: ESPN (388), NFBC (385)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	342	5	48	48	7/5	.289	.771	.316	11.0%	11.8%	23.6%	50.2%
2014	AAA	23	244	3	35	20	0/1	.279	.721	.340	19.3%	7.8%	22.4%	54.6%
2014	MLB	23	175	1	15	20	0/0	.240	.617	.283	16.4%	9.5%	20.8%	58.4%
Proj.			400	5	45	45	0	.240						

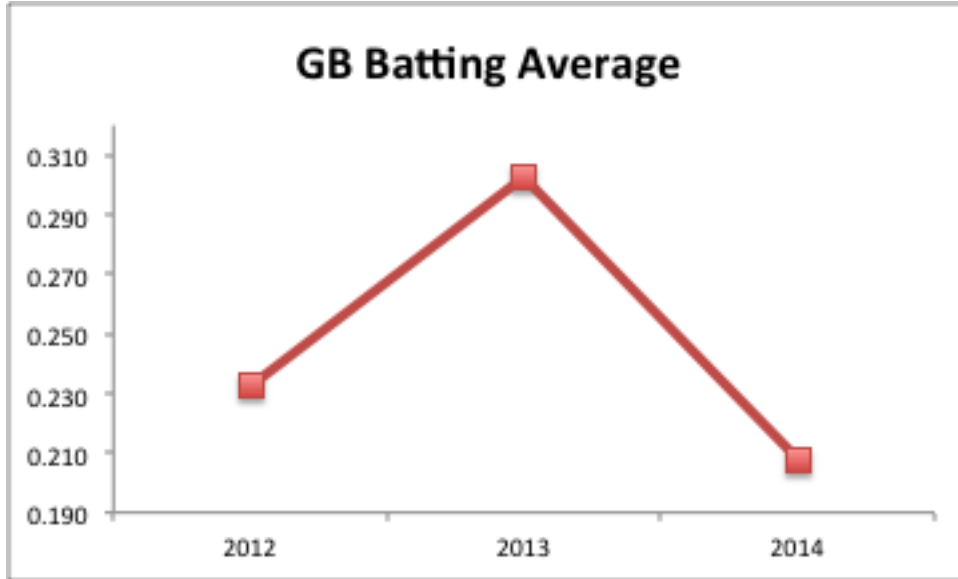
Christian Vazquez is a defense-first catcher and doesn't provide a lot of upside in one-catcher leagues. He has a little power and some speed (he stole seven bases last year), but he's just an AL-only play and doesn't have a lot of upside.

Dayan Viciedo

Bats: R | Age: 26 | Team: White Sox | Position: OF | RK: (135) | Player Rater: ESPN (151), NFBC (142)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	505	25	64	78	0/2	.255	.744	.286	22.1%	5.2%	23.4%	47.3%
2013	MLB	24	441	14	43	56	0/0	.265	.731	.308	20.7%	5.1%	24.7%	48.6%
2014	MLB	25	523	21	65	58	0/1	.231	.686	.261	21.7%	5.7%	21.5%	46.3%
Proj.			520	21	65	75	0	.254						

The first number that stands out when I look at **Dayan Viededo's** season is the .261 BABIP. Prior to last year his career BABIP was .306 so last year's BABIP was 45 points less. Another reason why the batting average should positively regress next year was his batting average on ground balls (image below).



Obviously his batting average was low last year, but it was also low in 2012 and he hit .255 that year. In 2012 he hit .402 on fly balls (which is really high), which covered up the really low batting average on ground balls. Overall, I think his batting average regresses to the .250-.260 range next year.

In regards to his power I would bet on 20-24 home runs with room for more if he gets lucky with the HR/FB rate. I would discount the 12 he hit in 2013 and chalk that up to bad luck with the HR/FB rate.

Also, his RBI totals should improve. Last year he hit .217 with runners in scoring position. Prior to this year he hit .302 in 252 ABs. I expect him to have 75-plus RBIs if he can play a full season.

Joey Votto

Bats: L | Age: 31 | Team: Reds | Position: 1B | RK: (1) | Player Rater: ESPN (281), NFBC (304)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	374	14	59	56	5/3	.337	1.041	.404	17.9%	19.8%	32.0%	38.5%
2013	MLB	29	581	24	101	73	6/3	.305	.926	.360	19.0%	18.6%	22.9%	45.4%
2014	MLB	30	220	6	32	23	1/1	.255	.799	.299	18.0%	17.3%	20.8%	41.6%
Proj.			545	22	94	86	1	.305						

In two of the past three seasons **Joey Votto** has missed significant portions of the time due to leg injuries. In 2012 he had surgery to repair a [torn meniscus](#) and last year he went on the DL twice with a quad strain. According to Reds Manager Bryan Price Votto's injury is [not expected to be a chronic issue](#).

We are going to have to wait until Spring Training for more information to come out about his health before we have a better idea of what his health could be entering 2015.

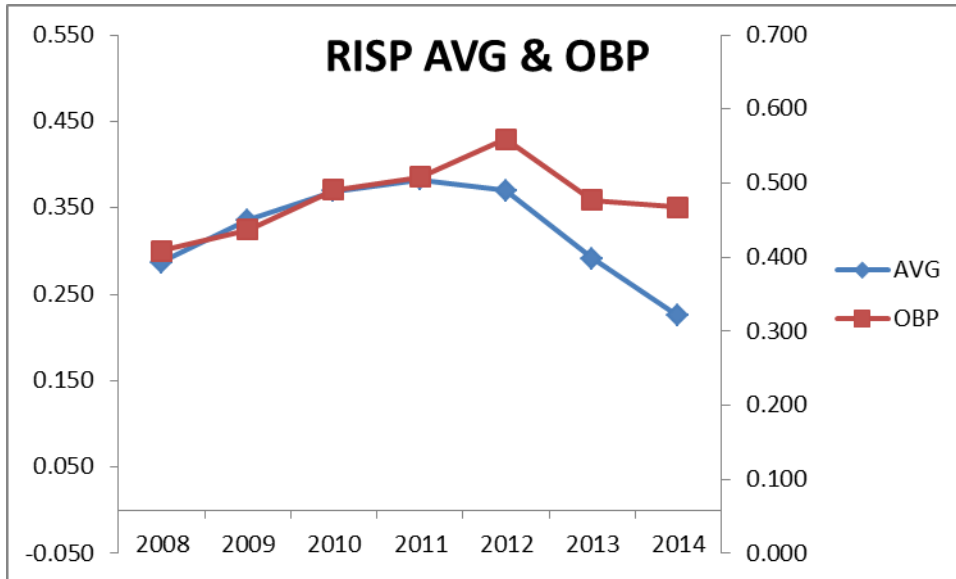
Last year was easily his worst offensive season of his career as he only hit six home runs and only a .255 batting average. The HR/FB rate was a career low 10.7%, which is eight percentage points less than his career average. It's possible the injuries were responsible for the decreased power, but his extra base hit percentage was comparable to years past.

Season	H	XBH	XBH%
2007	27	11	40.7%
2008	156	59	37.8%
2009	151	64	42.4%
2010	177	75	42.4%
2011	185	72	38.9%
2012	126	58	46.0%
2013	177	57	32.2%
2014	56	22	39.3%

What's troubling about last season was the low percentage of plate appearances he had with men in scoring position. The table below compares his total plate appearances and plate appearances with runners in scoring position. Last year was the lowest of his career (I didn't look at 2007 because the sample was so small). Since the lineup is going to be same as last year Votto is going to rely on OBP challenged hitters to get on-base for him.

Year	Total PA	RISP PA	%
2008	589	142	24.1%
2009	544	160	29.4%
2010	648	167	25.8%
2011	719	189	26.3%
2012	475	109	22.9%
2013	726	193	26.6%
2014	272	62	22.8%

Last he was extremely unlucky with his batting with runners in scoring position (RISP). The image below shows his batting average and OBP on plate appearances with RISP. Last year he hit .225 with RISP; prior to 2014 he was a career .338 hitter. The fact his OBP was stable suggests either two things: A) pitchers didn't pitch him or B) Votto never expanded his strike zone and opted to take a walk instead. What happened last year was probably a combination of both those things. If he plays a full year this year and he has the same number of RISP plate appearances he should have roughly 165 RISP plate appearances. In his career he has a 22% walk rate in RISP plate appearances, which means he'll 129 at-bats with RISP. And if he hits his career rate with RISP (.332) that's only 43 hits, which is extremely low. Therefore, it's difficult for me to project than 80 RBIs for Votto.



At the end of the day it's all about whether or not you believe Votto is healthy and play a full season or not. If, and that is a big if, Votto is healthy I expect him to bounce back to being a .300-plus hitter with 20-plus home runs. The rub against Votto is I don't think he's going to have a lot of at-bats with runners on base, which hinders his potential for RBIs.

Stephen Vogt

Bats: L | Age: 30 | Team: Athletics | Position: C | RK: (195) | Player Rater: ESPN (221), NFBC (268)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	25	0	0	0	0/0	.000	.074	.000	7.4%	7.4%	56.5%	26.1%
2013	MLB	28	135	4	18	16	0/1	.252	.695	.286	18.9%	6.1%	33.3%	31.5%
2014	MLB	29	269	9	26	35	1/0	.279	.752	.297	13.6%	5.6%	31.6%	34.6%
Proj.			420	13	53	53	0	.260						

If you sit in the right field bleachers you will hear this chant from the A's fans "[I believe in Stephen Vogt.](#)" Last year in a super utility role he quietly hit nine home runs in 287 plate appearances.

Entering 2015 he has no competition for playing time on the 40 man roster or in the minors. His closest competition is **Josh Phegley** and he wasn't good enough to beat **Tyler Flowers** for playing time. In the middle of October Vogt [underwent surgery](#) to repair the plantar plates and remove scar tissue in his right foot. The fact the A's traded away **Derek Norris** and **John Jaso** tells me they believe they're set at the catching position. For Vogt's brief Major League career (462 PAs) he has a .254/.298/.396 slash line with 13 home runs. The power is legit; I wouldn't be surprised if he hit 15.

Neil Walker**Bats: B | Age: 29 | Team: Pirates | Position: 2B | RK: (119) | Player Rater: ESPN (76), NFBC (69)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	472	14	62	69	7/5	.280	.768	.326	19.6%	8.9%	30.8%	43.5%
2013	MLB	27	478	16	62	53	1/2	.251	.757	.274	15.4%	9.1%	27.9%	40.6%
2014	MLB	28	512	23	74	76	2/2	.271	.809	.288	15.4%	7.9%	26.7%	40.0%
Proj.			480	17	70	70	2	.272						

Like **Howie Kendrick**, Neil Walker fits into the type of fantasy player that is extremely reliable and is not a sexy draft pick on draft day. I literally got called out by a few readers about why I had Walker rated higher than **Brad Miller**. At the time Miller had a much higher range of outcomes while with Walker fantasy owners kind of knew what they were going to get ... or so we thought.

Last year came almost out of nowhere as he hit a career high 23 home runs. Usually when I see a player have a career high in home runs I expect to a substantially high HR/FB rate, but his was only four percentage points higher than his career norm. The reason why he was able to hit so many home runs without a gigantic spike in the HR/FB rate was his fly ball rate was the highest of his Major League career.

Despite the uptick in home runs, he didn't make a lot more hard contact. The table below shows his extra base hit percentage since 2010.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2010	126	44	34.9%
2011	163	52	31.9%
2012	132	41	31.1%
2013	120	44	36.7%
2014	139	51	36.7%

Even though he missed time in 2014 with a fluky injury (appendectomy) it seems as though he always goes on the DL for something. In 2012 it was a bad back. In 2013 it was a hand laceration and ribcage soreness. Therefore, I do not expect more than 137 games.

Overall, the power numbers are going to regress to the 14-17 range, but he's still a very consistent fantasy option. The batting average should be in the .270s and he could be a sneaky play for 90 RBIs or runs depending on where he's hitting in the lineup.

Jayson Werth

Bats: R | Age: 35 | Team: Nationals | Position: OF | RK: (28) | Player Rater: ESPN (41), NFBC (43)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	300	5	42	31	8/2	.300	.827	.356	16.6%	12.2%	30.7%	41.0%
2013	MLB	34	462	25	84	82	10/1	.318	.931	.358	19.0%	11.3%	24.3%	36.6%
2014	MLB	35	534	16	85	82	9/1	.292	.849	.343	18.0%	13.2%	21.0%	39.9%
Proj.			520	20	85	85	7	.292						

Last year I was extremely high on **Jayson Werth** because of the numbers he put up in the last three months of the season and the [alteration of his batting stance](#). Even though he was healthy he didn't up the numbers I projected for him.

He's coming off the lowest HR/FB rate since 2005 (I'm not counting the 2012 season where he only played half a season) so he should positively regress in 2015. Other than the home runs he had a typical Jayson Werth season.

Like with **Matt Holliday** the biggest red flag against him is his age. He's going to turn 36 in May and that's usually when players suffer a severe decline in offensive performance. However, Werth shows no signs of slowing down (yes, the HR/FB rate could be a sign but I'm not buying it). I would love him a lot more if he played in the American League because I would feel more confident about his ability to stay healthy if he played half of his games at DH.

In early January Werth had [surgery on his right shoulder](#) and is expected to miss 2-3 months of the season. His availability for Opening Day is very much in question. I bet he misses the first 2-4 weeks of the season before coming back because the Nationals should easily win the division and they want Werth to be 100% for the entire season.

Matt Wieters

Bats: B | Age: 28 | Team: Orioles | Position: C | RK: (225) | Player Rater: ESPN (303), NFBC (363)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	526	23	67	83	3/0	.249	.764	.274	18.9%	10.1%	32.4%	44.1%
2013	MLB	27	523	22	59	79	2/0	.235	.704	.247	18.0%	7.4%	29.6%	39.4%
2014	MLB	28	104	5	13	18	0/1	.308	.839	.329	17.0%	5.4%	40.2%	29.9%
Proj.			250	6	30	30	0	.244						

When evaluating **Matt Wieters** it all comes down to health. Last June he had a TJ surgery. As of mid-February the latest news about his recovery is he will be the [DH for the first two weeks](#) of Spring Training. Buck Showalter has said Wieters will not break camp if he's only able to DH. Even if he was able to being the year in the majors he wouldn't be rosterable in ten team mixed leagues because he's a one category player who is a batting average liability.

Kolten Wong**Bats: L | Age: 24 | Team: Cardinals | Position: 2B | RK: (84) | Player Rater: ESPN (110), NFBC (89)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2014	AAA	23	75	3	16	13	6/0	.360	.933	.381	11.3%	6.3%	29.2%	50.8%
2013	MLB	22	59	0	6	0	3/0	.153	.363	.191	19.4%	4.8%	12.8%	59.6%
2014	MLB	23	402	12	52	42	20/4	.249	.680	.275	16.4%	4.8%	18.4%	49.6%
Proj.			570	15	69	60	21	.272						

After a slow start (in 20 games) the Cardinals strangely demoted **Kolten Wong** to Triple-A for three weeks. He went on to hit .360/.400/.533 in 18 games, which promptly made it easy for the Cardinals to call him back up.

In a shortened Major League season he hit 12 home runs and 20 stolen bases, which is awfully good considering he was a rookie. Let's take a look at the time for Wong's 2014 season.

In his first 20 games (76 PAs) he has a slash line of .225/.276/.268 with no home runs and three stolen bases. In mid-May he gets called back up to the majors. In late June he goes on the DL with [shoulder inflammation](#). He got the injury in early June while diving for a ball. From the call-up to the DL stint he was hitting .230/.287/.333 with one home run and six stolen bases. He suffered the injury in early June but played another 2-3 weeks and it's possible he tried to play through the pain.

To recap his statistics at the time of the DL stint, he's hitting .228/.282/.304 with one home run and nine stolen bases.

The injury was relatively minor as he was only on the DL for the minimum 15 days. After returning from the DL is when he took off as he hit .262/.298/.443 with 11 home runs and 11 stolen bases (in 262 PAs). It could be easy to discount the home runs because he achieved those totals with a 14.9% HR/FB rate, which seems awfully high considering he hit the ball on the ground 47.4% of the time.

In general, when evaluating Wong statistics you can view his season in the aggregate or focus primarily on the time after returning from the DL. I'm focusing on the latter primarily because he was finally healthy and the scouting report suggests he should be able to hit for power and batting average. Below is a quick snippet of [Jason Parks' scouting report](#) on February 7, 2014.

"Strengths: Tremendous feel for baseball; natural hitter; quick stroke; more pop than size suggests; hit tool projects to be plus (or better); several sources see a future .300 hitter ..."

The biggest thing to be aware of in Spring Training is where is going to hit in the lineup. If he hits second in the order his fantasy value takes a huge boost because he's going to have a lot of at-bats with a man on-base and will have a lot of opportunities to score runs as well.

David Wright**Bats: R | Age: 32 | Team: Mets | Position: 3B | RK: (90) | Player Rater: ESPN (120), NFBC (121)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	581	21	91	93	15/10	.306	.883	.347	16.7%	12.1%	32.9%	43.2%
2013	MLB	30	430	18	63	58	17/3	.307	.904	.340	16.1%	11.2%	26.6%	38.8%
2014	MLB	31	535	8	54	63	8/5	.269	.698	.325	19.3%	7.2%	26.5%	40.5%
Proj.			500	14	65	77	11	.278						

Odds are if you owned **David Wright** (like I did one league) you're probably going to skip this player profile all together because how much he burned your fantasy team last year. Last year his statistics and health deteriorated to such a low point that he was actually hurting your team because if he was playing you had to start him.

Starting in the middle of June he hurt shoulder and played through it until he was scratched June 27 and subsequently missed seven games. The big question with Wright is how much weight do you want to put on his bum shoulder (which ultimately required surgery in the offseason) for the down season. The table below shows his performance before and after missing those seven games.

Splits	PA	AVG	OPS	BABIP	K%	GB%	FB%
Before June 27	354	.277	.729	.332	19.5%	38.3%	35.5%
After June 27	232	.257	.651	.314	19.0%	36.3%	39.8%

Also, not shown in the table is six of his eight home runs came before June 27. Before the injury he only had a 6.6% HR/FB rate, which was still almost half of his career HR/FB rate.

The shoulder was so bad he had to tweak and tinker his swing. He [explained the extent of his injury](#) was brutal. Basically, the ligaments were so messed up they couldn't keep his shoulder in place. He had surgery in late September and as of early November he's progressing [better than expected](#).

In regards to his evaluation for 2015 he still has the upside to be a 20/20 player, which could make him a top five third baseman on some draft boards. Based on where he's likely to go in drafts, you're going to have to believe he can repeat the production in 2013. If I'm in a 10-team league I'm more willing to take a flyer on him because you win leagues with players who dramatically outperform their ADP. However, anything deeper I'm staying away. Since 2011 he's only played more than 134 games once, his lineup won't be very good and his power continues to decline.

Christian Yelich

Bats: L | Age: 23 | Team: Marlins | Position: OF | RK: (51) | Player Rater: ESPN (49), NFBC (45)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	21	193	7	33	29	5/5	.280	.883	.346	23.4%	11.7%	32.2%	45.5%
2013	MLB	21	240	4	34	16	10/0	.288	.766	.380	24.2%	11.4%	10.9%	64.6%
2014	MLB	22	582	9	94	54	21/7	.284	.764	.356	20.8%	10.6%	12.4%	62.2%
Proj.			600	12	91	58	21	.285						

After 2013 I questioned whether or not **Christian Yelich** could repeat the batting average next year because he had a high .380 BABIP with a 60% ground ball rate. Last year his BABIP dropped to .356 and the ground ball rate was 60%, but he was able to have a similar batting average as 2013.

Even though he only had nine home runs there is room for growth. First, his age; he played the entire season at the age of 22. Usually power comes later as a player matures. Second, the home ballpark may be suppressing his power. He has a career 3.8% HR/FB rate at home compared to 19.3% on the road. We're still dealing with a small sample size (933 PAs) so we're not at the point where we can make a more definitive conclusion.

According to some of the [scouts at Baseball Prospectus](#) there is room for him to grow into this power:

- Jason Parks: "As he continues to mature and learns the nuances of power, his doubles will start to turn into home runs and he could be a true middle-of-the-lineup threat"
- Nick J. Faleris: "He could reach 20 home runs a year once he is fully matured."

The question is when will he fully mature into his power? Last year his average home run distance was 412.9 feet. To put that number into context lets look at the average home run distances for players in 2014 (table below).

Splits	HR Dist.
Top 98%	418.5
Top 90%	409.5
Top 75%	402.4
Top 50%	393.9
Top 25%	383.2
Top 10%	376.4

Based on this data he ranks somewhere in the top 10% of average home run distance among hitters, which indicates when he gets into ball he can really drive it. That said, we're still dealing with only nine home runs so the sample size is small. I think he can grow into some power, but since his ground ball rate is so high the ceiling on the home runs is small. For example, last year he hit 81 fly balls and 272 ground balls. He needs to increase the number of fly balls by at least 20% for him to more than 12 home runs.

Ryan Zimmerman

Bats: R | Age: 30 | Team: Nationals | Position: 3B | RK: (48) | Player Rater: ESPN (253), NFBC (298)
)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	578	25	93	95	5/2	.282	.824	.313	18.1%	8.9%	25.8%	48.5%
2013	MLB	28	568	26	84	79	6/0	.275	.809	.316	21.0%	9.5%	21.0%	45.4%
2014	MLB	29	214	5	26	38	0/0	.280	.790	.313	15.4%	9.2%	19.9%	43.6%
Proj.			530	23	85	85	1	.285						

In 2014 **Ryan Zimmerman's** season was tale of injuries. Two weeks into the season he [fractured his thumb](#) on a freak play diving back to second base. Then towards the end of July he [strained his right hamstring](#) trying to beat out a double play. In 2013 he went on the DL with a hamstring strain, but he only missed 14 games. With the departure of **Adam LaRoche** Zimmerman will take over first base duties. The switch could help him stay on the field, but I doubt it because his injuries are tissue based and have a higher degree of repeating regardless of where he's playing defense. However, I think with the weight of playing defense out of the way he'll have time to focus on hitting and he should be more productive.

In the past six years he has only played more than 143 games once (in 2009) so fantasy owners should expect one DL stint in 2015. What else fantasy owners can bank on is his ability to hit. He's a career .286 hitter and has averaged a little more than 20 home runs every year. Last year he had the lowest HR/FB rate of his career (7.8%), which could have been due to the thumb injury to start the year.

Prior to the 2014, in four of the past five seasons Zimmerman hit 25-plus home runs with one 33 home run season. With power at premium I think Zimmerman provides a lot of upside especially since I expect his ADP to be suppressed because 2014s numbers.

Ben Zobrist

Bats: B | Age: 33 | Team: Athletics | Position: SS, 2B, OF | RK: (86) | Player Rater: ESPN (88), NFBC (84)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	560	20	88	74	14/9	.270	.848	.296	15.4%	14.5%	26.9%	44.7%
2013	MLB	32	612	12	77	71	11/3	.275	.756	.303	13.0%	10.3%	25.0%	44.1%
2014	MLB	33	570	10	83	52	10/5	.272	.749	.301	12.8%	11.5%	23.7%	50.2%
Proj.			570	9	94	72	9	.272						

At this point in his career **Ben Zobrist** is a medium/high floor player with little upside. He provides position flexibility, which increases his value in daily lineup leagues because you can move him around if your team suffers an injury during the week.

In terms of his statistical value his power and stolen base totals have decreased steadily since 2012 and I cannot find any statistical evidence to show improvement is coming. The stolen base success rate was the second lowest of his career.

If you play in OBP leagues his value jumps up a tick because you can bank on at least a .340-plus OBP. From 2009-2013 he is a career .288 hitter with runners in scoring position, but last year he only hit .225 so a positive regression in his RBI totals should occur.

In early January the Athletics acquired Zobrist (along with Yunel Escobar). Zobrist will likely begin the year in left field and bat in the two spot when Coco Crisp is in the lineup and when Crisp is not in the lineup Zobrist will likely bat leadoff. It looks like the Zobrist and Escobar trade is the last trade the A's are going to make this offseason. If the lineup can stay healthy the A's should have pretty good lineup, which means Zobrist should be able to score at least 85 runs with room for 95-plus.

Mike Zunino

Bats: R | Age: 24 | Team: Mariners | Position: C | RK: (203) | Player Rater: ESPN (210), NFBC (109)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	AB	HR	R	RBI	SB/CS	AVG	OPS	BABIP	SO%	BB%	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	22	203	11	38	43	0/0	.227	.775	.269	28.8%	7.4%	37.6%	34.0%
2013	MLB	22	173	5	22	14	1/0	.214	.620	.267	25.4%	8.3%	27.2%	44.0%
2014	MLB	23	438	22	51	60	0/3	.199	.658	.248	33.2%	3.6%	32.0%	35.2%
Proj.			440	22	53	60	0	.206						

Mike Zunino is a fairly easy player to evaluate if you see him hit for a few games. He's constantly looking for fastballs regardless of the account, which makes him susceptible to pitchers who can throw their secondary pitches for strikes and quality strikes. The evidence of this is reflected in the .230 batting average and a 27.7% strikeout rate against fastballs. Against non-fastballs he a .164 batting average and 40.3% strikeout rate.

Despite the batting average Zunino is going to have the opportunity to get the lion share of the at-bats because he has evolved into a plus (on the scouting scale) defender. If I'm in a dynasty league I'm holding on to him because I think his approach at the plate will improve over time (probably 2016) and he'll make enough contact to have a .240-plus batting average. In regards to 2015 I don't see a massive uptick occurring in his batting average, which makes him almost undraftable for most fantasy teams. If during your draft you have a lot of high batting average players you could roster Zunino.

Pitcher Profiles/Capsules

The data underneath each player's name is from Baseball Prospectus. You'll notice some of the numbers I reference in the write-ups are not the same in the main player tables (primarily ground ball, fly ball, HR/FB rates). When I wrote the player capsules I was looking at various websites for statistical information. Sometimes I used data from FanGraphs and other times Baseball Reference. My recommendation when looking at the numbers is to not focus on the specific number. Instead look at the trends the numbers are indicating. For example, if a player's ground ball rate has increased for three straight years it doesn't matter that the write-up says his ground ball rate last year was 45 percent while the main player table says 43 percent. The overall trend is what matters.

For each player I provide the player rater numbers for ESPN and NFBC. Lastly, the players I choose are players that could be owned in a 15-team mixed league so there will be players that you may like that I missed. "RK" refers to my overall ranking of that player among all other starting pitchers.

Please make sure to read my [scouting primer](#) before reading my player profiles as this will help you to read the player capsules, especially for the prospects because I quote prospect evaluators a lot and they use the same language in the primer.

Also, you'll note I do not have any write-ups on relief pitchers. I did this for two reasons. First, I do not have the time necessary to give them a proper evaluation. The Reliever/Closer preview provides a glimpse into how I evaluated the position. Second, a player's skill set is irrelevant in regards to whether the player is rosterable. For example, **LaTroy Hawkins** is not a good pitcher, but he was owned at the end of every draft last year because he was the primary closer for the Indians. There's only 30 closers (give or take) and they're all going to be rostered no matter what. If you want more information about the closers/relievers you can always ask me on Twitter [@MattCommins](#).

Henderson Alvarez

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Marlins | Position: SP | RK: (96) | Player Rater: ESPN (40), NFBC (42)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	187.3	9	79	4.85	1.44	9.8%	6.7%	0.291	70.1%	21.6%	20.0%	57.8%
2013	MLB	23	102.7	5	57	3.59	1.14	13.6%	6.5%	0.271	67.7%	3.6%	17.1%	55.0%
2014	MLB	24	187	12	111	2.65	1.24	14.4%	4.3%	0.304	79.3%	15.4%	14.7%	55.6%
Proj.			160	12	90	3.60	1.24							

In 2013 **Henderson Alvarez** missed half of the season with [shoulder inflammation](#). Last season he missed 16 games with another [shoulder inflammation](#) issue and additional nine games with an [oblique strain](#). Basically, he has a long injury history.

Last year he finished the year with a 2.65 ERA and there is no way that's going to happen again because he's not going to strand 79.3% runners. He doesn't miss a lot of bats. Instead of trying to strike guys out he wants to induce a lot of ground balls and generate weak contact. Other than the ERA he didn't

provide a lot value. At the end of the year he was the 42nd best starting pitcher on ESPN's Player Rater, which means most of value was built on the ERA. Therefore, if the ERA regresses he won't have a lot of value.

Chris Archer

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Rays | Position: SP | RK: (47) | Player Rater: ESPN (59), NFBC (57)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	29.3	1	36	4.60	1.23	29.5%	10.7%	0.29	61.0%	13.0%	31.9%	44.4%
2013	MLB	24	128.7	9	101	3.22	1.13	19.2%	7.2%	0.253	78.8%	16.1%	24.6%	47.4%
2014	MLB	25	194.7	10	173	3.33	1.28	21.0%	8.8%	0.296	71.6%	9.8%	21.6%	47.6%
Proj.			195	12	175	3.35	1.25							

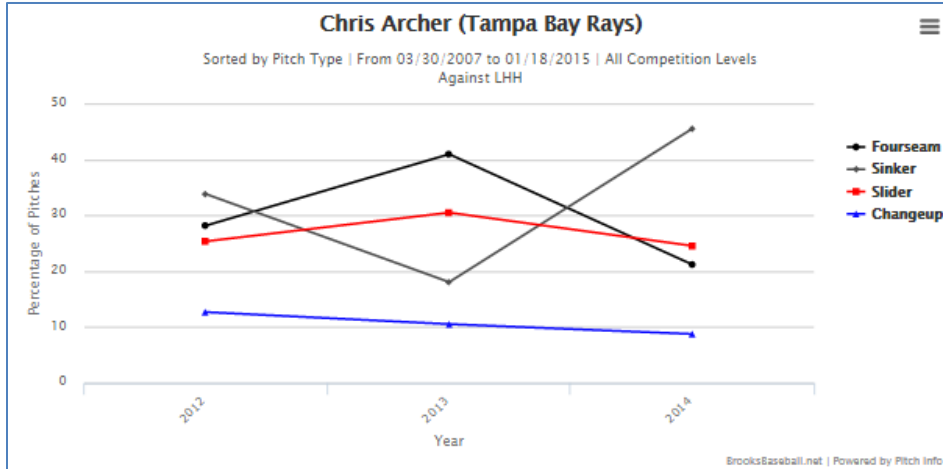
The biggest question I had about **Chris Archer** heading into 2014 was would he finally be able to get lefties out. The table below shows his career numbers against lefties.

Year	AVG	SLUG	BABIP	K%	BB%	GB%	FB%
2012	.300	.475	.435	30.0%	18.0%	40.0%	32.0%
2013	.261	.471	.291	20.4%	8.0%	39.5%	37.3%
2014	.228	.316	.285	21.2%	9.8%	43.0%	34.6%

By looking at the table it looks as though he's found a way to mitigate lefties. The question how was he able to do that and is it repeatable?

Archer is basically and two-pitch pitcher (fastball [four and two seam] and slider). In general, the slider is a divesting weapon against righties because the pitch is thrown down and away from the batter (i.e. away from the fat part of the hitters bat). However, against lefties, in general and not specific to Archer, that pitch is thrown right into the wheel house of a lefties bat. Therefore, that's why I wrote the changeup was the key aspect him to taking the next step in 2015.

Last year I thought if his changeup improved he could breakout because the changeup is thrown down and away (i.e. away from a left handers bat). Instead of throwing the changeup to lefties he opted to throw the two-seam fastball a lot more (image below from BrooksBaseball.net). What's most important is he used that pitch to generate a lot of ground balls and weak contact.



Last year his command improved in general. There would be a few starts where he would lose command and not pitch very well, but there would be other times where he looked amazing. The biggest change from 2013 is he had more amazing starts and less bad starts. It's not uncommon for young pitchers to be up and down with their command and do not forget 2014 was his first full year in the majors. From the scouting reports I've read he has the makeup, athleticism and most importantly, stuff to get even better in 2015.

Jake Arrieta

Throws: R | Age: 29 | Team: Cubs | Position: SP | RK: (18) | Player Rater: ESPN (16), NFBC (57)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	114.7	3	109	6.20	1.37	22.0%	7.1%	0.32	57.3%	18.2%	25.4%	46.4%
2013	MLB	27	75.3	5	60	4.78	1.33	18.5%	12.7%	0.239	69.3%	15.3%	27.1%	41.7%
2014	MLB	28	156.7	10	167	2.53	0.99	27.2%	6.7%	0.272	74.2%	8.2%	15.2%	51.2%
Proj.			185	13	190	3.05	1.12							

After **Jake Arrieta** made his 2014 debut [I said](#), "he was a must own in all formats." (I have to admit that was my best call last year.) After watching him pitch the command improved and I knew he had improved, but I didn't know exactly the adjustments he made. If you're curious about the actual adjustment he made you should read this article from [J.P. Green](#).

Before his 2014 debut I was high on him and grabbed him in my NFBC leagues a week before the call-up. The primary reason was I believed in him was he always had good stuff, but his biggest problem was command and injury problems.

Fantasy owners have to decide how much weight to put on his 2014 numbers because before he was absolutely dreadful (table below).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
2010-13	5.23	1.43	.287	17.5%	10.2%	12.1%	67.1%
2014	2.53	0.99	.277	27.2%	6.7%	4.4%	74.2%

The list below outlines the adjustments he made in 2014:

- Better mechanics/more repeatable delivery
- Pitching on a new spot on the rubber
- Increased usage of the hard slider

Based on all of those things including the overall quality of his raw stuff I believe the skill set he showed last year is real. Looking at his 2014 numbers it's obvious he got lucky with the HR/FB rate and BABIP, but everything else looks legit. What also behind those numbers are mechanical adjustments, which furthers my belief what he did last year was legitimate. The article I linked goes into MUCH greater detail as to why Arrieta's breakout is for real.

Homer Bailey

Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: Reds | Position: SP | RK: (55) | Player Rater: ESPN (85), NFBC (74)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	208	13	168	3.68	1.24	19.2%	5.9%	0.29	73.6%	14.5%	27.7%	46.1%
2013	MLB	27	209	11	199	3.49	1.12	23.4%	6.4%	0.284	73.7%	18.0%	18.9%	48.0%
2014	MLB	28	145.7	9	124	3.71	1.23	20.5%	7.5%	0.286	77.0%	29.1%	12.9%	52.1%
Proj.			180	11	165	3.51	1.17							

Like **Mike Minor**, **Homer Bailey** didn't get a full Spring Training because Bailey was dealing with a groin strain. Unlike Minor, Bailey began the year in the rotation and he got shelled. In his first seven starts he had a 5.36 ERA, 1.64 WHIP, 20.9% strikeout rate and 7.7% walk rate. However, on May 10, 2014 [I said](#) fantasy owners should buy low on Bailey because the reason why he was struggling was due to poor command and not because his stuff dropped off. From that day on he posted a 3.08 ERA, 1.07 WHIP, 20.4% strikeout rate and 7.3% walk rate. Even though the walk rate was essentially the same his strike rate increased three percentage points, which indicates his command improved. Most importantly, the ground ball rate continued to improve and was a career best last year.

In mid-August Bailey was shut down for the rest of the year due to a [bulging disc in his neck/back](#) and surgery to repair a [torn flexor tendon](#) in his elbow. To recap, last year he had a groin strain, knee tendinitis, bulging disc and an elbow strain. Also, he has a history of shoulder problems. As of early January he is expected to be ready for Spring Training.

His fantasy success is going to come down to his health. Either you'll believe the 2012-13 seasons where he was healthy and threw more than 200 innings or you believe the pre-2012 and 2014 seasons where he had various injuries. I'm projecting 180 innings so I believe he can stay relatively healthy next year.

Chris Bassitt

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Athletics | Position: SP | RK: (123) | Player Rater: ESPN (182), NFBC (210)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	24	47.7	4	37	2.27	1.09	19.4%	8.9%	0.254	75.2%	7.1%	21.2%	47.7%
2014	MLB	25	29.7	1	21	3.94	1.58	15.3%	9.5%	0.34	74.0%	0.0%	20.0%	42.0%
2014	AA	25	34.7	3	36	1.56	1.15	24.8%	9.7%	0.264	81.6%	8.0%	26.9%	48.4%
Proj.			120	4	80	3.8	1.31							

Chris Bassitt doesn't have a lot flash, but he's going to be an out getter. He's 6'5 and has a deceptive delivery with a ¾ arm slot. His biggest asset is he can throw four pitches for strikes (fastball-sinker, slider, changeup and curveball). None of those pitches can be used as an out pitch (the curveball has the chance to become one) so he's going to have to be a bat to ball pitcher. His command can get loose from batter to batter and when that happens hitters will square him up. One reason why he struggles with his command is due to his height and the fact there are so many moving levers in his windup. The fastball sits in the 90-92 mph as a starter, but in relief he can bump up the fastball to the 94-95 mph range. Eventually Bassitt will see time in the rotation because he's the sixth best starting pitcher the A's have (that assumes **Jarrod Parker** and **A.J. Griffin** are not Major League ready).

Trevor Bauer

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Indians | Position: SP | RK: (81) | Player Rater: ESPN (124), NFBC (93)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	22	121.3	6	106	4.15	1.58	19.3%	13.3%	0.307	76.1%	12.8%	30.6%	43.3%
2014	MLB	23	153	5	143	4.18	1.38	21.6%	9.0%	0.312	73.1%	12.8%	27.8%	37.2%
2014	AAA	23	46	4	44	2.15	1.09	24.2%	7.7%	0.263	90.9%	12.5%	32.5%	39.8%
Proj.			190	11	170	3.85	1.30							

I wrote more about **Trevor Bauer** than any other player last year. There were many reasons why I wrote about him so much. First, I said this was the year he was going to take a huge step forward (you will see my specific recommendations in the subsequent paragraphs). Second, he has exceptional stuff when he has command of his pitches. Third, his prospect status; as a college amateur he pitched on the same team as **Gerrit Cole**. In fact Bauer put up better numbers than Cole and some scouts preferred Bauer to Cole before the amateur draft.

This is what [I said](#) before his second start of the 2014 season on May 21:

"Upon hearing Trevor Bauer was going to pitch on Tuesday, I said he was a must start in all formats. So, needless to say, I was going to watch his start against the Tigers. My overall impression of Tuesday's start was it wasn't as good as the first start. That said, I was still impressed with his ability to dominate, at times, one of the best lineups in the majors.

For the first five innings his command was solid, and the first pitch he threw was a fastball. Of five fastballs, four missed up in the zone. A positive takeaway was the following pitches were thrown for

strikes. Last year a fastball up in the zone was precursor to more fastballs missing the zone. He left a few change-ups and curveballs up in the zone, but he was able to generate swings and misses because he was throwing his 93-96 mph fastball for strikes. He had a really good feel for his slider as that was his go-to secondary pitch when he needed to throw a strike.

After the second inning hitters started swinging at the first pitch, which must have been to keep them from seeing his explosive secondary pitches. Of the seven hits he allowed, 3-4 of them came on the first pitch. After the first batter in the sixth inning, his fastball command became extremely loose as he was consistently missing up in the zone, which led to back-to-back walks. With runners on first and second and one out, he was able to induce a double play and get out of the jam. After the sixth inning I thought his night was done as he had thrown 94 pitches and his command was off. However, he (strangely) started the seventh inning and on the first pitch Alex Avila hit a single to right and then Bauer's night was over.

Bauer's next two starts are at the Orioles and home against the Rockies. He is a must start in almost any matchup and is a top 35-40 fantasy starting pitcher from this point forward."

This is what [I said](#) about Bauer on June 6, 2014:

"I love Trevor Bauer and Marcus Stroman from a fantasy perspective. When Bauer got his second call-up in mid-May I said he would be a top 35-40 starting pitcher. That recommendation was based on how good his raw stuff is, his prior start in the majors (against the Padres), the minor league numbers and most importantly, those good numbers were due to mechanical changes he made.

Prior to 2014 his biggest roadblock was he couldn't throw strikes consistently. I've watched every one of Bauer's major league starts and I've been impressed with the improvements he's made from 2013, but Bauer was still a work in progress. There have been bursts where he would look great one inning and lose his command the next. In each start the command has been more consistent.

The most frustrating part about watching Bauer pitch is, at times, he tries too hard to make the perfect pitch and strike everyone out. This was a much bigger factor when he was a prospect in the Diamondbacks organization. He doesn't do it as much this year, but he did it enough times that it was something that was noticeable and it was hindering his ability to go deep into games; he was throwing a lot of pitches per batter. Ideally a starting pitcher wants to induce a lot of weak contact from batters because it keeps the defense on their toes and most importantly, it keeps the pitch count down, which allows them to go deeper in the game.

On Friday (June 6) was the best start I've seen from Bauer all year. The box score doesn't look impressive as he allowed 4 ER, 5 H and 2 BB over 6.1 innings. However, all those runs came in the second inning with two outs. He got a little unlucky as two hits were a little fluky in nature. After the second inning he only allowed two base runners and struck out five. What was the most impressive is he tried to induce weak contact instead of trying strike every one. If he becomes a dominant pitcher, this is the start I'll point to as to when he started to become a pitcher."

Lastly, this is what [I said](#) on August 5:

“I’ve probably written about him (Bauer) the most this year, so I’m not going to belabor my love for him any further. At times he’ll flash number one starter upside (usually after 70 pitches) and remind you why the Diamondbacks took him third overall in a loaded 2011 draft. However, at other times he’ll have trouble throwing strikes and look like a fifth starter. He performs better deeper into games, which indicates it takes him awhile to find his release point. The Indians have tried ways to simulate this by allowing him to throw three innings of warmup before the game, but it has not been very effective. The fact that he flashes ace level performance means that if he puts it all together he can be a top 15-20 pitcher.”

Archie Bradley

Throws: R | Age: 22 | Team: Diamondbacks | Position: SP | RK: (109) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	20	123.3	12	119	1.97	1.23	23.5%	11.7%	0.276	81.2%	6.8%	22.8%	46.6%
2014	AAA	21	24.3	1	23	5.18	1.56	22.1%	11.5%	0.373	66.7%	0.0%	28.4%	46.3%
2014	AA	21	54.7	2	46	4.12	1.48	19.2%	15.0%	0.285	70.9%	3.6%	36.6%	43.8%
Proj.			140	7	140	4.12	1.38							

Before the 2014 season **Archie Bradley** was touted as the one of the best pitching prospects (and the best for some) in the minors. Once the season began he performed more like a fringe top 100 prospect. He began the year on the DL with an intercostal strain and missed the first month of the season. Once he returned his command was bad; it was so bad that [some scouts projected](#) him as a number four starter and that **Aaron Blair** may get to the majors first. Baseball Prospectus [didn’t have a glowing report](#) about Bradley as well.

His 2014 prospect ranking probably makes him draftable in deeper mixed leagues, but after reading the scouting reports I have doubts if he will be able to throw strikes consistently to make it to the majors. Suppose he does make it to the majors he’s going to have a lot of strikeouts but his ERA and WHIP are going to be at levels that reduce the strikeout gains.

Clay Buchholz

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Red Sox | Position: SP | RK: (75) | Player Rater: ESPN (162), NFBC (221)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	189.3	11	129	4.56	1.33	16.1%	8.0%	0.284	69.7%	15.9%	26.3%	49.3%
2013	MLB	28	108.3	12	96	1.74	1.02	23.1%	8.7%	0.254	83.6%	5.6%	25.1%	49.1%
2014	MLB	29	170.3	8	132	5.34	1.39	17.9%	7.3%	0.315	62.1%	13.7%	22.9%	47.5%
Proj.			170	12	136	3.45	1.27							

Clay Buchholz is probably the hardest pitcher to project (I also waited until the end to write this write-up) because his performances in the past have been so widely inconsistent. To [borrow a line](#) from Jason Mastrodonato, “Baseball-reference.com creates comparable player lists based on the numbers, and the

players Buchholz is compared to – **Rich Harden, Shaun Marcum, Ricky Nolasco, Ian Kennedy and Wade Miller**, among others – are perhaps equally talented as they are sporadic.”

So before going down the rabbit hole let’s take a look at his baseline numbers first. From 2008-13 he has a 3.66 ERA, 1.30 WHIP, 17.9% strikeout rate and 9.1% walk rate. Last year he was really bad; last year’s ERA was the highest it’s been since his rookie year in 2008. When [asked about his poor numbers](#) not even Buchholz himself was able to identify why.

He was incredibly unlucky last year as his BABIP and strand rate were much than his career norms. It’s easy to say both numbers will positively regress, but there’s a reason why last year’s BABIP was 30 points higher than his career average and the strand rate was nearly ten percentage points lower than his career average.

Let’s take a look at the performance of his pitches (table below). I categorized his pitch types into two categories: Hard and Soft. Hard consists of the fastball, sinker and cutter and Soft consists of the curveball, splitter and changeup.

Year	Hard		Soft	
	SLUG	BABIP	SLUG	BABIP
2008	.615	.403	.338	.333
2009	.446	.306	.338	.210
2010	.312	.266	.343	.295
2011	.438	.286	.313	.216
2012	.464	.285	.372	.313
2013	.289	.268	.386	.266
2014	.429	.314	.376	.262

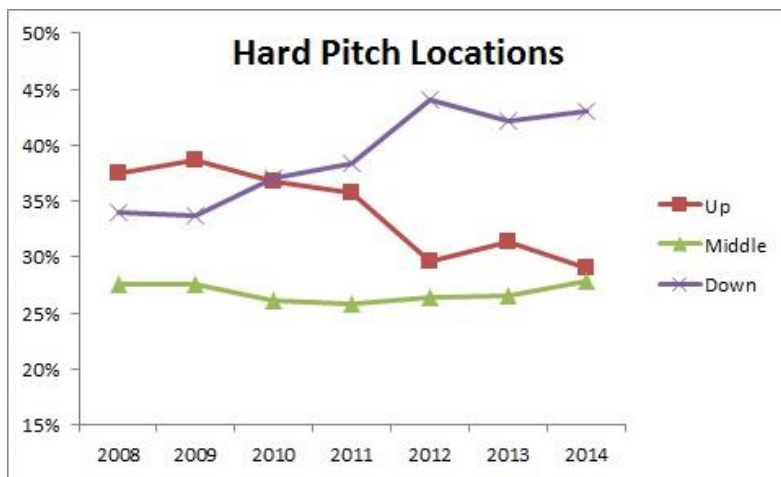
The biggest reason why his BABIP was so high was due to the Hard pitches. Even though the Hard pitches had a high BABIP he didn’t allow a lot of hard contact as evidenced by normal slugging percentage. Let’s take a deeper dive and look at his performance against left handed and right handed hitters.

The table below shows his performance throwing Hard pitches against left handed and right handed batters.

Year	Left		Right	
	SLUG	BABIP	SLUG	BABIP
2008	.651	.379	.575	.431
2009	.433	.315	.460	.297
2010	.331	.252	.286	.283
2011	.495	.316	.383	.258
2012	.457	.305	.471	.264
2013	.299	.265	.278	.271
2014	.455	.380	.397	.290

He had huge spike in BABIP against lefties last year, but like the previous table lefties didn't make a lot of hard contact against him. He also saw an uptick in BABIP against righties too so maybe it was bad pitch location that caused the high BABIP?

The image below shows the percentage of pitches by pitch location for Hard pitches. The three locations are Up, Down or Middle.



Last year he continued to throw Hard pitches down in the zone so it's counterintuitive because keeping the ball down in the zone is one of the most effective ways to be successful. If he kept the ball down then why was his BABIP so high? The table below shows the BABIP of Hard pitches thrown in various locations. Those locations are classified as Up, Middle and Down.

Year	Up	Middle	Down
2008	.452	.359	.395
2009	.383	.286	.264
2010	.214	.290	.289
2011	.333	.301	.220
2012	.313	.277	.275
2013	.319	.263	.238
2014	.333	.305	.376

His thrown Hard pitches down in the zone at the same clip for the past three seasons, but his BABIP shot up immensely which indicates he was extremely unlucky last year.

Some fantasy owners may say the reason for his poor performance was a [decrease in fastball velocity](#), but his velocity was barely less than 2013 and only one mph less than the 2011 season.

In late September he had surgery to repair a torn meniscus in his right knee, which could have been a factor to his poor performance because it was the same knee that put him on the DL in May. However, when Buchholz [insists](#) he was fully healthy.

After looking at all this data I conclude he got unlucky with the BABIP and if he continues to throw Hard pitches down in the zone he should be very successful next season. The big question is how successful?

Last year he posted the lowest walk rate of his career while continuing to throw Hard pitches down in the strike zone. If he's able to continue both trends and the BABIP positively regresses he could have an ERA in the 3.40-3.50 range with a sub 1.29 WHIP. Injuries are always going to be a concern for Buchholz (he's never pitched more than 190 innings in a regular season), but he has tremendous upside. The infield defense should be very good and he'll likely be pitching with a lot of runs on the board. His ADP will likely be suppressed so fantasy owners will likely be able to draft him at a substantial discount. I'm going to take a chance on him and so should you.

Mark Buehrle

Throws: L | Age: 36 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: SP | RK: (95) | Player Rater: ESPN (81), NFBC (78)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	202.3	13	125	3.74	1.17	15.1%	4.8%	0.27	74.8%	13.4%	29.4%	43.4%
2013	MLB	34	203.7	12	139	4.15	1.35	15.9%	5.8%	0.305	73.4%	15.3%	23.2%	48.0%
2014	MLB	35	202	13	119	3.39	1.36	13.9%	5.4%	0.316	75.9%	9.8%	22.2%	45.3%
Proj.			202	12	125	3.75	1.34							

It was a tale of two halves for **Mark Buehrle**. The table below shows his statistics for the first three months compared to the last three months.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
April-June	2.50	1.21	0.282	14.20%	6.3%	6.2%	81.0%
July-Oct.	4.05	1.42	0.353	14.40%	3.5%	6.6%	70.0%

The first thing I noticed was he was extremely lucky during the first three months and unlucky the remaining three months. If I were to choose one of the two sample sizes that represents his true talent level I would say it's the last three months of the year. I say that because he doesn't miss bats and relies on command and changing speeds to get batters out and pitchers like that are the ones that need to be perfect to get outs consistently. Lastly, he doesn't have much upside. I much rather take a chance on almost any other pitcher than draft Buehrle because that other pitcher has a much better chance of breaking out than Buehrle.

Madison Bumgarner

Throws: L | Age: 25 | Team: Giants | Position: SP | RK: (9) | Player Rater: ESPN (8), NFBC (8)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	208.3	16	191	3.37	1.11	22.5%	5.8%	0.276	73.5%	13.9%	27.4%	49.2%
2013	MLB	23	201.3	13	199	2.77	1.03	24.8%	7.7%	0.252	75.6%	13.8%	20.4%	48.6%
2014	MLB	24	217.3	18	219	2.98	1.09	25.1%	4.9%	0.296	75.8%	15.2%	22.8%	46.4%
Proj.			200	14	200	3.14	1.11							

If the Giants never won the World Series **Madison Bumgarner** could have been a top five starting pitcher, but after throwing 52 innings in the post season (270 innings for the entire season) I'm staying away. I say this despite the fact that from a pure statistical level I can't find any reason why Bumgarner should regress next year.

In 2008 **Cole Hamels** had a great regular season and postseason – winning a World Series in the process. In that season he threw 36 additional innings in the postseason (263 innings for the entire season). In 2009 he had the worst season of his career and suffered from the World Series hangover. By hangover I mean he threw too many innings and wasn't his normal self all year. After Hamels' 2009 season I am weary of any pitcher throwing that many innings in the post season. It's important to also note Bumgarner has a lot of mileage on his arm – throwing 1,114 innings since 2010, which is the 13th highest of any pitcher. I much rather have a pitcher like **Corey Kluber** or **Cole Hamels** who had the entire October to rest than someone who pitched a lot of high leverage innings.

A.J. Burnett

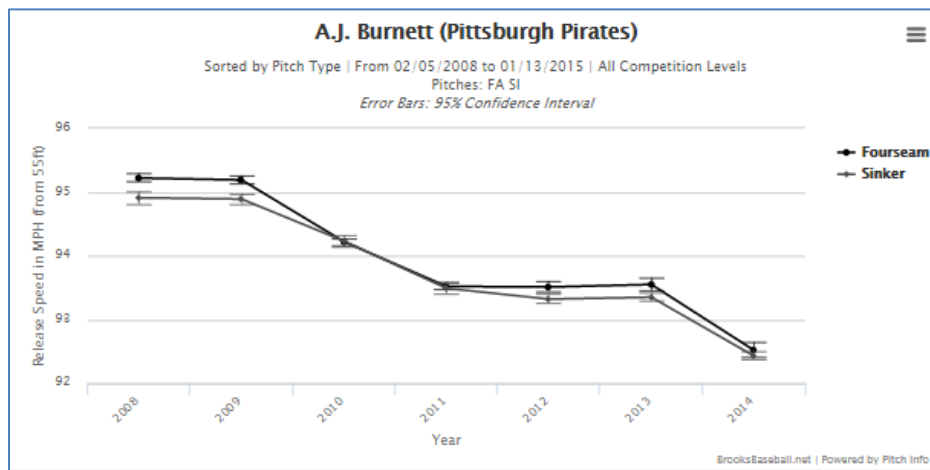
Throws: R | Age: 38 | Team: Phillies | Position: SP | RK: (40) | Player Rater: ESPN (130), NFBC (143)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	35	202.3	16	180	3.51	1.24	21.2%	7.3%	0.294	74.1%	14.6%	20.5%	58.3%
2013	MLB	36	191	10	209	3.3	1.21	26.1%	8.4%	0.305	71.8%	12.0%	17.8%	58.7%
2014	MLB	37	213.7	8	190	4.59	1.41	20.3%	10.3%	0.302	67.5%	16.9%	18.6%	52.8%
Proj.			190	13	175	3.47	1.23							

Right after the 2014 season ended **A.J. Burnett** had [hernia surgery](#) and is expected to be ready for Spring Training. It's a little reductive to say his numbers should bounce back to the numbers he posted in 2013 even though he had subpar numbers in 2014. A lot has been made how the use of the defensive shift helped Burnett achieve really good numbers in 2013. In 2013 he allowed a .233 batting average when the ball was hit on the ground; last year .223 batting average on ground balls. Instead his poor 2014 season was due to a combination of bad luck and decline in skill set.

Looking at his 2014 statistics it looks like he reverted to the pitcher he was back in 2011 when he couldn't throw his fastball for strikes consistently. After three miserable seasons with the Yankees, Burnett bounced back nicely in two seasons with the Pirates before having a down year with the Phillies. Based on that fact it appears Burnett pitches much better in smaller markets (also could be a small sample bias) so it's possible he could have a nice bounce back season. The question will he be the 2012 version or the 2013 version?

Not to sound cliché but the reason for the strikeout rate spike in 2013 was due to command. In 2013 he threw his curveball for more strikes so hitters couldn't sit on any pitch. That's why his fastball strikeout rate ticked up almost four percentage points. His track record for having command that good only happened in 2013 (my data only goes back to 2008) so the smart money says the 2012 version is more likely to happen in 2015. Some fantasy owners may be concerned by the decreased fastball velocity (image below from [BrooksBaseball.net](#)), but I'm not. Even though the average velocity is down, his max velocity only ticked down 0.4 mph last year.



The odds of him returning to 2013 form are not high, but they're still possible. He pitches in a great pitchers park, behind a good defense and bullpen and has a greater opportunity to win 14-plus games. On top of all that he could provide 200-plus strikeouts. Most pitchers at his ADP will not have that upside.

Eddie Butler

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Rockies | Position: SP | RK: (118) | Player Rater: ESPN (213), NFBC (229)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	27.7	1	25	0.65	0.69	24.8%	5.9%	0.188	90.0%	0.0%	21.7%	58.0%
2014	AA	23	108	6	63	3.58	1.26	14.0%	7.1%	0.274	74.2%	11.4%	24.9%	46.7%
Proj.			100	6	70	3.79	1.33							

This is the scouting report [I wrote](#) on Butler on September 22, 2014.

*“There was a lot of hype surrounding **Eddie Butler** before he made his Major League debut in June. After he got lit up for six earned runs in 5.1 innings the hype dissipated because he got knocked around and then went on the DL with an inflamed right shoulder (which may have contributed to the poor start). He was on the DL for five weeks and was promptly sent down to Double-A.*

For the year, his strikeout rate in the minors has dropped precipitously compared to his career prior. Based on how he pitched in 2014 it looks like the Rockies wanted him generate more ground ball outs rather than striking out hitters. Pitching in that ballpark, it’s good to generate a lot of weak contact, but if he’s going to be fantasy relevant in shallower leagues he’s going to have to strike more guys out.

On Saturday his fastball sat 91-93 mph and hit 95 in bursts (in the past he was able to bump it up to 98-99). He throws a four-seam and two-seam fastball. The two-seamer has heavy sink, especially to the arm-side. He also features a changeup and a slider. The changeup was easily the better pitch as he was able to throw it for strikes and to get swings and misses. To begin the game he threw a few really good sliders with good late break, but his command of it got loose as the game progressed. After the first two or three innings he started leaving fastballs and changeups up in the zone, which barrels easily, but balls found outfielder’s gloves. I’m not the biggest fan of the delivery, but it’s fairly repeatable.

His plan of attack was to generate as many ground balls as possible, which was effective because he was able to generate two double play ground balls. It’s only one start, but the Rockies developmental plan wants him to continue have outings like the one Saturday. From a fantasy angle hopefully he can continue to generate ground balls while missing more bats.

Overall, I liked what I saw and he has the raw stuff to be successful pitching in Colorado’s ballpark. His raw stuff is so good I couldn’t believe he didn’t miss more bats. He’s far from a finished product because his command was loose as the game progressed. Pitching is going to be deep next year and there is no guarantee he begins in the rotation to begin the year, but if he does he’s rosterable in a 14-team mixed league and maybe 12-team mixed leagues with deep rosters.”

Matt Cain

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Giants | Position: SP | RK: (69) | Player Rater: ESPN (141), NFBC (165)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	219.3	16	193	2.79	1.04	22.0%	5.8%	0.259	79.0%	10.7%	31.5%	40.8%
2013	MLB	28	184.3	8	158	4	1.16	20.8%	7.2%	0.26	71.6%	16.2%	26.2%	39.1%
2014	MLB	29	90.3	2	70	4.18	1.25	18.7%	8.6%	0.265	70.2%	20.0%	24.1%	45.6%
Proj.			180	11	160	3.75	1.20							

After making 30-plus starts since 2006 **Matt Cain** was only able to start 15 games for the Giants last year. He had [bone chips](#) removed in his right elbow in August and a [bone spur](#) removed in his ankle in September.

Even though I didn't see him getting hurt last year, I still wasn't going to own him in any league last year. The main reason for this was because his fastball velocity was sitting 91-93 mph and loved to throw fastballs up in the zone. He threw it up in the zone 49% of the time from 2008-13. Considering the ballpark he plays in he can get away with that strategy, but even 91 mph fastballs can still be driven out of the park at that location, which is evidenced by the increase in his HR/FB rates. To his credit, last year he stopped throwing the fastball up in the zone, throwing it at that location only 42% of the time, the lowest of his career (as far back as 2008).

Another reason I wasn't buying was the strike out rate decreased year-over-year while the walk rate increased at the same rate. From 2007-12 he outperformed his peripherals (i.e. his numbers were better than his expected ERA), but in the last year two years he performed horribly. Maybe it was the injuries? If that's the case it's not publically known. Cain is someone I'm going to monitor closely because as of mid-January all I can do is make my best guess about he'll perform next year.

Carlos Carrasco

Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: Indians | Position: SP | RK: (33) | Player Rater: ESPN (29), NFBC (67)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	26	46.7	1	30	6.75	1.76	13.8%	8.3%	0.364	60.7%	11.1%	21.3%	50.3%
2013	AAA	26	71.7	3	79	3.14	1.12	26.5%	7.0%	0.285	70.9%	10.5%	29.7%	45.3%
2014	MLB	27	134	8	140	2.55	0.99	26.5%	5.5%	0.274	75.9%	10.1%	19.3%	54.1%
Proj.			180	13	180	3.40	1.20							

Carlos Carrasco is a fantasy quagmire. Before 2014 he was really bad. You could argue he was bad for most of 2014 before his last ten starts of the year where he pitched like an ace. The table compares his career numbers and his last ten starts.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%	Strk%
Before	4.98	1.45	.322	17.1%	7.6%	12.1%	68.5%	64.0%
Last 10 Starts	1.30	0.82	.251	29.8%	4.2%	4.4%	84.6%	71.2%

Like I said before, you could argue his 2014 season was bad because his four starts to begin the season were so bad. After those four starts I said he [should be a reliever](#). After those four starts he was put in the bullpen and he thrived. The table below shows his statistics for 2014. I broke it out by his four starts, his time as a reliever and his last ten starts.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%	Strk%
1st 4 Starts	6.95	1.50	.361	23.5%	9.20%	11.10%	52.8%	61.0%
As a Reliever	2.30	1.00	.267	23.1%	5.30%	9.10%	82.9%	67.0%
Last 10 Starts	1.30	0.82	.251	29.8%	4.20%	4.40%	84.6%	71.2%

I wrote a [full report](#) on Carrasco in mid-September about what I saw and the changes he made. Steve Kinsella [wrote a great piece](#) about some of the specific adjustments me made heading into 2014 and made during 2014.

The biggest adjustment he made was he started using the slider a lot more in the last ten starts compared to the first four starts. What I noticed was he had better command of the slider and was able to throw it for a ton of strikes. The same was also true for the fastball too.

At the end of the day it depends how much weight you want to put on a small and most recent sample size. Kinsella's piece indicates that the light suddenly turned on for Carrasco while in the bullpen.

This is what I know for sure about Carrasco: He has an elite fastball and dynamite secondary pitch with two other offerings. He saw success once he was able to throw all of those pitches for strikes consistently.

Andrew Cashner

Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: Padres | Position: SP | RK: (46) | Player Rater: ESPN (66), NFBC (123)

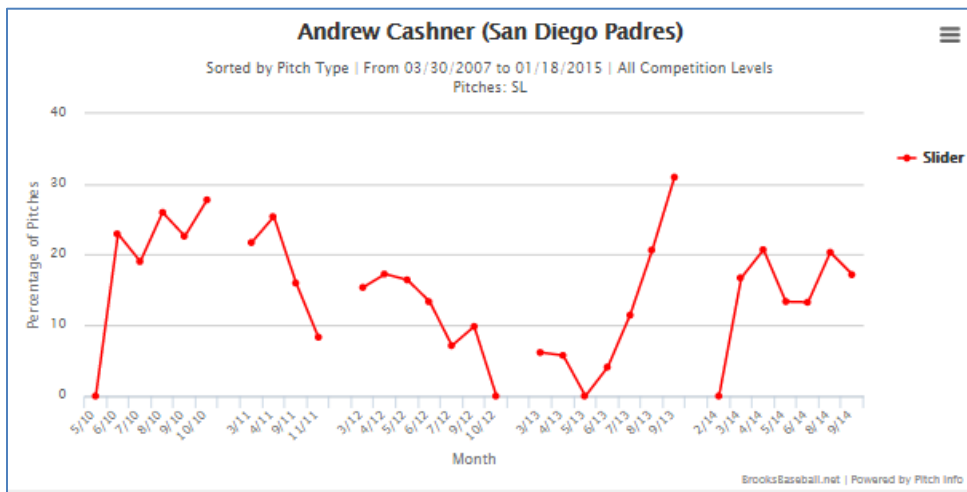
YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	46.3	3	52	4.27	1.32	26.5%	9.7%	0.311	70.9%	17.9%	22.6%	55.6%
2013	MLB	26	175	10	128	3.09	1.13	18.1%	6.6%	0.269	72.4%	10.9%	20.8%	53.4%
2014	MLB	27	123.3	5	93	2.55	1.13	18.4%	5.7%	0.275	75.3%	9.3%	19.6%	50.0%
Proj.			197	11	161	3.39	1.14							

The big question in the fantasy community is will **Andrew Cashner** ever provide 30-plus starts in a season? Because if he does he could be a top 10-15 starting pitcher. Last year he missed 76 games due to a [strained elbow](#) in May and [shoulder inflammation](#) in June.

With any Padres pitcher let's first look at Cashner's home-road splits (table below).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Home	2.11	1.00	.257	19.5%	5.5%	6.7%	76.7%
Away	4.07	1.32	.303	19.3%	7.9%	8.8%	70.1%

In regards to his stuff it can be unhittable in bursts or when he wants to be. By that I mean he'll go months without throwing his slider, his best secondary pitch (image below from BrooksBaseball.net). In 2013 he almost completely abandoned the pitch for the first half of the season.



To further expand the importance of his slider the table below shows his performance in the first and second half of 2013. You'll notice his numbers got vastly better the more he started using the slider.

Split	ERA	WHIP	AVG	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB%
1st Half	3.81	1.27	.262	.298	16.2%	6.8%	8.4%
2nd Half	2.14	0.95	.194	.236	20.7%	6.5%	6.5%

When looking at his 2014 season there some negative trends. The contact rate rose 1.4 percentage points from the previous year while the ground ball rate (from 52.5% to 48.3%) and the swing and miss rate decreased (from 20.0% to 18.4%).

Cashner is a very intriguing and tempting pitcher because he pitches in Petco Park and has, in bursts, has looked like an ace. Injuries have been consistent throughout his career (he's had significant shoulder injuries in three of the past four years as well as a strained elbow last summer). He will sporadically not throw all of his pitches (which is probably due to him not being 100%). On top of all that he's missing fewer bats and he's not generating as much weak contact.

The shallower the league the more likely I'm going to take a chance on Cashner. Also, if you're confident in finding pitching on the waiver wire (i.e. **Jacob deGrom**, **Jake Arrieta**, **Marcus Stroman** and etc) then Cashner is well worth the risk because if he does go on the DL you will be able to augment your team with a very good replacement level pitcher.

Jhoulys Chacin

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Rockies | Position: SP | RK: (120) | Player Rater: ESPN (212), NFBC (192)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	69	3	45	4.43	1.62	14.3%	10.2%	0.311	79.0%	14.7%	28.9%	39.6%
2013	MLB	25	197.3	14	126	3.47	1.26	15.4%	7.5%	0.288	71.9%	9.2%	19.2%	48.4%
2014	MLB	26	63.3	1	42	5.4	1.44	15.4%	10.3%	0.285	66.8%	20.0%	19.9%	44.3%
Proj.			100	5	65	3.55	1.31							

Last year **Jhoulys Chacin** missed a substantial amount of time for [relatively the same injury he had in 2012](#); a right rotator cuff strain and labral pathology in the form of fraying. If he's healthy he could be a nice streaming option when he's hot pitching at home. The table below shows his career home-road splits. As of early January I don't know how well he is progressing in regards to his recovery.

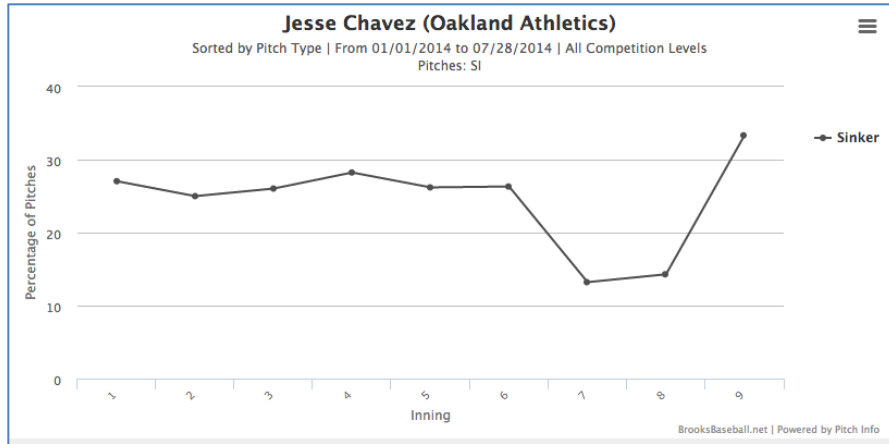
Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Away	3.24	1.31	.288	19.6%	9.6%	7.9%	77.0%
Home	4.21	1.36	.281	16.7%	10.0%	10.3%	69.3%

Jesse Chavez

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Athletics | Position: SP | RK: (116) | Player Rater: ESPN (91), NFBC (77)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	29	57.3	2	55	3.92	1.22	22.2%	8.1%	0.281	66.9%	8.6%	20.6%	47.1%
2013	AAA	29	30	2	26	2.7	1.33	20.0%	3.8%	0.351	63.1%	3.7%	27.6%	40.8%
2014	MLB	30	146	8	136	3.45	1.31	21.9%	7.9%	0.302	76.7%	18.1%	21.8%	43.4%
Proj.			80	4	70	3.25	1.18							

When I look at **Jesse Chavez's** body I don't see a pitcher who can hold up for 200-plus innings, which is also why I'm not surprised he has trouble holding velocity deep into games (image below from [BrooksBaseball.net](#)).



Also, even though he was really good to begin the year he quickly started to fade as he accumulated more innings. The table below breaks down his first 11 starts compared to his last ten last year.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%	HR/FB
1st 11	2.78	1.18	.284	.238	22.7%	6.4%	13.3%
Next 10	4.21	1.44	.333	.268	21.9%	9.2%	8.5%

I'm writing this player capsule in early January and as of right now I have no idea who is going to be the five guys in the starting rotation. The only locks are **Sonny Gray** and **Scott Kazmir**. After that who knows.

Assuming both **A.J. Griffin** and **Jarrod Parker** are ready some time in 2015 the A's will have at least eight pitchers who could have vying for the last three spots in the rotation. I think **Sean Nolin**, **Jesse Hahn** and Chavez will emerge and will start the year in the rotation but it's very possible they'll do what they did with Chavez last year in that he'll being the year in the rotation and migrate over to the bullpen. With so many starting pitchers it would make sense to limit the workloads for some and to give Parker and Griffin a chance to get their feet wet in the majors again. Also, if the A's are out of contention in July Kazmir and **Eric O'Flaherty** are going to be dealt because they have expiring contracts.

Therefore, if Chavez begins the year in the rotation I would buy low and start him for 8-12 starts then either sell high or place him on the waiver wire.

Wei-Yin Chen

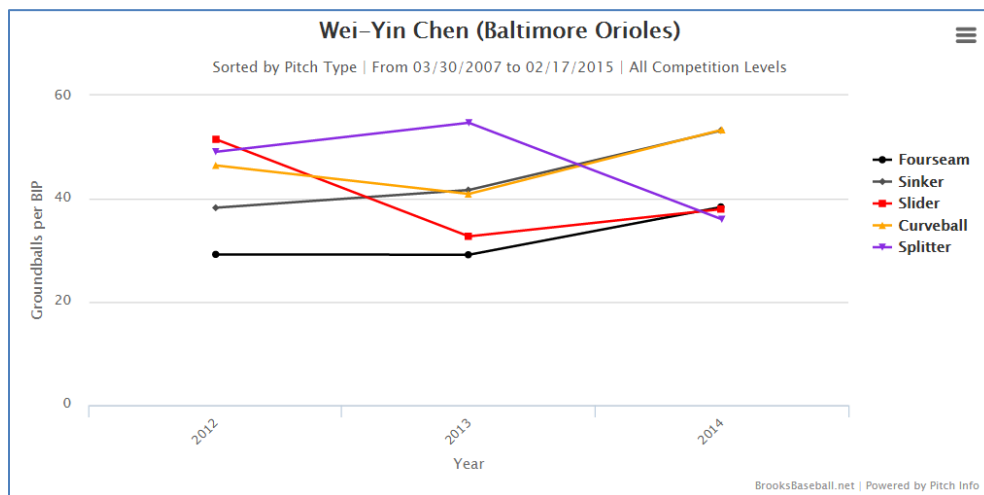
Throws: L | Age: 29 | Team: Orioles | Position: SP | RK: (64) | Player Rater: ESPN (45), NFBC (34)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	192.7	12	154	4.02	1.26	18.8%	7.0%	0.274	72.8%	13.9%	34.6%	38.7%
2013	MLB	27	137	7	104	4.07	1.32	18.2%	6.8%	0.305	76.0%	14.7%	27.2%	35.8%
2014	MLB	28	185.7	16	136	3.54	1.23	17.6%	4.5%	0.296	77.5%	14.6%	26.3%	42.3%
Proj.			185	12	140	3.69	1.26							

The reason why **Wei-Yin Chen** ended so high on ESPN's Player Rater was due to his 16 wins, which was incredibly fluky. Last year he only averaged six innings pitched per start, which means he got runs early in games and relieved heavily on the bullpen to hold those leads for him.

Even though the wins were fluky he's still a very good pitcher. He doesn't have overwhelming stuff, but he pounds the zone effectively and misses a fair number of bats. Before 2014 he was a fly ball heavy pitcher, but last year the fly ball rate dropped at the expense of the ground ball rate, which is great. The question is why did the ground ball rate increase and is it sustainable?

After looking at the statistics the ground ball rate wasn't the result of a single pitch. In fact all of his pitches (except for the splitter) all had higher ground ball rates (image below from BrooksBaseball.net).



After looking at the statistics he threw more pitches down in the zone at the highest percentage of his career, which leads me to believe he can repeat last year's ground ball rate. Chen doesn't have immense upside, but if the ground ball rate sustains itself he will be usable in deeper mixed leagues because he's going to have an average ERA, WHIP and wins. If the strikeout rate ticks back up to 18.2% he'll only be below average in strikeouts.

Tony Cingrani

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Reds | Position: SP | RK: (124) | Player Rater: ESPN (186), NFBC (170)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	23	104.7	7	120	2.92	1.1	28.6%	10.2%	0.241	82.1%	18.4%	29.8%	36.1%
2013	AAA	23	31.3	3	49	1.15	0.8	41.9%	9.4%	0.236	89.4%	5.6%	32.1%	50.0%
2014	MLB	24	63.3	2	61	4.55	1.53	21.8%	12.5%	0.292	80.0%	30.0%	21.9%	37.2%
Proj.			140	5	115	4.45	1.46							

In early May the Reds placed **Tony Cingrani** with a [shoulder inflammation/soreness](#). In June he went again on the DL (while pitching in Triple-A) with [shoulder tendonitis](#).

I wasn't high on Cingrani when the season began because his success was reliant on deception, which is never sustainable in the long term. His stuff played up in 2013 because of the deception of his delivery, but the more looks hitters got the faster the deception faded. Last year was the manifestation of the league catching up to him; the strikeout rate dropped nearly seven percentage points while the walk rate more than two percentage points. Ultimately Cingrani will be in the bullpen and he'll be very good. He's not going to be on any of my fantasy teams next year.

Alex Cobb

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Rays | Position: SP | RK: (28) | Player Rater: ESPN (35), NFBC (30)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	136.3	11	106	4.03	1.25	18.6%	7.0%	0.295	68.5%	14.5%	18.4%	60.1%
2013	MLB	25	143.3	11	134	2.76	1.15	23.2%	7.8%	0.279	81.4%	18.3%	17.9%	57.3%
2014	MLB	26	166.3	10	149	2.87	1.14	21.9%	6.9%	0.282	77.9%	12.4%	18.7%	56.4%
Proj.			190	11	170	2.94	1.14							

When evaluating **Alex Cobb** or any other Tampa Rays starting pitcher the first thing that comes to mind is will the offense score enough runs to get wins for their starters? The second thing is will the bullpen be able to hold leads?

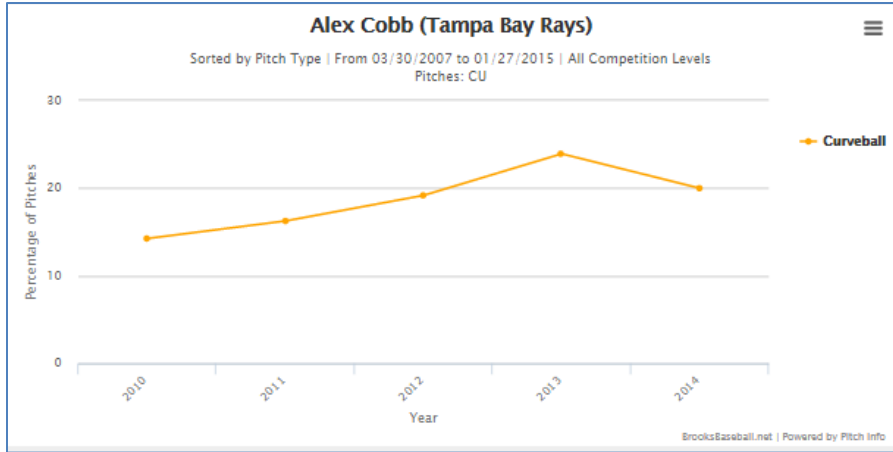
In regards to the offense, the Rays are going to score fewest runs in the AL. As of January 26 their second best hitter is **James Loney**, which is not good. Also, if you read the profiles for **Evan Longoria** or **Desmond Jennings** you'll see I'm not high on either of them.

If **Jake McGee** can come back healthy the bullpen has a chance to be really good with **Kevin Jepsen** and **Brad Boxberger** (he literally struck out 42% of batters last year). Therefore, it's very possible the bullpen can be above average next year.

Last year Cobb missed 35 games with an [oblique strain](#) and the year before that he missed 51 games after getting hit in the head by a batted ball.

Last year I loved Cobb. I thought he was primed for a big breakout (I think I loved Cobb a little more than **Corey Kluber**). I love pitchers who can miss bats and generate a ton of ground balls. Among qualified starting pitchers Cobb had the fourth highest ground ball rate last year.

Last year his strikeout rate was 1.3 percentage points less than 2013. The reason was due to the decreased usage of the curveball (image below from [BrooksBaseball.net](#)).



It's possible he'll throw the curveball more in 2015, but even if he doesn't he should have a strikeout rate greater than 20%. He's going to have trouble earning more than 12 wins, but if he starts 30-31 games he could be a top 20 pitcher.

Gerrit Cole

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Pirates | Position: SP | RK: (16) | Player Rater: ESPN (64), NFBC (62)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	22	117.3	10	100	3.22	1.17	21.3%	6.0%	0.308	74.5%	11.5%	18.0%	51.2%
2013	AAA	22	68	5	47	2.91	1.06	17.5%	10.4%	0.216	75.3%	7.0%	30.2%	49.7%
2014	MLB	23	138	11	138	3.65	1.21	24.2%	7.0%	0.311	73.5%	14.9%	19.3%	52.1%
Proj.			190	14	200	3.30	1.15							

Last year I was huge believer in **Gerrit Cole** because of the quality of his raw stuff, the impeccable command (at times) of the fastball and how quickly he made adjustments in 2013. In last year's guide I predicted the strikeout rate would increase to 24% and it did. What I didn't plan for was him missing a third of the season with shoulder a strain and fatigue.

For me, his raw skill set is so good that he could be a top five starting pitcher in baseball. What's going to suppress his ADP is the injury last year and the "lack" of production in minors and majors. In regards to the numbers in the minors it's important to remember when players are in the minors they are developing and working on things. What he worked on was improving the command of the fastball and the manifestation of that development can be seen in the majors.

What's interesting is Cole seems to change when he wants or does not want to dominate. In his last nine starts (in 2014) he had a 3.14 ERA, 0.99 WHIP, 29.0% strikeout rate, 5.4% walk rate with a .311 BABIP. In his first 14 starts he posted a 4.02 ERA, 1.36 WHIP, 21.0% strikeout rate, 8.1% walk rate and a .325 BABIP. In regards to his 2014 statistics I have no idea how much injuries effected his season so instead I'm going to rely on the eye test and the scouting reports I've read.

Overall, his skill set and makeup are so good that I'm going to target him in every draft because his upside is so high. Last year he only started 22 games, but he won 11 of them and that's indicative of how good the Pirates defense and bullpen is. He has a very good chance to win 15-plus games if he can make 30-plus starts.

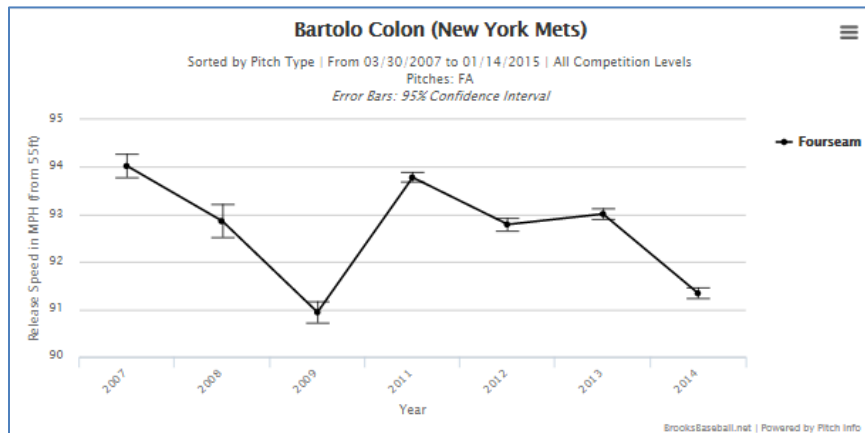
Bartolo Colon

Throws: R | Age: 41 | Team: Mets | Position: SP | RK: (80) | Player Rater: ESPN (61), NFBC (51)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	39	152.3	10	91	3.43	1.21	14.3%	3.6%	0.286	76.3%	11.9%	27.4%	47.2%
2013	MLB	40	190.3	18	117	2.65	1.17	15.2%	3.8%	0.294	80.0%	8.8%	25.5%	43.2%
2014	MLB	41	202.3	15	151	4.09	1.23	17.8%	3.5%	0.307	70.2%	11.8%	28.2%	41.4%
Proj.			190	11	145	3.67	1.23							

When it came to write about **Bartolo Colon** I didn't know what to say about his 2014 season. He throws a lot of fastballs for strikes and attempts to induce a lot of weak contact.

Last year his average fastball velocity was the second lowest of career (image below from BrooksBaseball.net).



More times than not I do not care a decrease in velocity, but with Colon I do because he relies so heavily on that one pitch. If the velocity is down the command has to be even finer to be successful or in other words the margin of error is lower. If the margin of error is lower, the higher likelihood he'll allow more hard contact and home runs. This offseason the Mets [brought in the fences](#) to right and right-center field doesn't help Colon's cause heading into 2015. Like any NL East pitcher he's going to be stream worthy at times, but during my drafts I rather take a pitcher with higher upside than Colon.

Jarred Cosart

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Marlins | Position: SP | RK: (98) | Player Rater: ESPN (96), NFBC (92)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	23	60	1	33	1.95	1.35	13.4%	14.2%	0.246	85.9%	8.6%	19.7%	55.1%
2013	AAA	23	93	7	93	3.29	1.33	23.2%	12.5%	0.276	75.0%	9.8%	20.0%	60.4%
2014	MLB	24	180.3	13	115	3.69	1.36	15.0%	9.5%	0.29	71.5%	9.2%	17.0%	55.7%
Proj.			190	12	120	3.77	1.34							

Before the season began I said **Jared Cosart's** ultimate role would ultimately be in bullpen pitching in the 8-9th inning. He certainly looked like that would hold true for most of the season, but after he was traded to the Marlins in July and he posted really good numbers (table below shows his 2014 numbers). The question is will he continue to have similar results in 2015?

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
HOU	4.23	1.44	0.3	14.8%	9.8%	7.9%	69.6%
MIA	2.84	1.25	0.277	15.3%	9.1%	3.3%	74.8%

By looking at the statistics it looks like he got lucky and his true talent level didn't change very much. After being acquired by the Marlins Cosart almost entirely got rid of the cutter and opted to throw the fastball more. The biggest thing I'm worried about Cosart is the same reason why I'm not buying **Shelby Miller**, which is the lack of a third pitch. His curveball can be good in bursts, but in order for the curveball and fastball to play up there needs to be a third pitch.

Pitching in that home ballpark and getting to face the NL East is going to make him a stream worthy option a lot more than you think next year, but I'm still not buying him as a starting pitcher who should be in your lineup the entire season.

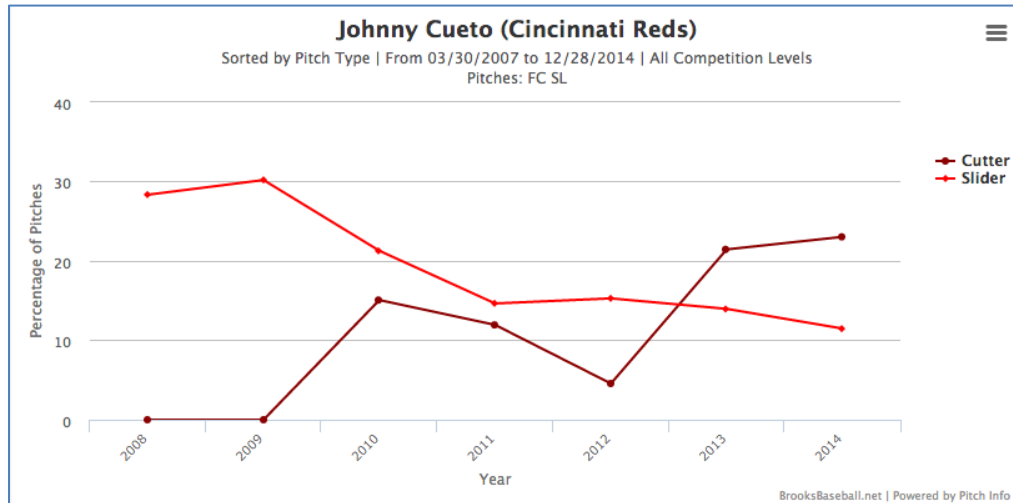
Johnny Cueto

Throws: R | Age: 29 | Team: Reds | Position: SP | RK: (12) | Player Rater: ESPN (2), NFBC (2)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	217	19	170	2.78	1.17	19.1%	5.5%	0.296	78.8%	9.4%	24.2%	49.9%
2013	MLB	27	60.7	5	51	2.82	1.05	21.1%	7.4%	0.236	81.5%	24.1%	16.9%	52.9%
2014	MLB	28	243.7	20	242	2.25	0.96	25.2%	6.8%	0.238	82.5%	18.2%	18.9%	47.9%
Proj.			200	12	198	2.96	1.10							

Before you think about putting **Johnny Cueto** in your top 10 do not forget about the three separate times he went on the DL for the same injury in 2013. After coming off the DL for the last time he changed his delivery. He found so much success with it he continued to use the [same new delivery](#) in 2014 and was healthy the entire season. At the end of the day you either have to believe he'll continue to be healthy or go back to being often injured.

Since 2011 he has a 2.48 ERA with a 1.07 WHIP, 20.8% strikeout rate, .264 BABIP, 8.6% HR/FB rate and 79.6% strand rate. Last year he was extremely lucky with the BABIP and LOB% (.238 and 82.5% respectively) so regression should occur. Also, what's troubling was his ground ball rate was the lowest it's been since 2010. The reason why the ground ball rate has decreased is because he's not throwing the slider nearly as much and has opted to throw a cutter (image below from BrooksBaseball.net).



The usage of the cutter is likely to remain consistent which means I do not expect the ground ball rate to increase back to pre-2013 levels. The positive side of using the cutter more is it misses a lot of bats. In the last two seasons the cutter has a 24% strikeout rate.

Overall, I expect Cueto's 2014 numbers to regress, but not as much as you might think. I still believe he'll have a sub-3.00 ERA with the same strikeout rate. I'm projecting him to make 25 starts because of the injury risk. It's important to note that when calculating your rankings and/or dollar values to add 5-7 additional starts to your estimated statistics of a replacement level pitcher that's likely to be available in your league format. If you play in a shallow format Cueto's value gets an uptick because there is going to be a big pool of streamable pitchers available on the waiver wire.

Yu Darvish

Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: Rangers | Position: SP | RK: (9) | Player Rater: ESPN (50), NFBC (48)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	191.3	16	221	3.90	1.28	27.1%	10.9%	0.295	70.5%	11.2%	25.2%	47.6%
2013	MLB	26	209.7	13	277	2.83	1.07	32.9%	9.5%	0.264	83.9%	20.6%	26.5%	42.2%
2014	MLB	27	144.3	10	182	3.06	1.26	30.1%	8.1%	0.334	78.4%	14.4%	24.2%	37.1%
Proj.			200	14	217	3.29	1.18							

Despite **Yu Darvish's** stellar numbers last year he didn't look like his normal self. He missed a couple of starts with neck stiffness (to begin the season and at the end of May) and he missed the last two months of the season with [elbow inflammation](#). He dealt with elbow inflammation before the 2011 season and

only missed one Spring Training start. He started that season on time and finished the year with a 1.44 ERA in a career-high 232 innings pitched. The latest news is in early December he has [begun a throwing program](#).

As of early January it's hard to tell how 2015 is going to play out for Darvish. He literally could throw 200 innings or zero. He'll probably be drafted 8-15th among starting pitchers, which is about right considering his current injury status. If I'm in a shallow mixed league I'll be more likely to draft Darvish because there will be many replacements on the waiver wire throughout the year.

Jorge De La Rosa

Throws: L | Age: 34 | Team: Rockies | Position: SP | RK: (65) | Player Rater: ESPN (71), NFBC (64)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2011	MLB	30	59	5	52	3.51	1.19	21.2%	9.0%	0.267	70.8%	8.9%	26.6%	45.6%
2013	MLB	32	167.7	16	112	3.49	1.38	15.7%	8.7%	0.303	75.4%	12.5%	16.4%	49.7%
2014	MLB	33	184.3	14	139	4.1	1.24	18.1%	8.7%	0.264	70.8%	19.4%	19.6%	53.4%
Proj.			190	13	140	3.77	1.32							

To quote the 2014 Baseball Prospectus Handbook, “**Jorge De La Rosa** made just 13 starts between 2011 and 2012 due to Tommy John surgery, and he looked awful in his three 2012 appearances. Naturally, then, he rattled off one of the best seasons in Rockies history in 2013. De La Rosa made 30 starts with an ERA under 3.50, making him just the third pitcher to do so as a Rockies.”

Last year was a tale of two halves. The table below breaks down his performance for the first three months of the season compared to the last three months.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
April-June	4.86	1.34	.270	17.3%	10.1%	14.5%	66.8%
July-Oct.	3.36	1.14	.266	18.9%	7.3%	10.8%	75.2%

The big reason why he was so good in the second half of the season was due to the lower walk and HR/FB rate. He has a career HR/FB rate of 11.3% so the HR/FB rate the first three months was incredibly high. Therefore, if he can limit the walks he could be a very good stream option. What's interesting about De La Rosa is he has a lower career ERA and WHIP at home than on the road. Despite that fact I wouldn't be comfortable starting him at home despite the track record at home. If I'm in a deep mixed league I would take a shot on De La Rosa as a stream option.

Jacob deGrom

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Mets | Position: SP | RK: (15) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	25	75.7	4	63	4.52	1.47	19.0%	7.3%	0.342	68.5%	9.5%	25.9%	47.3%
2014	AAA	26	38.3	4	29	2.58	1.28	18.0%	6.2%	0.311	78.4%	6.7%	24.8%	59.5%
2014	MLB	26	140.3	9	144	2.69	1.14	25.5%	7.6%	0.297	77.4%	9.0%	20.7%	47.2%
Proj.			200	12	200	2.91	1.14							

Prior to his last start of 2014 [I wrote](#) I was buying **Jacob DeGrom** in 2015. This is what I said:

*“Since Jacob deGrom made his Major League debut on May 15 he has the 13th-lowest ERA, 29th-lowest WHIP, and 18th-highest strikeout rate (this will increase a few spots after his start on Monday) among qualified starting pitchers. For the first six innings on Monday he was brilliant, striking out 13 and only allowing three hits. In the seventh inning he allowed three hits (two of which were squibbers/bloops) and three earned runs. He was faced a Marlins lineup that has only scored nine runs in their past five games and only featured two Major League quality hitters (**Marcell Ozuna** and **Christian Yelich**), but nonetheless I was extremely impressed with his outing and how he performed all year.*

*What I’ve been the most impressed with is his fastball command. He can throw it anywhere in the strike zone as well as elevate it up and out of the strike zone to get a lot of swings and misses, all while maintaining his 92-95 mph velocity. Among qualified starters only one pitcher (**Madison Bumgarner**) has more strike outs via the fastball up in the zone than deGrom. He also features a curveball and a changeup, which are both above average pitches. The curveball receives a lot of the fanfare but the changeup has been the better pitch all year and will be the better pitch in the future.*

*What impressed me the most was how he handled adversity. In the seventh inning when he got into trouble he didn’t panic; he was composed and got out of the inning without it getting too out of hand. Everything deGrom has done this year has been legit and if the Mets can acquire any offense in the offseason he is at least going to be a top 30 starting pitcher for me and he will easily be the highest rated Mets pitcher in my rankings next year. (Yes, I’m aware **Matt Harvey** may begin the year in the rotation but command is the last thing to come back for pitchers and I believe Harvey is going to struggle for the first half of the 2015 season.)”*

R.A. Dickey

Throws: R | Age: 40 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: SP | RK: (50) | Player Rater: ESPN (46), NFBC (35)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	37	233.7	20	230	2.73	1.05	24.8%	5.8%	0.275	79.9%	14.1%	26.8%	47.6%
2013	MLB	38	224.7	14	177	4.21	1.24	18.8%	7.5%	0.265	73.2%	20.3%	25.1%	42.0%
2014	MLB	39	215.7	14	173	3.71	1.23	18.9%	8.1%	0.263	73.4%	17.1%	23.3%	44.7%
Proj.			220	13	173	3.70	1.23							

Last year I was a big believer in **R.A. Dickey**. After the first two months of the season Dickey had a 5.18 ERA and 1.41 WHIP. It turned out [he was dealing with](#) a back injury, neck stiffness a cracked fingernail and shoulder tightness, which could have contributed to the poor start and the diminished velocity of the knuckleball. Once he was healthy the velocity of the knuckleball ticked up to the point where it was the same velocity he showed in his 2012 Cy Young season. The table below shows his 2013 statistics for the first two months of the season and the rest of the season.

Split	ERA	WHIP	AVG	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB%
First 2 Months	5.18	1.41	0.255	0.281	18.4%	9.9%	14.0%
Rest of Season	3.72	1.15	0.236	0.258	19.0%	6.3%	12.2%

Since I was so invested in Dickey I watched a lot of his starts and I kept waiting to see the 2012 version of Dickey but it never happened. At times he would flash no-hit stuff but more often than not he struggled to throw the knuckleball for strikes; he had the highest walk rate in his career since becoming a starting pitcher

After two years of having substantially higher walk rates and poor performances I believe he's not returning to the pre-2013 level of production. I've watched a lot of his starts and I have no feel on whether he's on a roll or cannot find the strike zone because the performance of the knuckleball literally changes from at-bat to at-bat. Dickey is good enough he should be rostered in a 15-team mixed league. If you draft him just leave him in your lineup and never take him out. Last year I tried to stream him and it failed horribly.

Danny Duffy

Throws: L | Age: 26 | Team: Royals | Position: SP | RK: (70) | Player Rater: ESPN (36), NFBC (84)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	24	24.3	2	22	1.85	1.36	21.2%	13.5%	0.284	85.3%	0.0%	38.8%	31.3%
2013	AAA	24	53	3	59	4.08	1.42	25.7%	10.9%	0.329	71.4%	8.0%	34.7%	38.2%
2014	MLB	25	149.3	9	113	2.53	1.11	18.6%	8.7%	0.239	77.2%	9.4%	29.2%	37.7%
Proj.			180	12	144	3.50	1.25							

After having TJ in 2012 **Danny Duffy** finally played an entire season and put up fantastic numbers. Obviously he's not going to continue to have a .239 BABIP and 77% strand rate in 2015, but what kind of numbers should fantasy owners expect next year?

After returning from the TJ he changed as a pitcher. He opted to strikeout less batters and started to fill the strike zone to induce contact. Also, he started to limit the walks. He made mechanical changes to his delivery in 2014. Specifically, "[Duffy] worked on shaving off the unnecessary movement in his delivery, streamlining his mechanics, from when he takes the sign and raises his hands to the instant the ball

leaves his hand. This gives him a better chance to throw strikes, and repeat his delivery” (source: [ESPN](#)). Overall, the adjustments he made gives him a better opportunity to have real life success.

What often goes overlooked with TJ pitchers is command is usually the last thing to come back for pitchers. Therefore, it’s possible the walk rate could improve even more in 2015. It’s also possible he returns to his wild ways and walks 13% of batters again too. I don’t think he’ll ever provide a sub-3.00 ERA again, but he’ll provide average ERA and strikeout totals with a WHIP that probably won’t hurt you.

Nathan Eovaldi

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Marlins | Position: SP | RK: (104) | Player Rater: ESPN (125), NFBC (159)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	22	119.3	4	78	4.3	1.51	14.8%	8.9%	0.317	73.4%	9.6%	26.1%	46.7%
2013	MLB	23	106.3	4	78	3.39	1.32	17.3%	8.9%	0.287	73.9%	8.5%	24.8%	45.6%
2014	MLB	24	199.7	6	142	4.37	1.33	16.6%	5.0%	0.323	65.5%	10.0%	21.1%	46.4%
Proj.			200	11	140	4.08	1.35							

For the past three years I’ve always started my comments on **Nathan Eovaldi** with will he ever develop a third pitch to get lefties out? I’m not the only one feels this way. R.J. Anderson goes [into depth](#) about Eovaldi’s struggles against lefties. The table below shows his career righty-lefty splits for his Major League career.

Splits	Strike%	K%	BB%	AVG	OPS
1st Half	65.0%	17.6%	7.2%	.249	.678
2nd Half	63.8%	15.0%	7.9%	.292	.770

Eovaldi leaves the pitcher friendly confines of Miami for the bam box in New York. Also, do not forget how much different the stadiums are in the AL East to the NL East; other than the Rays all the ballparks are hitter friendly. Yankees pitching coach, Larry Rothschild, is a great pitching coach and he may be able to cure Eovaldi’s struggles against lefties. Eovaldi has really good stuff so if he’s able to make this adjustment the sky is the limit for him, but I don’t see that happening to begin the year. If I’m in a deep format with a deep bench I would take a flyer on him, but that’s it.

Jose Fernandez

Throws: R | Age: 22 | Team: Marlins | Position: SP | RK: (23) | Player Rater: ESPN (93), NFBC (152)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	20	172.7	12	187	2.19	0.98	27.5%	8.5%	0.24	79.4%	9.5%	24.4%	47.1%
2014	MLB	21	51.7	4	70	2.44	0.95	34.1%	6.3%	0.271	69.1%	14.3%	23.0%	50.0%
Proj.			200	13	187	3.41	1.16							

Jose Fernandez is really good. I thought he would regress in 2014, but instead he got better ... dramatically better. The strikeout rate increased seven percentage points while the walk rate decreased by two percentage points. Unfortunately after only eight starts he went on the DL and had Tommy John Surgery.

There are several reasons why I'm going to stay away from Fernandez in redraft formats. The first is we have no idea when he's going to come back to the majors. It's very possible he suffers a setback sometime in 2015, which delays his return to the majors. Since Fernandez is the future of the Marlins organization I have to assume they are going to be extra cautious with Fernandez even with the slightest bump in the road.

The biggest reason why I'm staying away is command is the [last thing to return](#) post Tommy John Surgery. This is same thing I wrote about Matt Harvey, but it is still highly relevant. **Adam Wainwright** had a TJ in 2011 and he returned in 2012 and had 32 starts. The first 16 starts were far worse than the last 16 (table below). The primary reason was his command was loose and became tighter as the season progressed.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%
1 st 16 Starts	4.75	1.35	.332	.272	22.0%	6.8%
2 nd 16 Starts	3.18	1.16	.309	.245	22.2%	5.7%

Since the rehab process has improved since Wainwright had his surgery it's possible Fernandez comes out of the gate full bore with his stuff and command in-tact, but as of early January there are too many questions surrounding him that he's not worth the risk (based on where he'll likely go in drafts). If he slips into the 50s-60s among starting pitchers I'll gladly take a flier on Fernandez, but I think he'll drafted as a top 30 pitcher, which is too high of a price for me.

Mike Fiers

Throws: R | Age: 29 | Team: Rockies | Position: SP | RK: (125) | Player Rater: ESPN (58), NFBC (125)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	127.7	9	135	3.74	1.26	25.0%	6.7%	0.319	73.2%	10.9%	30.1%	34.4%
2013	MLB	28	22.3	1	15	7.25	1.52	14.6%	5.8%	0.27	61.4%	34.8%	28.0%	36.6%
2014	MLB	29	71.7	6	76	2.13	0.88	27.7%	6.2%	0.224	82.7%	12.7%	30.4%	36.5%
Proj.			120	5	80	4.7	1.48							

I've said since 2012 **Mike Fiers** will not have sustained success in the majors because his entire game revolves around a deceptive delivery and fringe average stuff (his fastball is barely 90 mph). He performed well in 2012, but in 2013 he fell apart and landed on the DL for a majority of the season. He obviously performed well in 2014, but I don't think it's going to continue. I think his ultimate role is best served in the bullpen where the deception of the delivery would play-up.

Doug Fister

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Nationals | Position: SP | RK: (86) | Player Rater: ESPN (19), NFBC (16)

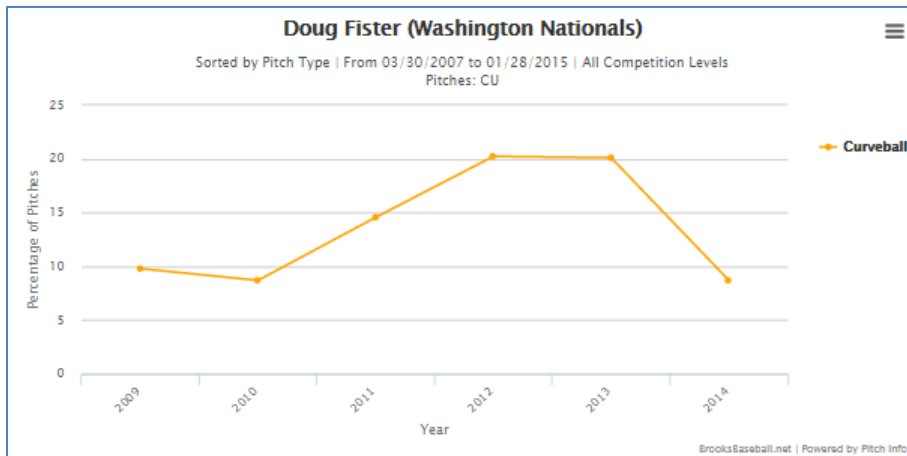
YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	127.7	9	135	3.74	1.26	25.0%	6.7%	0.319	73.2%	10.9%	30.1%	34.4%
2013	MLB	28	22.3	1	15	7.25	1.52	14.6%	5.8%	0.27	61.4%	34.8%	28.0%	36.6%
2014	MLB	29	71.7	6	76	2.13	0.88	27.7%	6.2%	0.224	82.7%	12.7%	30.4%	36.5%
Proj.			120	5	80	4.7	1.48							

To begin the year **Doug Fister** began the 2014 season on the DL with a [strain in his right lat muscle](#). After he returned from the DL he put up ace like numbers. The question is the 2014 season repeatable?

Yes it is repeatable, but the smart money says he’s going to regress in 2015. He was incredibly lucky last year. His BABIP and strand rate were far below his career rate (table below).

Splits	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	AVG	K%	GB%
2008-13	.299	72.1%	8.0%	.261	16.8%	47.1%
2014	.265	83.1%	9.7%	.242	14.8%	49.3%

Other than the strand rate and BABIP what’s concerning about last year was he strikeout rate was the lowest of his career since 2010. The reason why the strikeout rate was he started throwing the curveball a lot less (image below from [BrooksBaseball.net](#)).



When I look at his 2014 statistics he’s a very good pitcher, but is nowhere near indicative near the numbers he put up last year.

Since his 2014 season was so good he’s very likely to be over drafted and will not be on any of my fantasy teams. Also, he’s a pitch to contact pitcher, which is great for real life baseball, but in fantasy I want at least four pitchers who will strikeout 180-plus batters before I take someone like Fister. I expect him to put similar numbers to 2012 next year.

Lastly, this probably means nothing, but in late August he had some [skin cancer removed on his neck](#) and he said that he is fine.

Yovani Gallardo

Throws: R | Age: 29 | Team: Brewers | Position: SP | RK: (91) | Player Rater: ESPN (86), NFBC (85)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	204	16	204	3.66	1.3	23.7%	9.4%	0.29	78.4%	16.8%	27.0%	49.2%
2013	MLB	27	180.7	12	144	4.18	1.36	18.6%	8.5%	0.299	70.2%	17.0%	18.9%	51.4%
2014	MLB	28	192.3	8	146	3.51	1.29	17.9%	6.6%	0.294	74.7%	16.8%	20.4%	53.5%
Proj.			185	12	140	3.8	1.33							

Last year I thought **Yovani Gallardo** would positively regress from 2013s numbers because he was a little unlucky with the strand rate. However, since he had a high walk rate from 2012-13 I didn't think he would improve that much.

To his credit he lowered his walk rate to 6.6%, which was nearly two percentage points less than the previous year. Also to his credit the ground ball rate has increased year-over-year since 2011, which is a positive because of the home ballpark. The high ground rate has come at the expense at the strikeout rate. From 2009-12 he 200 strikeouts each year, but in the last two seasons he's only averaged 145 strikeouts.

Since strikeouts have increased immensely in league the 145 strikeouts he provides really puts his owners at a disadvantage. Sometimes it's okay to own a lot strikeout pitcher if they provide above average results in the other categories but Gallardo doesn't do that.

His trade to the Rangers doesn't significantly affect his 2015 fantasy potential. He's going from hitter's park to another one. The move to the AL is going to hurt his value because he's not going to face the pitcher twice per start and the quality of lineups are better in the AL.

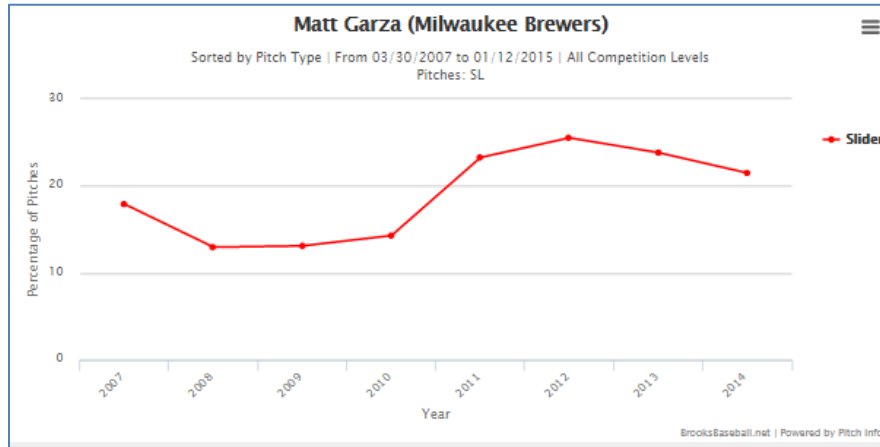
Matt Garza

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Brewers | Position: SP | RK: (88) | Player Rater: ESPN (75), NFBC (75)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	103.7	5	96	3.91	1.18	22.6%	7.5%	0.271	74.3%	20.0%	25.7%	50.3%
2013	MLB	29	155.3	10	136	3.82	1.24	20.9%	6.4%	0.29	73.4%	18.7%	22.8%	41.8%
2014	MLB	30	163.3	8	126	3.64	1.18	18.5%	7.4%	0.268	66.6%	10.9%	22.0%	46.2%
Proj.			160	10	127	3.67	1.20							

The last time **Matt Garza** threw more than 200 innings was 2010. Last year he missed a month of the season with an [oblique strain](#). The two years prior it was a [strained lat and stress reaction in his elbow](#). At this point fantasy owners should expect one or two DL stints in 2015.

Before the year began I thought Garza’s strikeout rate would see an uptick, but what happened last year was he threw his fastball more and his slider, his best secondary pitch, less. Maybe Garza threw less sliders (image below from BrooksBaseball.net) for the same reason **Zack Greinke** did: the slider put too much torque on the elbow (for which Garza has had problems with in the past). Since the ground ball rate has risen so much I think he’s been throwing more two-seamers to get ground balls so I’m not overly concerned about the decreased usage of the slider for health reasons.



Another number that stands out is the HR/FB rate of 7%, which was the lowest of his career. That number screams regression and I think it will, but not to the level he showed the past two seasons. The reason why I say that is he stopped pitching up in the zone with the fastball last year. In 2013 he threw the fastball in the zone a lot (35%), but last year that number decreased down to 27.7%. If he continues to keep the fastball down in the zone I can see him with a sub-3.70 ERA.

Kevin Gausman

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Orioles | Position: SP | RK: (44) | Player Rater: ESPN (110), NFBC (111)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	22	47.7	3	49	5.66	1.34	24.4%	6.5%	0.328	64.4%	21.6%	26.6%	44.6%
2014	AAA	23	43.3	1	44	3.32	1.36	23.4%	9.6%	0.298	78.8%	19.2%	20.6%	46.8%
2014	MLB	23	113.3	7	88	3.57	1.31	18.5%	8.0%	0.304	72.8%	8.9%	22.6%	43.8%
Proj.			180	12	180	3.40	1.24							

I love **Kevin Gausman**. I wrote about him consistently throughout the year. Below are snippets of what I wrote throughout the year. These will serve as my evaluation of Gausman.

Below is what [I wrote](#) after his 2014 debut on May 15:

“If you read yesterday’s roundup I was extremely excited to see how Kevin Gausman would look in his 2014 major league debut. His final line was 4 IP, 6 H, 2 BB, 2 K, and 5 ER. He threw primarily fastballs (about 80% of the time) and had fairly good command of them. However, he didn’t have good command of his secondary stuff, which is probably why he leaned so much on his fastball. Even though his fastball

sat at 92-96 mph, batters started to time to the pitch¹, which is why the effectiveness of the pitch started to decrease in the third inning².

He was pitching on only four days rest and his highest pitch count before yesterday's start was 77 pitches. In the fourth inning (at about the 64th pitch), he started to look gassed as he lost command of his fastball and he started missing up in the zone. Despite yesterday's performance, I'm still a believer in his long-term viability and he should be owned in all formats if he stays in the Orioles rotation."

This is what [I wrote](#) on June 9, 2014:

"After a sub-par 2014 debut¹ and the poor performance in 2013, the fantasy community soured on Kevin Gausman, which I never bought. I've always been a huge fan of his fantasy potential because of the mixture of raw stuff and command.

*If you're like me you shut off upon hearing or reading about someone else's team because it can be self-indulgent, but indulge me for a moment. I was in a 15-team mixed league auction with 30-man rosters and I chose Gausman in the reserve round ahead of other starting pitcher prospects I adore such as **Trevor Bauer** and **Marcus Stroman**.*

On Saturday Gausman looked like a near-ace and provided a glimpse into his immense potential. He only allowed five baserunners, one earned run, and six strikeouts against one of the two best offenses in the majors. His fastball sat 94-96 mph and it reached 99 mph (in the sixth). I was most impressed with his command of his secondary offerings, especially the split-change, which was a true out-pitch on both sides of the plate. In his first start he didn't have much feel for his secondary stuff, but on Saturday he was throwing strikes consistently, which made his fastball play up."

To sum up his 2014 season it's important to first note the Orioles yo-yoed him between the minors and majors all year; he would make a start in the majors and be sent to the minors right after just to get called back up in six, seven days.

He didn't produce the numbers indicative of his true talent level, but with any young pitcher he is not a finished product yet and there's still room for growth. I watched all of his starts and as the year progressed he was sequencing better and the slider looked dramatically better in his last 4-5 starts. I am going to "reach" for him in all my leagues because I think he takes a big step forward next year.

Kyle Gibson

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Twins | Position: SP | RK: (111) | Player Rater: ESPN (108), NFBC (118)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	25	51	2	29	6.53	1.75	12.2%	8.4%	0.35	66.5%	17.9%	21.2%	51.1%
2013	AAA	25	101.7	7	87	2.92	1.16	21.1%	8.0%	0.279	73.9%	10.4%	16.4%	56.8%
2014	MLB	26	179.3	13	107	4.47	1.31	14.1%	7.5%	0.287	66.3%	13.6%	14.9%	56.9%
Proj.			190	9	109	4.21	1.32							

Even though **Kyle Gibson** is a ground ball pitcher he doesn't miss enough bats to be ownable in leagues as deep as a 15-team mixed league. Also, the Twins defense isn't really good so there are bound to be a few plays per start where they let him down. The strand rate should improve, but it's possible the BABIP and HR/FB regress, which could counteract the positive gains in the strand rate.

Gio Gonzalez

Throws: L | Age: 29 | Team: Nationals | Position: SP | RK: (29) | Player Rater: ESPN (57), NFBC (59)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	199.3	21	207	2.89	1.13	25.2%	9.2%	0.267	74.1%	7.3%	23.0%	50.2%
2013	MLB	27	195.7	11	192	3.36	1.25	23.4%	9.3%	0.286	75.3%	13.7%	22.6%	44.5%
2014	MLB	28	158.7	10	162	3.57	1.2	24.8%	8.6%	0.294	70.9%	9.7%	23.8%	47.5%
Proj.			190	12	190	3.30	1.20							

After being relatively healthy his Major League career **Gio Gonzalez** had his first trip on the DL in 2014 with [shoulder inflammation](#). Before going on the DL his numbers suffered (table below). It's possible the bad numbers were caused by the injury, bad luck and/or a small sample size. Either way, after he came off the DL he was a much different pitcher.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%	HR/FB
Before	4.62	1.34	.319	.251	24.4%	9.2%	8.9%
After	3.08	1.13	.289	.219	25.0%	8.3%	5.6%

The biggest question about Gonzalez's fantasy value is whether or not you believe the 8.3% walk rate after coming off the DL. Before 2014 his career walk rate was 10.5% and from 2011-13 his walk rate was 9.7%. I never like high walk pitchers because they're more prone to blow up innings (and starts) and they leave games earlier, which lowers their win potential.

Since 2011 35% of his starts have ended with an ERA above four (i.e. the in-game ERA for that specific start was above four). That's incredibly high number for a pitcher who misses that many bats.

The primary reason why I don't believe in the lower walk rate was his fastball command didn't improve. After coming off the DL the strike percentage of his fastball was 64.7% and from 2011-14 (before going on the DL) his strike percentage was 64.2%.

I have the same advice as last year for any Gonzalez owner. If you have him you have to keep him in your lineup no matter what. Since he's a high walk pitcher he's going to be prone to random blow up starts. The blow up starts will be unpredictable, but do not waiver. When he's clicking he can be one of top 15 pitchers in baseball.

In regards to his win potential there's a reason why he's only won 21 games the past two seasons. That reason is his he only six innings per start (which is primarily due to his high pitch counts due to the high

number of walks). The Nationals should be able to walk away with the NL East, which is why I projected **Stephen Strasberg** and **Jordan Zimmerman** for 14-15 wins. However, I can't go more than 12 for Gonzalez because his ability to win games will be bullpen dependent.

Miguel Gonzalez

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Orioles | Position: SP | RK: (107) | Player Rater: ESPN (78), NFBC (76)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	105.3	9	77	3.25	1.21	17.7%	8.1%	0.26	82.6%	11.3%	36.3%	36.6%
2013	MLB	29	171.3	11	120	3.78	1.23	16.9%	7.4%	0.26	73.6%	15.5%	28.9%	40.9%
2014	MLB	30	159	10	111	3.23	1.3	16.5%	7.6%	0.273	85.5%	18.5%	26.9%	39.1%
Proj.			160	10	115	4.26	1.29							

When the 2014 regular season concluded **Miguel Gonzalez** had a 3.23 ERA, but there's no way that's going to repeat itself. He benefitted greatly from an unsustainable second half to the season. The table below compares his statistics for the first three months compared to the last three months.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
April-June	4.56	1.56	.323	17.8%	9.2%	13.4%	78.4%
July-Oct.	2.09	1.07	.230	15.4%	6.1%	10.2%	94.6%

There are two takeaways from looking at the data. First, he became a pitch to a pitch to contact pitcher. Second, there is no way he's going to have a 94% strand rate next year.

On top of regression I do not believe Gonzalez is an above average pitcher because he's unable to get batters out the third time hitters see him. The table below shows his career statistics for the number of times hitters have seen him in a game.

Splits	AVG	OPS	K%	BB%
1st PA	.234	.708	17.3%	6.9%
2nd PA	.239	.656	17.8%	6.8%
3rd PA	.273	.838	15.6%	9.8%

Overall, Gonzalez is more of 15-team mixed league streaming option. However, he will likely be drafted in leagues as shallow as 10-team mixed leagues, but it's not going to be me because severe regression is going to occur.

Kendall Graveman

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Athletics | Position: SP | RK: (121) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2014	AAA	23	38.3	3	22	1.88	1.02	15.2%	3.4%	0.282	82.4%	5.6%	15.3%	66.1%
Proj.			100	4	75	3.95	1.25							

Kendall Graveman began the year in Low-A and he quickly worked his way through the minors and eventually landed in the majors by late September. For the year he had a 1.83 ERA and 1.03 WHIP over 167.3 IP. Those numbers suggest he has a high ceiling, but he profiles as a back-end starter. However, I wouldn't be surprised if the A's put him in the bullpen because the bullpen is the weakest part of the team and they need a right-handed pitcher to replace Luke Gregerson.

Graveman looked really good as a reliever for the Blue Jays; the fastball velocity bumped up to 94-95 mph and he was able to generate a lot of ground balls with the two-seam fastball. If he ends up in the rotation his value will be similar to Nolin's. Graveman will probably begin the year in Triple-A to get some more seasoning.

Sonny Gray

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: | Position: SP | RK: (34) | Player Rater: ESPN (25), NFBC (23)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	23	64	5	67	2.67	1.11	25.7%	7.7%	0.276	74.9%	12.9%	17.8%	52.3%
2013	AAA	23	118.3	10	118	3.42	1.32	23.9%	7.9%	0.337	70.5%	7.0%	21.1%	51.9%
2014	MLB	24	219	14	183	3.08	1.19	20.4%	8.2%	0.277	74.5%	16.3%	14.5%	58.1%
Proj.			210	13	175	3.4	1.21							

After the first four months of the season **Sonny Gray** looked like legitimate top 20 starting pitcher, but in the last two months he faded down the stretch (table below). In full fairness the August-September data was skewed by a very bad August.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%	HR/FB
April-July	2.65	1.18	.278	.224	21.1%	8.5%	7.0%
Aug-Sept.	3.83	1.21	.287	.247	19.0%	7.7%	13.6%

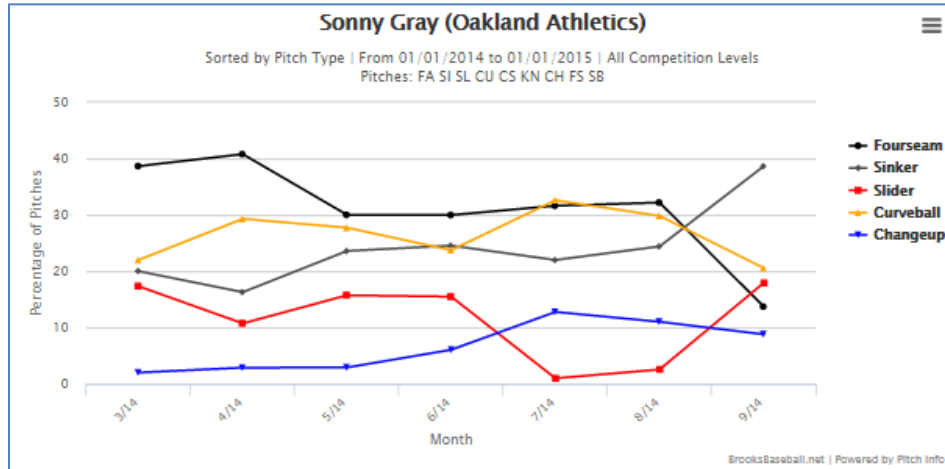
What surprised me about Gray last season was the high walk rate (8.3%). I thought he had impeccable command of the fastball, but that wasn't the case. In fact, among starting pitchers with at least 25 starts, his walk rate ranks in the bottom 25% of pitchers.

Another trend that caught my eye was he was a much better pitcher on the road than at home (table below), which is counterintuitive because of how much of a pitcher's park he plays in.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%	HR/FB
Home	3.60	1.28	.303	.250	21.3%	8.1%	10.9%
Away	2.51	1.10	.256	.212	19.2%	8.4%	7.5%

So to recap, Gray has a very confusing profile thus far. He pitched better on the road and was very effective despite walking a lot of batters.

Last year I wasn't high on Gray entering the 2014 season because I thought the lack of a third pitch would make it easier for opposing batters to figure him out the more times they saw him. For the year he was primarily a two-pitch pitcher but during the last three months he started to incorporate the slider and changeup (image from BrooksBaseball.net).



The next obvious question is how the changeup and slider performed when he started throwing them more the last three months of the season. The table below shows precisely that.

Splits	Strike%	K%	WHIFF%	AVG	SLUG
1st Half	57.6%	2.4%	3.2%	.220	.280
2nd Half	68.3%	22.6%	26.0%	.233	.383

I don't know what to make of Sonny Gray's season. He walks a lot of batters, but he misses a lot of bats and generates a lot of ground balls. Since he walks so many batters he's probably going to regress in 2015.

Zack Greinke

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Dodgers | Position: SP | RK: (10) | Player Rater: ESPN (11), NFBC (11)

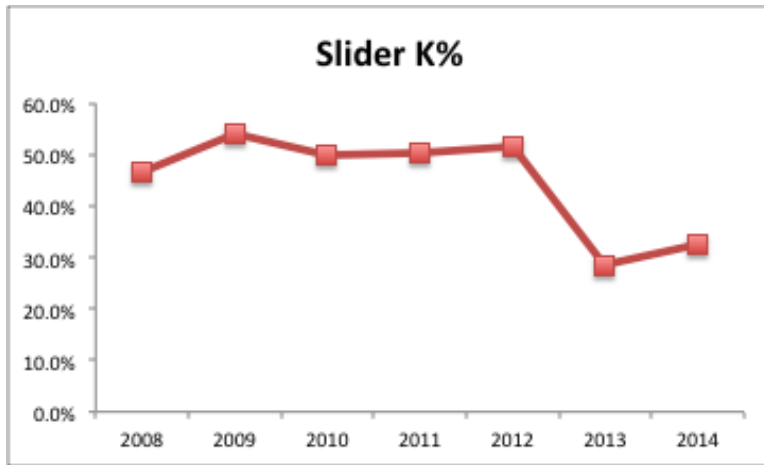
YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	212.3	15	200	3.48	1.2	23.0%	6.2%	0.306	74.5%	11.9%	24.7%	50.8%
2013	MLB	29	177.7	15	148	2.63	1.11	20.6%	6.4%	0.276	80.8%	13.8%	18.2%	48.4%
2014	MLB	30	202.3	17	207	2.71	1.15	25.2%	5.2%	0.311	79.7%	21.3%	15.6%	49.7%
Proj.			190	15	186	2.99	1.15							

At the start of spring training in 2013 **Zack Greinke** was diagnosed with [elbow inflammation](#) and at the time of the diagnosis was seen a minor injury. That proved to be true as he was able to begin the year on the opening day roster. Other than **Carlos Quentin** tackling him and breaking his collar bone Greinke had a healthy 2013 season.

In 2014 Greinke missed time at the beginning of the year with a [calf strain](#) but that occurred in mid-March when the Dodgers played the Diamondbacks in Australia. In mid-August Greinke had [elbow soreness](#) and at the time, it was believed he could miss a couple of starts because it. It turns out nothing happened and he was able to continue pitching.

Last year was highest strikeout rate since 2011. In last year's fantasy guide I said the reason for the lowered strikeout rate in 2012-13 was due to the decreased usage of the slider. I thought he wasn't throwing the slider because his elbow was hurting, but in fact it was the other way around. He started throwing the slider less to [protect his elbow](#).

Last year the usage of the slider ticked back up to pre-2012 levels and the strikeout rate increased. However, the strikeout rate did not increase because of the slider. In fact the strikeout rate of the slider was below average compared to previously in his career (image below).



The reason why the strikeout rate was so high last year was he started throwing the changeup much more. He started throwing it more often coming off the DL in 2013 but last year he threw it more than 15% of the time and it's a [true bat miser](#).

I don't think it's a coincidence he started throwing the slider more in 2014 and he started having elbow problems. Technically he has not missed any time to this point but he has dealt with elbow issues the past two seasons. The severity of these elbow issues is unknown, but I believe it should be factored into his projection for next season.

Jesse Hahn

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Athletics | Position: SP | RK: (117) | Player Rater: ESPN (101), NFBC (119)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2014	MLB	24	73.3	7	70	3.07	1.21	22.9%	10.5%	0.27	76.7%	12.5%	16.0%	51.5%
2014	AA	24	42.3	2	38	1.91	1.16	22.1%	8.7%	0.282	76.1%	4.5%	18.6%	66.1%
Proj.			100	5	80	3.75	1.28							

The 2015 fantasy ceilings for **Jesse Hahn** and **Drew Pomeranz** are the same. Hahn had a TJ surgery after he was drafted and didn't pitch until 2012. He only pitched in 163 innings in the minors before making it to the majors, which is quite a feat. In his entire professional career he's been extremely successful in the majors and minors. The table below shows his statistics as a starter last year (in 12 starts and 70 innings).

ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%	HR/FB
2.96	1.13	0.251	0.199	22.6%	10.1%	7.0%

When I see a .251 BABIP and 10.1% walk rate I cannot believe the 2.96 ERA would sustain itself over a larger sample size. Last year he was two-pitch pitcher (fastball-curveball) who threw an occasional changeup. The reason why I bring up Pomeranz is he too only threw a fastball and curveball and had good results (in a small sample) as a starter last year. If Hahn is going to take a step forward the changeup is going to have to emerge as a viable option to go through a lineup three times. If the changeup doesn't tick up he is going to be a really good in the seventh or eighth inning reliever.

Cole Hamels

Throws: L | Age: 31 | Team: Phillies | Position: SP | RK: (20) | Player Rater: ESPN (18), NFBC (19)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	215.3	17	216	3.05	1.12	24.9%	6.0%	0.29	78.1%	15.2%	26.5%	44.5%
2013	MLB	29	220	8	202	3.6	1.16	22.3%	5.5%	0.295	72.5%	14.0%	23.3%	44.9%
2014	MLB	30	204.7	9	198	2.46	1.15	23.9%	7.1%	0.295	81.9%	12.1%	20.6%	49.5%
Proj.			210	12	200	3.29	1.15							

Cole Hamels has been incredibly consistent for his entire career, posting a career 3.27 ERA, 1.14 WHIP and a 23.3% strikeout rate. He's also started at least 30 games since 2008. He began last season with [biceps tendinitis](#), but was still able to make 30 starts.

With those career numbers you would think he's been a top five fantasy pitcher. However, that has not been on the case. The Phillies are bad and Hamels knows that all too well as he's only won 17 games the past two seasons. As of early January he's still on the Phillies so it's hard to project more than 12 wins for him.

Last year he had a career best 2.46 ERA, which was heavily influenced by a 82% strand rate that is not going to repeat itself in 2015. The only negative I can see in his game is the walk rate. Last year he tied the second highest walk rate in his career (with 2010). His walk rate was very high in his first two starts (12.1%) but even if you remove those two starts it was 6.8%; still much higher than the previous three seasons.

The biceps injury to begin last year gives me some pause about 2015, but he's still one of the safest pitchers in baseball. Even though the Phillies will probably be even worse in 2015 I have to believe he'll have some positive luck and earn 10-12 wins next year.

Jason Hammel**Throws: R | Age: 32 | Team: Cubs | Position: SP | RK: (92) | Player Rater: ESPN (41), NFBC (37)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	118	8	113	3.43	1.24	22.9%	8.5%	0.291	73.9%	9.9%	27.1%	53.9%
2013	MLB	30	139.3	7	96	4.97	1.46	15.7%	7.9%	0.304	72.1%	18.2%	26.4%	42.3%
2014	MLB	31	176.3	10	158	3.47	1.12	22.1%	6.2%	0.272	78.3%	17.6%	25.9%	40.0%
Proj.			160	8	140	3.60	1.20							

Other than the month of July **Jason Hammel** pitched exceptionally well last year (table below).

Splits	ERA	WHIP
April	2.08	0.69
May	3.44	1.04
June	3.45	1.34
July	7.83	1.87
August	2.86	1.27
September	2.20	0.80

The reason why he struggled in July was due to the cliché of bad command. Also in July (with the A's) he didn't look confident and had a woe is me demeanor on the mound (and yes, I'm very aware I provided analysis that cannot be measured statistically ... also he was away from his pregnant wife, which must have had an effect). Back to the command, he was leaving curveballs up in the zone and the fastball was left up and in to a lot of righties. Starting in August he regained his command and pitched better than he did with the Cubs. Despite the low walk totals his command is always going to be a little loose from pitch to pitch, which causes him to have extended at-bats and results in his low inning totals per start.

Injuries are going to be a greater concern for Hammels than other pitchers (he's never pitched more than 185 innings), but when he's at his best he throws a lot of strikes and misses enough bats to be a steam worth option for 12-team mixed leagues.

Matt Harvey**Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Mets | Position: SP | RK: (59) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	59.3	3	70	2.73	1.15	28.6%	10.6%	0.262	81.3%	12.2%	28.1%	41.1%
2012	AAA	23	110	7	112	3.68	1.32	23.7%	10.1%	0.295	75.9%	11.5%	25.4%	46.3%
2013	MLB	24	178.3	9	191	2.27	0.93	27.7%	4.5%	0.28	77.4%	6.7%	22.6%	49.4%
Proj.			170	9	175	3.41	1.15							

In 2013 I loved **Matt Harvey**. I thought he was being criminally under drafted. He had great stuff and was extremely productive in ten starts in the season prior. It's no surprise I bought low on Harvey in all

of my drafts and I rode him to a couple of fantasy titles. All that said I'm probably not going to have Harvey on any of my teams. There are several reasons why I'm staying away:

1. The Mets offense and bullpen will be bad and he won't have a lot of wins.
2. How many innings will he throw?
3. I do not know how the [new changes to the Mets ballpark](#) will effect scoring, but it most likely will not help pitchers.

The biggest reason why I'm staying away is command is the [last thing to return](#) post Tommy John Surgery. **Adam Wainwright** had a TJ in 2011 and he returned in 2012 and had 32 starts. The first 16 starts were far worse than the last 16 (table below). The primary reason was his command was loose and became tighter as the season progressed.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%
1 st 16 Starts	4.75	1.35	.332	.272	22.0%	6.8%
2 nd 16 Starts	3.18	1.16	.309	.245	22.2%	5.7%

Since the rehab process has improved since Wainwright had his surgery it's possible Harvey comes out of the gate full bore with his stuff and command in-tact, but as of early January there are too many questions surrounding him that he's not worth the risk (based on where he'll likely go in drafts). If he slips into the 50s-60s among starting pitchers I'll gladly take a flier on Harvey, but I think he'll drafted as a top 30 pitcher, which is too high of a price for me.

Andrew Heaney

Throws: R | Age: 23 | Team: Angels | Position: SP | RK: (72) | Player Rater: ESPN (201), NFBC (226)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2014	AA	23	53.7	4	52	2.35	1.08	23.9%	6.0%	0.285	76.1%	4.9%	26.8%	47.1%
2014	AAA	23	83.7	5	91	3.87	1.17	26.0%	6.6%	0.296	63.8%	12.9%	30.2%	44.8%
2014	MLB	23	29.3	0	20	5.83	1.33	15.9%	5.6%	0.289	68.5%	35.3%	17.7%	47.9%
Proj.			190	13	160	3.90	1.30							

Before the 2014 season began **Andrew Heaney** was a top rated prospect (in all of baseball) and could have been considered untouchable by the Marlins. However, after struggling in a brief stint in the majors he was traded to the Dodgers, then subsequently to the Angels. The Angels need starting pitching and he has a great pedigree so he is going to start the year in the rotation.

At the time of his call-up I [originally projected](#) a 3.35-3.45 ERA with a 1.15-1.22 WHIP with a 22% strikeout rate. Even after getting pummeled by the Phillies in his second start [I was still buying](#) Heaney. The biggest mistake I made when I wrote that piece was I let the bias of his scouting reports cloud what I was seeing on the field. What I saw on the field was loose fastball command and a changeup that wasn't very good. His scouting reports said the contrary.

After his bad results some scouts and teams soured on him and only projected him to be a backend starter, which is a huge contradiction from the scouting reports before the season began. For 2015 I am going to give Heaney the benefit of the doubt because there's a reason why his prospect status was so high. He's going to pitch for a good offense and in a pitcher's park. At the very least he will be a streamers delight throughout the season for 12-team mixed leagues.

Jeremy Hellickson

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Rays | Position: SP | RK: (106) | Player Rater: ESPN (183), NFBC (185)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	177	10	124	3.1	1.25	16.7%	8.0%	0.262	82.7%	15.4%	29.3%	42.9%
2013	MLB	26	174	12	135	5.17	1.35	18.3%	6.8%	0.307	66.2%	15.9%	27.6%	41.1%
2014	MLB	27	63.7	1	54	4.52	1.45	19.2%	7.5%	0.321	71.3%	13.3%	29.4%	38.2%
Proj.			190	9	140	4.14	1.30							

In early February **Jeremy Hellickson** had [elbow surgery](#) to clean up some loose bodies. Originally he was supposed to miss 6-8 weeks, but he ended up missing half of the season. When he returned his stuff was in-tact so heading into 2015 there shouldn't be any worry about a depression of stuff.

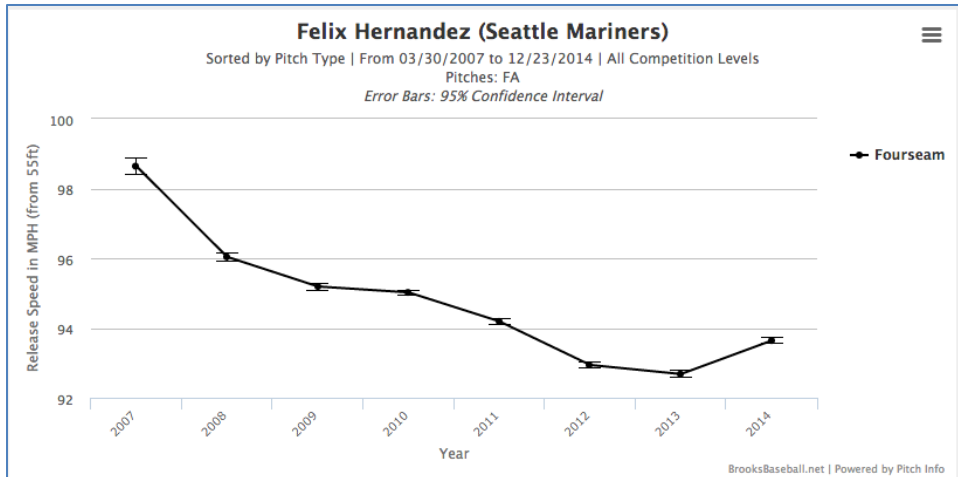
My major concern about Hellickson next year is how many home runs is he going to allow at the Diamondbacks ballpark next year. One reason why he was successful during his career in Tampa Bay, despite his fringy stuff, was Tropicana Field suppressed a lot of fly balls from turning into home runs. He's not going to have the benefit with the Diamondbacks in 2015. That said, moving to the NL helps because he gets to face the pitcher in the batting order and the overall quality of teams are lower in the NL. He's going to be a nice streaming option in 12-team mixed leagues throughout the year (when he's pitching on the road).

Felix Hernandez

Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: Mariners | Position: SP | RK: (2) | Player Rater: ESPN (3), NFBC (3)

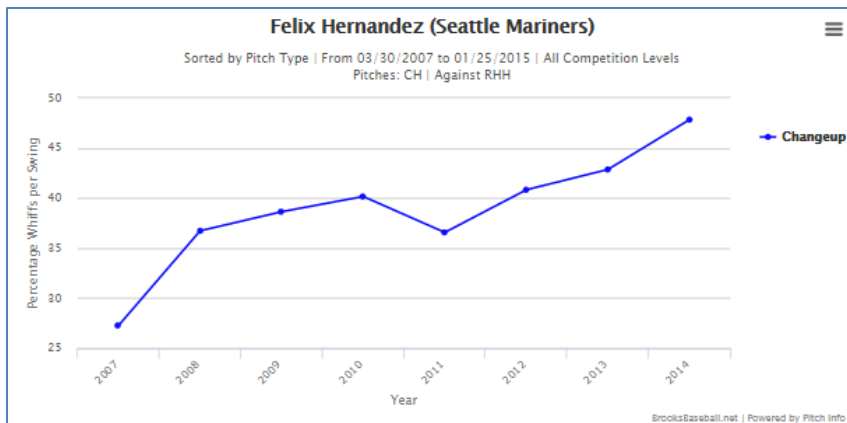
YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	232	13	223	3.06	1.14	23.7%	6.0%	0.308	75.0%	9.7%	22.2%	50.5%
2013	MLB	27	204.3	12	216	3.04	1.13	26.2%	5.6%	0.313	75.1%	14.2%	19.0%	52.9%
2014	MLB	28	236	15	248	2.14	0.92	27.2%	5.0%	0.258	77.0%	15.5%	16.8%	57.3%
Proj.			225	14	230	2.57	1.10							

Any time someone tries to tell you the reason why a pitcher is struggling is due to declining fastball velocity then tell that person to explain to you why **Felix Hernandez** has gotten better as his velocity has dropped (image below from [BrooksBaseball.net](#)).



When looking at the image the first thing you'll notice is he saw an up tick in fastball velocity. And no, that is not the reason why he had the best season of his career last year. In fact there is no one thing to point to as the sole reason for his great season. Instead, there are many contributing factors. For example he had career bests in strikeout rate and walk rate. Another example is the ground ball rate increased five percentage points from the previous season – the highest it's been since 2007.

The reason why the strikeout rate improved came against right-handed hitters. Since his velocity ticked up it's possible he generated more strikeouts with the fastball, but that wasn't the reason for more strikeouts. It was the changeup that generated more swings and misses and strikeouts (image below from BrooksBaseball.net).



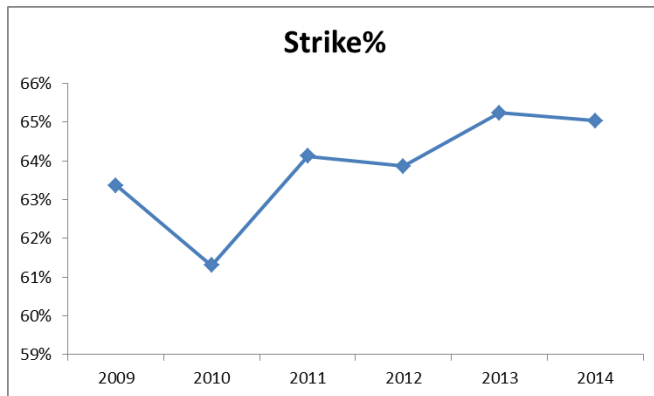
Even though he had a great season with more strikeouts and less walks, he did benefit a lot from an incredibly low .258 BABIP, which was 40 points less than his career rate. Next year there is going to be some regression of the BABIP, but if the strikeout rate and ground ball are at the same level next year it should only increase 20 points or so.

Derek Holland

Throws: L | Age: 28 | Team: Rangers | Position: SP | RK: (45) | Player Rater: ESPN (114), NFBC (195)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	175.3	12	145	4.67	1.22	19.9%	7.1%	0.261	67.9%	19.0%	31.7%	44.0%
2013	MLB	26	213	10	189	3.42	1.29	21.1%	7.2%	0.307	75.1%	12.6%	24.9%	42.6%
2014	MLB	27	37	2	25	1.46	1.05	17.2%	3.4%	0.296	79.5%	0.0%	27.0%	41.7%
Proj.			190	13	185	3.54	1.29							

Last year **Derek Holland** missed 134 games after he had [microfracture surgery](#) to repair torn cartilage behind the kneecap of his left knee. What's odd about the injury was he suffered the injury while running with his dog. He came off the DL on September 2 and continued to be the strike throwing machine he was back in 2013. The image below shows his career strike percentage.



After a bad 2012 season Holland took a step forward in 2013; the strike out rate increased and he was able to limit the number of home runs allowed. To quote his player comment in the 2014 Handbook from Baseball Prospectus, "When Holland is on, he has the stuff to be unhittable—he has more career shutouts than **Justin Verlander**, **Andy Pettitte**, **Jake Peavy**, and on and on—but his command issues result in inconsistency and make him prone to leaving balls out over the plate where they can be mashed." Since he only had five starts and one relief appearance it's hard to make any significant takeaways, but the fact the walk rate was cut in half gives an indication the command may improve in 2015.

Even though he missed most of the year it seems like Holland is becoming widely forgotten in the fantasy community. He's one year removed from a 189 strikeout and 3.42 ERA season. Holland is the type of pitcher I'll always target in drafts because his biggest problem has been command and not the stuff. If the command improves, which is very possible considering he's been in the majors since 2009, he is going to dramatically outperform his draft day value.

Tim Hudson

Throws: R | Age: 39 | Team: Giants | Position: SP | RK: (87) | Player Rater: ESPN (77), NFBC (82)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	36	179	16	102	3.62	1.21	13.6%	6.4%	0.27	71.1%	8.3%	24.4%	56.3%
2013	MLB	37	131.3	8	95	3.97	1.19	17.8%	6.7%	0.281	68.1%	14.1%	17.7%	56.6%
2014	MLB	38	189.3	9	120	3.57	1.23	15.2%	4.3%	0.3	70.3%	14.4%	16.6%	53.8%
Proj.			180	12	115	3.79	1.21							

For the first two months of the season **Tim Hudson** was fantastic, posting a 1.92 ERA and 0.88 WHIP. However, after that he fell back down to earth posting a 4.54 ERA and 1.44 WHIP. Since he pitched in a pitcher friendly ballpark you may think he pitched much better at home than on the road, but that wasn't the case as he posted a 3.23 ERA on the road and a 3.94 ERA on the road. At the end of the day he's a ground ball pitcher who doesn't strikeout a lot of batters. The ballpark will mean he'll be a nice streaming option during the season, but that's about it.

Phil Hughes

Throws: R | Age: 29 | Team: Twins | Position: SP | RK: (27) | Player Rater: ESPN (22), NFBC (18)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	191.3	16	165	4.23	1.26	20.2%	5.6%	0.286	73.9%	16.7%	34.9%	33.3%
2013	MLB	27	145.7	4	121	5.19	1.46	18.8%	6.5%	0.324	68.7%	14.3%	35.4%	32.1%
2014	MLB	28	209.7	16	186	3.52	1.13	21.8%	1.9%	0.324	70.1%	9.6%	25.6%	37.5%
Proj.			200	13	178	3.55	1.14							

I wrote last year I loved **Phil Hughes** going to the Twins because he was finally going to pitch in a ballpark that suited his skillset. The table below shows his home-road splits since new Yankee Stadium opened in 2009; the numbers are from 2009-13.

Split	ERA	WHIP	AVG	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB%	HRs
Home	4.82	1.34	.269	.297	20.4%	6.8%	13.7%	71
Away	3.99	1.27	.250	.292	19.6%	7.2%	6.9%	30

In regards to last year he changed his approach, which brought him a lot of success. The new approach is similar to a reliever in that he threw strikes and a lot of them. He threw so many strikes he led all qualified starting pitchers with strike percentage last year. Also, he threw so many strikes he hardly walked anyone; he literally only walked 16 batters.

Last year he was basically only threw the fastball and cutter (he mixed in a curveball too). Hughes has been to known to [tinker a lot](#) with his pitch selection so it's possible he'll change what made him successful in 2015, but I don't see that happening. He probably won't better than last year, but everything he did last year looks legit.

Drew Hutchison

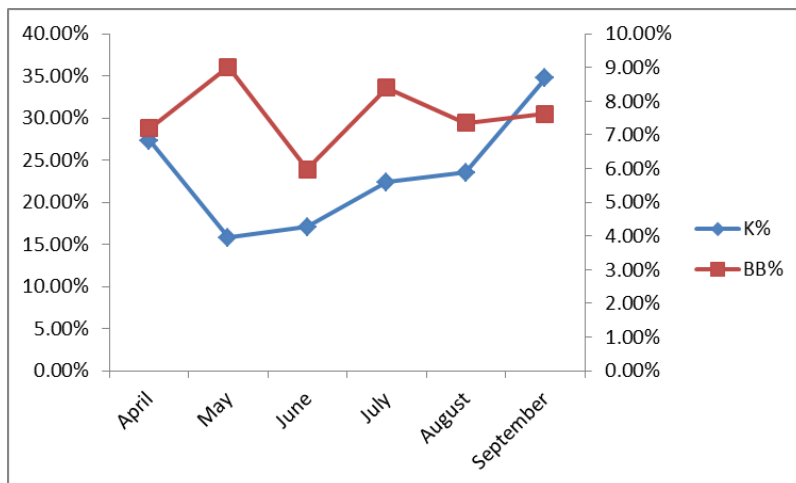
Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: SP | RK: (36) | Player Rater: ESPN (89), NFBC (79)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	21	58.7	5	49	4.6	1.35	19.1%	7.8%	0.291	72.8%	15.4%	28.4%	45.9%
2014	MLB	23	184.7	11	184	4.48	1.26	23.4%	7.6%	0.293	71.2%	14.0%	30.7%	37.0%
Proj.			200	13	200	3.79	1.24							

After missing a little less than two seasons **Drew Hutchison** was finally healthy and made 32 starts. In late April [I wrote](#), “After watching his start three starts I’m a believer that his raw stuff is good enough that he could be a 200 K pitcher if given the opportunity to start 31-33 games.” He ended up having 32 starts and pitched 184 innings. Coincidentally he struck out 184 batters so if he pitched a few more innings my projection would have come true.

In that same piece I concluded my evaluation of Hutchison that he would finish the year with, “At the end of the year he’ll be somewhere near a 3.80 ERA, 1.25 WHIP with 180 strikeouts.” Obviously I was incorrect about the ERA, but he had a 3.85 FIP and 3.82 xFIP so I was definitely on the right track.

The one thing he should try to work on is trying to limit the fly balls. Last year his fly ball rate was 45%, which is high considering the home ballpark is one of the worst ballparks for allowing home runs. If he can lower the fly ball rate to even 40% he’ll have an opportunity to have an ERA in the sub-3.80s. There’s another sign of optimism as his strikeout rate increased month-over-month while the walk rate decreased slightly as the season progressed (image below).



If Hutchison played in a bigger market and in a better pitchers ballpark there would be more talk about him as a potential breakout candidate. He’ll likely be drafted in the 60-70 among starting pitchers (or even later), but he is one of the best candidates to substantially improve in 2015.

Hisashi Iwakuma**Throws: R | Age: 33 | Team: Mariners | Position: SP | RK: (24) | Player Rater: ESPN (24), NFBC (21)**

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	125.3	9	101	3.16	1.28	19.5%	8.3%	0.282	81.9%	20.2%	22.6%	53.5%
2013	MLB	32	219.7	14	185	2.66	1.01	21.4%	4.8%	0.252	81.9%	17.0%	23.1%	50.2%
2014	MLB	33	179	15	154	3.52	1.05	21.7%	3.0%	0.287	74.1%	21.1%	17.9%	51.7%
Proj.			180	12	160	3.29	1.03							

Hisashi Iwakuma began the 2014 season on the DL with a [finger strain](#). In June he had neck stiffness but he didn't miss any time. Prior to 2014 he has been relatively healthy. However, do not forget about his lengthy injury history prior to coming to the majors.

Michael Barr [said June 2013](#), "One, he's had a series of shoulder issues in his career, although he's been relatively healthy going on two seasons now. This is ostensibly why the club used him out of the pen to start 2012 and also why he's only averaging 93 pitches per start in 2013. Most pitchers are ticking time bombs, but in Iwakuma there's definitely increased risk."

In last year's fantasy guide I said he is going to regress because there is no way the .252 BABIP and 81.9% LOB% he put up in 2013 repeat itself in 2014. Lo and behold the BABIP regressed to .287 and so did the strand rate to 74.1%. The numbers in 2014 accurately reflect his true talent level.

There's a lot of talk about how he faded down the stretch (7.61 ERA in the month of September), but after close inspection he suffered from bad luck. The table below shows his advanced statistics; one row is for the September and the other is for April-August but I'm not telling you which one is which (until the next paragraph).

Splits	K%	BB%	GB%	FB%
A	21.1%	2.2%	48.4%	30.1%
B	25.6%	7.4%	53.4%	23.3%

"B" is September. Other than the walk rate climbing five percentage points his numbers almost identical in September. What caused his poor September was he had a .371 BABIP and a 17.6% HR/FB rate.

He's been relatively healthy in his Major League career, but he's had major injuries in the past, which means he's not a lock for 30 starts next year.

Ubaldo Jimenez

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Orioles | Position: SP | RK: (110) | Player Rater: ESPN (170), NFBC (103)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	176.7	9	143	5.4	1.61	17.8%	11.8%	0.309	68.6%	15.4%	29.0%	39.7%
2013	MLB	29	182.7	13	194	3.3	1.33	25.0%	10.3%	0.304	76.5%	12.9%	24.8%	45.4%
2014	MLB	30	125.3	6	116	4.81	1.52	21.0%	13.9%	0.289	72.2%	15.4%	25.6%	42.7%
Proj.			180	10	155	4.50	1.50							

These are the last four ERAs for **Ubaldo Jimenez**: 4.68, 5.40, 3.30 and 4.81. Looking at these statistics it looks as though the 3.30 ERA is the outlier. His biggest problem is his inability to throw strikes consistently. The reason why he has trouble throwing strikes he doesn't repeat his delivery and the reason why he struggles to repeat the delivery is due to [poor posture](#). Maybe if I'm in a deep format with a large bench I would maybe take a flyer on him, but if I do own him I'm going to hold my breath every time he's in my starting lineup.

Scott Kazmir

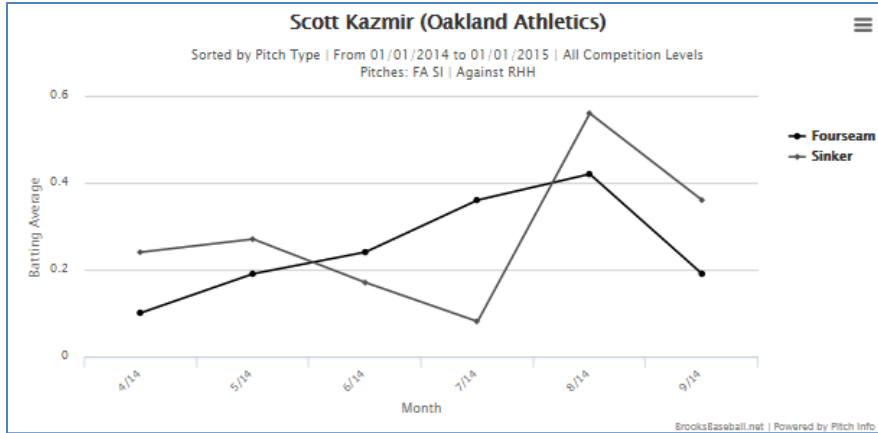
Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Athletics | Position: SP | RK: (66) | Player Rater: ESPN (34), NFBC (28)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2010	MLB	26	150	9	93	5.94	1.58	13.6%	11.6%	0.281	68.2%	14.6%	34.3%	40.0%
2013	MLB	29	158	10	162	4.04	1.32	24.1%	7.0%	0.324	73.4%	18.4%	22.4%	42.0%
2014	MLB	30	190.3	15	164	3.55	1.16	21.1%	6.4%	0.285	71.1%	12.0%	23.8%	44.5%
Proj.			170	12	153	3.65	1.22							

Last year it was a tale of two halves for **Scott Kazmir**. The table below breaks down his first 16 starts compared to his last 16.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
1 st 16	2.66	1.01	.258	21.8%	6.4%	9.8%	79.6%
2 nd 16	4.48	1.32	.317	20.5%	7.4%	6.7%	64.2%

The first half of the year he pitched like an All-Star and in the second half he pitched like the pitcher who was forced to play Independent baseball in 2012. He actually performed really well in July, but once August came he struggled immensely; he posted a 6.05 ERA and 1.50 WHIP. The biggest reason why he struggled was due to inconsistent command of the fastball to righties. The image below (from [BrooksBaseball.net](#)) shows his batting average against on fastballs by month.



Last year Kazmir threw 190.1 innings, which was the second most of his Major League career so it's possible he wore down towards the end of the season. The A's acquired a lot of starting pitchers this offseason and when I look at the tea leaves I think the A's are preparing themselves for life without Kazmir. I can see them trading Kazmir at the trade deadline if they're out of the race. I can also see them resting Kazmir throughout the year, giving him a couple of starts off to keep him fresh. Therefore, I don't seem throwing more than 170 innings next year (if stays with the A's the whole year), which is a positive for his fantasy value.

In 2013 he had a 24% strikeout rate, but last year that dropped to 21%, which is fine because he had the highest ground ball rate of his career. The biggest reason for the uptick was the increased usage of the changeup and better location of the slider. In 2013 he was throwing the slider way off the plate (to lefties) to get strikeouts, but in 2014 he was throwing it on the outer edge of the strike zone to get ground balls.

Joe Kelly

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Red Sox | Position: SP | RK: (99) | Player Rater: ESPN (139), NFBC (135)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	107	5	75	3.53	1.38	16.4%	7.9%	0.306	73.7%	12.5%	23.3%	53.4%
2013	MLB	25	124	10	79	2.69	1.35	14.8%	8.3%	0.289	82.4%	12.7%	19.6%	52.0%
2014	MLB	26	96.3	6	66	4.2	1.35	15.9%	10.1%	0.274	70.7%	18.6%	14.3%	56.3%
Proj.			180	13	120	4.02	1.35							

Last year I said **Joe Kelly** would regress significantly in 2014 and that's what happened. If you watch him pitch it's easy to see why 2013s numbers were not repeatable. He throws a mid-90s fastball and all of his pitches have movement, but his problem is he doesn't know where the pitches are going (as evidenced by the 10% walk rate last year). He has the raw stuff to be a number three starter in real life, but if the command doesn't improve he'll likely be relegated to the bullpen. As of early January he'll likely begin the season in the rotation. He generates a lot of ground balls and should have an above

average to good infield behind him so he'll have value as a streaming option in 10-12 mixed leagues. If the command improves he could be a number 4-5 starter in 10-team mixed leagues.

Ian Kennedy

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Padres | Position: SP | RK: (41) | Player Rater: ESPN (51), NFBC (33)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	208.3	15	187	4.02	1.3	20.8%	6.1%	0.306	74.9%	12.8%	33.9%	39.7%
2013	MLB	28	181.3	7	163	4.91	1.4	20.5%	9.2%	0.295	69.1%	19.4%	25.5%	39.9%
2014	MLB	29	201	13	207	3.63	1.29	24.5%	8.3%	0.315	74.0%	11.0%	25.7%	42.5%
Proj.			200	13	200	3.62	1.30							

Other than in the month of June **Ian Kennedy** was fairly consistent last year (table below).

Month	ERA	WHIP
April	3.16	0.95
May	3.68	1.34
June	5.46	1.45
July	2.53	1.19
August	3.63	1.50
September	3.48	1.35

Last year Kennedy was a top 40 fantasy starting pitcher, which was primarily driven by his high strikeout and moderate win totals. His strikeouts were so good there were only 13 pitchers who had 200-plus strikeouts and Kennedy was one of them. His ERA and WHIP were below average and a liability in 10-team mixed leagues.

Last year his strikeout rate increased four percentage points. The biggest question fantasy owners will the uptick in strikeouts continue in 2015? Last year he started throwing the curveball a lot more and the changeup less. At times he was basically a two-pitch pitcher who occasionally threw other pitches. The curveball is thrown between 77-80 mph while the fastball is thrown 91-95 mph. Since there's a major difference in velocities it's no surprise both pitches saw an uptick in whiff and strikeout rates. If he continues to utilize the curveball and to throw a lot strikes with the fastball, the strikeout rate should be repeatable.

Contrary to common belief, Kennedy hasn't had a huge benefit from pitching in Petco Park. The table below shows his home-road splits since he was traded last year. Lastly, this is his last season before he becomes a free agent and he's made at least 30 starts since 2010.

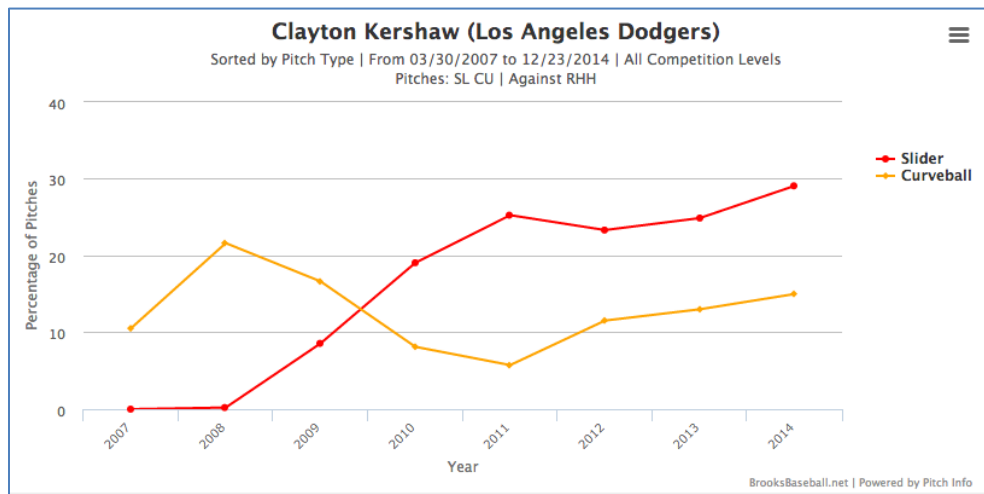
Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Home	3.57	1.29	0.313	25.8%	8.8%	10.2%	75.7%
Away	3.97	1.31	0.31	22.0%	8.6%	8.3%	72.7%

Clayton Kershaw

Throws: L | Age: 27 | Team: Dodgers | Position: SP | RK: (1) | Player Rater: ESPN (1), NFBC (1)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	227.7	14	229	2.53	1.02	25.4%	7.0%	0.262	77.9%	10.3%	25.7%	48.9%
2013	MLB	25	236	16	232	1.83	0.92	25.6%	5.7%	0.252	80.6%	9.2%	19.2%	49.1%
2014	MLB	26	198.3	21	239	1.77	0.86	31.9%	4.1%	0.278	81.6%	12.5%	15.1%	52.6%
Proj.			225	17	245	1.85	0.91							

After having strikeout rates in the 25-27% range, last year the strikeout rate bumped up almost 32% for **Clayton Kershaw**. The big spike in the strikeout rate came primarily against right-handed batters. The big adjustment he made was throwing more curveballs and sliders (image below from BrooksBaseball.net).



Overall, Kershaw is the best pitcher in baseball and he'll likely cost a top 10-15 pick in mixed league drafts next year. Based on his track record and his improved performance against righties I can't argue against taking him at that ADP. Taking him at that ADP defines the strategy for the rest of your draft. By that I mean you will need to draft a lot of hitting afterwards and have more hitters breakout in order to catch up to the other teams that waited on pitching.

Dallas Keuchel

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Astros | Position: SP | RK: (51) | Player Rater: ESPN (33), NFBC (29)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	85.3	3	38	5.27	1.55	10.1%	10.3%	0.277	67.9%	18.2%	25.8%	53.5%
2013	MLB	25	153.7	6	123	5.15	1.54	18.0%	7.6%	0.34	68.1%	21.7%	18.3%	57.6%
2014	MLB	26	200	12	146	2.93	1.18	18.1%	5.9%	0.296	75.5%	14.1%	12.9%	65.1%
Proj.			190	13	141	3.3	1.18							

Similar to **Jake Arrieta**, **Dallas Keuchel** came out of nowhere and had a breakout year. However, in terms of skill set Keuchel is a completely different pitcher than Arrieta. Keucgel doesn't have great bat missing stuff, but he induces a lot of ground balls (the most among qualified starting pitchers last year) and throws a lot of strikes. In fact his strike percentage increased nearly three percentage points from the previous season (from 63.7% to 66.6%).

The table below compares his 2013 season against 2014. It looks like his skill set didn't change that dramatically last year. Instead it looks like his numbers positively regressed.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	GB%
2013	5.15	1.54	.342	18.0%	7.6%	17.1%	55.8%
2014	2.92	1.18	.298	18.1%	5.9%	8.6%	61.2%

The reason why the ground ball rate increased five percentage points was because his fastball command improved and he became more proficient at throwing the fastball/sinker down in the zone at a much higher rate (from 39.9% in 2013 to 44.4% in 2014).

Overall, I believe in Keuchel's 2014 season, but there is one caveat. Any time a pitcher relies on putting balls into play he is more susceptible to the BABIP monster and it is possible to put up numbers similar to 2013. I don't see that happening though because his command improved a full grade last year. Since he doesn't have overpowering stuff so maybe he allows a couple more home runs, but since he's throwing more pitches down in the zone the HR/FB rate should only increase maybe one or two percentage points.

Corey Kluber

Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: | Position: SP | RK: (4) | Player Rater: ESPN (4), NFBC (7)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	63	2	54	5.14	1.49	19.2%	6.4%	0.342	63.2%	16.4%	26.8%	45.9%
2013	MLB	27	147.3	11	136	3.85	1.26	22.4%	5.4%	0.329	72.9%	17.9%	19.4%	47.9%
2014	MLB	28	235.7	18	269	2.44	1.09	28.3%	5.4%	0.316	78.6%	11.4%	19.7%	49.6%
Proj.			210	13	230	2.85	1.13							

In last year's fantasy guide I ranked **Corey Kluber** as a top 30 starting pitcher so needless to say I was very optimistic about his ability to do well in 2014. I would be lying if I thought he would be good enough to win the Cy Young though. What's amazing about last year was he pitching in front of the second worst defense in the majors (the Astros were worse according to [FanGraphs](#)). Speaking of defense, the only major change to their starting lineup is the addition of **Brandon Moss** in right field so the defense will likely be bad again. It is still unknown who will play shortstop. I mention this because he's going to be pitching in front of a bad defense again, which will make him more susceptible to regression.

In regards to regression next year, the biggest candidates are the 7.4% HR/FB rate and the 78.6% strand rate. The HR/FB rate probably will not regress to the 12-13% he showed in the seasons prior to 2014, but I think 10% is more along his true talent level. Last year he allowed 190 fly balls so if the HR/FB was 10% he would have allowed 19 home runs instead of 14.

Even though he could regress I don't see the regression being that big because I love his mechanics, his excellent command and how good his raw stuff is. In regards to his stuff, he may have the best slider/curveball in the majors. He throws two versions of it with one looking more like curveball and the other looking more like a traditional slider. He only throws the pitch 15-16% of the time so he only uses it when he needs it the most.

John Lackey

Throws: R | Age: 36 | Team: Cardinals | Position: SP | RK: (61) | Player Rater: ESPN (62), NFBC (53)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2011	MLB	32	160	12	108	6.41	1.62	14.5%	7.5%	0.339	63.6%	12.6%	28.4%	41.6%
2013	MLB	34	189.3	10	161	3.52	1.16	20.7%	5.1%	0.281	76.9%	17.6%	25.9%	47.8%
2014	MLB	35	198	14	164	3.82	1.28	19.7%	5.6%	0.305	72.6%	18.2%	21.3%	46.9%
Proj.			190	13	162	3.70	1.24							

What **John Lackey** provides is reliability. He'll provide slightly above average production in all four categories with 180-plus innings. Getting out of the AL and Fenway Park certainly boosts his value; at the very least it should help reduce his HR/FB rate. The table below shows his extra base hit percentage for the past six seasons. The reason why I don't see any regression coming in 2015 is he's not allowing more hard contact.

Year	H	XBH	XBH%
2008	161	54	33.5%
2009	177	55	31.1%
2010	233	83	35.6%
2011	203	65	32.0%
2012	179	66	36.9%
2013	206	70	34.0%

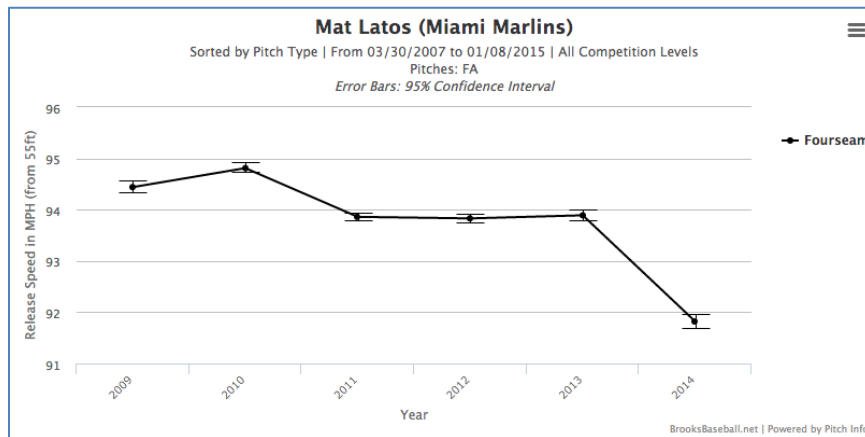
Mat Latos

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Reds | Position: SP | RK: (43) | Player Rater: ESPN (100), NFBC (138)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	209.3	14	185	3.48	1.16	21.6%	7.5%	0.266	75.5%	15.3%	27.0%	47.4%
2013	MLB	25	210.7	14	187	3.16	1.21	21.2%	6.6%	0.299	74.6%	12.0%	18.7%	47.4%
2014	MLB	26	102.3	5	74	3.25	1.15	17.6%	6.2%	0.269	72.6%	14.3%	19.8%	40.6%
Proj.			197	11	173	3.38	1.17							

Where to begin? From 2010-13 he's made at least 31 starts, but last year he was only able to start 16 games. The reason why he only made 16 starts was due to a [knee surgery](#) (after slipping on the mound) and elbow inflammation. The elbow inflammation started in [April](#) and came up again in [September](#).

Last year his fastball velocity dropped from 94.07 mph to 91.82 in 2014. I have to believe injuries played a major part in the velocity decrease because his velocity was stable for the three years prior and he never had a decrease that big before (image below courtesy of [BrooksBaseball.net](#)). Also, his secondary stuff didn't look the same either; especially the slider.



It can be easy to say he'll begin the year healthy and rebound. It's also easy to say he will continue to not be healthy because elbow injuries are more serious. I think we will have to wait to see how he looks in Spring Training to get a better idea on how he'll perform in 2015.

To quote [Keith Law](#), "Latos has five full years in the majors and has never had an ERA over 3.50 or a FIP over 3.85, and that includes three seasons in a hitter's park in Cincinnati." In regards to the "low" strikeout rate in 2012-13 I see that as a positive because he started throwing his two-seamer more to get ground balls, which makes sense considering the Reds ballpark.

Overall, his fantasy value is going to be tied to his health. If he throws 150-plus innings his fantasy owners will make a fairly large profit. As of early January I have no idea if he will be healthy or not, which is why I will conclude with this:

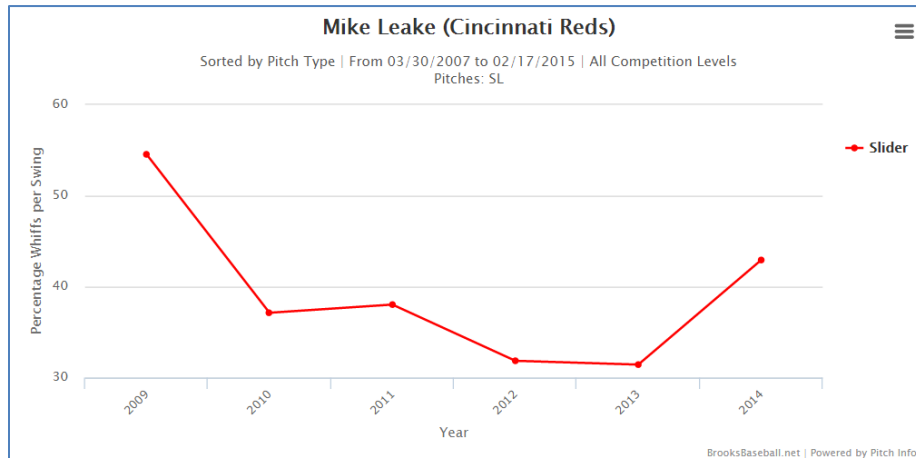
The Reds traded Latos for **Anthony DeSclafani** and **Chad Wallach** (catcher). DeSclafani's ultimate role will be a long reliever because I don't think he has the arsenal to go through a lineup more than once. In my view the Reds traded Latos away for a bag of magic beans essentially. The Reds knew more about Latos' medical status better than anyone. If they believed he had a good chance of rebounding in 2015 then why trade him for little? I'm sure they could have gotten more in trade in June/July than now. The retort to that is to look at the **Jeff Samardzija** trade. The A's didn't get that much back in return (at least in the public's perception) so maybe that was the best offer on the table for the Reds. But if that was the case then why not keep him for a half a year and trade him when his value is higher?

Mike Leake

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Reds | Position: SP | RK: (48) | Player Rater: ESPN (63), NFBC (60)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	179	8	116	4.58	1.35	15.3%	5.4%	0.306	70.9%	19.0%	22.9%	49.7%
2013	MLB	25	192.3	14	122	3.37	1.25	15.2%	6.0%	0.285	77.7%	20.4%	16.5%	50.1%
2014	MLB	26	214.3	11	164	3.7	1.25	18.2%	5.5%	0.298	75.5%	21.5%	15.9%	54.8%
Proj.			190	12	160	3.70	1.25							

The biggest change **Mike Leake** made was he increased his strikeout rate three percentage points. The reason for the increase was due to the slider. The image below shows the swing and miss percentage of the slider by year since his rookie season (source: BrooksBaseball.net)



The reason why he was able to strike more batters out with the slider was he finally able to throw that pitch down and out of the strike zone at the highest rate of his career last year (table below).

Year	Down	Away
20110	72.6%	65.6%
20111	66.6%	61.4%
20112	62.8%	62.8%
20113	73.5%	59.5%
20114	77.7%	69.9%

In his career he's fared much better on the road than at home. The table below shows his career home-road splits. Obviously he's performed better on the road, but what's interesting is the primary reason why he has performed better is the HR/FB rate.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Home	4.28	1.31	.305	17.4%	5.9%	15.8%	74.2%
Away	3.61	1.29	.291	15.0%	6.2%	11.6%	74.8%

In last year's guide I recommended Leake as a great streaming option when he was on the road and I have the same recommendation this year.

Cliff Lee

Throws: L | Age: 36 | Team: Phillies | Position: SP | RK: (38) | Player Rater: ESPN (132), NFBC (149)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	211	6	207	3.16	1.11	24.4%	3.3%	0.309	78.5%	14.7%	28.9%	45.6%
2013	MLB	34	222.7	14	222	2.87	1.01	25.3%	3.7%	0.287	76.7%	15.5%	23.0%	46.8%
2014	MLB	35	81.3	4	72	3.65	1.38	20.5%	3.4%	0.358	70.7%	13.7%	19.1%	51.3%
Proj.			200	10	187	3.37	1.16							

Similar to **Yu Darvish**, the fantasy community will have to wait until Spring Training to get better idea of **Cliff Lee's** fantasy potential heading into 2015. However, unlike Darvish, Lee did not put up numbers that helped your fantasy team. He was limited to only 13 starts last season due to a flexor pronator strain. He [opted for rehab rather than surgery](#). As of mid-January he is close to [begin throwing off a mound](#).

There are lot of questions surrounding Lee. Will he be healthy? If so, will the stuff come back? If so, how many wins will he have? With the loss of **Jimmy Rollins** and **Marlon Bird** the Phillies are going to be worse than last year. In regards to his 2014 statistical evaluation I don't put any weight into those numbers. I don't know how long he was pitching with an injury but his statistics are so far off his baseline for the previous seven years I have to conclude his numbers were polluted by his injury.

Jon Lester

Throws: L | Age: 31 | Team: Cubs | Position: SP | RK: (7) | Player Rater: ESPN (7), NFBC (13)

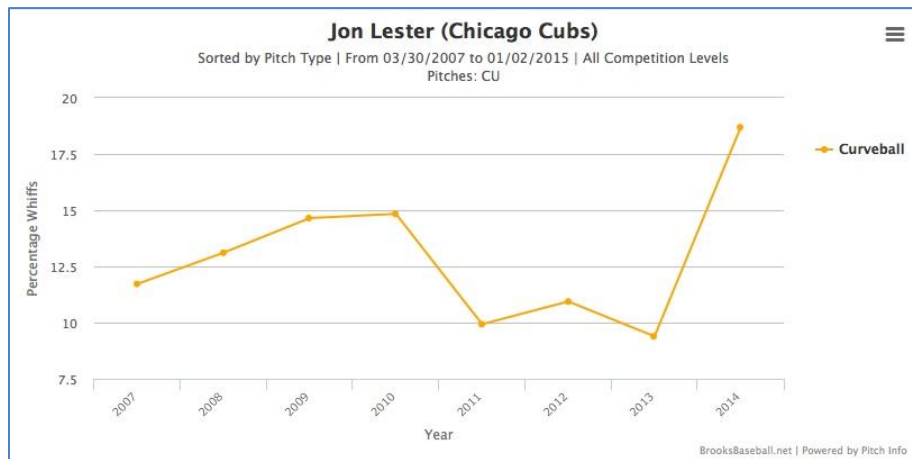
YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	205.3	9	166	4.82	1.38	18.9%	7.8%	0.312	67.6%	17.5%	22.4%	50.6%
2013	MLB	29	213.3	15	177	3.75	1.29	19.6%	7.4%	0.3	73.7%	12.7%	23.0%	45.9%
2014	MLB	30	219.7	16	220	2.46	1.10	24.9%	5.4%	0.299	76.1%	11.1%	23.5%	44.6%
Proj.			210	13	200	3.15	1.13							

Based on **Jon Lester's** 2014 numbers, the team he plays for and the contract that team gave him he is going to be one of the most over drafted players next year in drafts. Before the 2014 season began I was not buying Lester as a real life ace because his track record looked more like a number two starter (you can ask [Jake Devereaux](#) from Baseball Professor about the lively email debate about this at the start of the 2014 season).

Lester gets a lot of praise for how good his cutter is, but looking at the statistics (table below) the performance of the cutter was good last year, but it was “worse” compared to previous seasons.

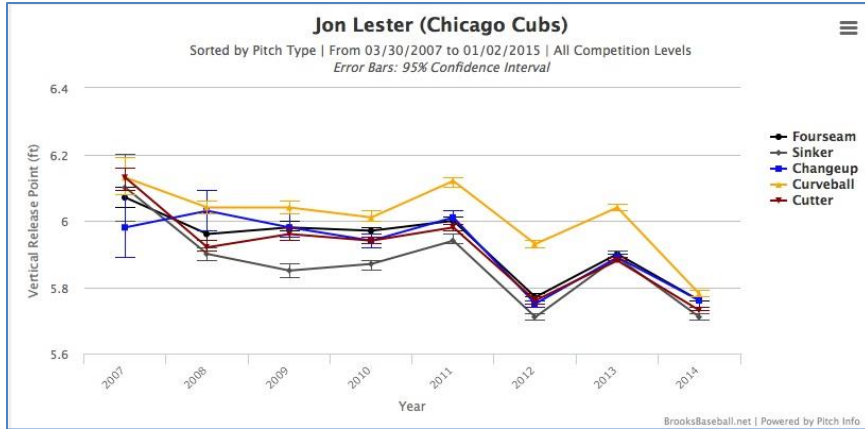
Year	AVG	BABIP	K%	BB%
2008	.274	.354	20.0%	8.6%
2009	.214	.306	30.4%	5.2%
2010	.185	.281	32.7%	5.5%
2011	.187	.295	35.8%	7.4%
2012	.240	.327	28.5%	7.6%
2013	.231	.321	28.2%	5.7%
2014	.249	.325	26.8%	5.9%

Last year his strikeout rate was the highest it’s ever been since 2010 and the reason for this was due to the larger incorporation of the curveball. The image below (from BrooksBaseball.net) shows his swing and miss rate on the curveball since 2007.



The curveball was exceptional last year. Among qualified starting pitchers his curveball had the third highest swing and miss rate (behind **Matt Garza** and **Corey Kluber**). It’s no wonder he started throwing the curveball more last year.

Judging by how much he tightened up his release point (image below from BrooksBaseball.net) with his other pitches it’s no wonder why hitters were having difficulty picking up the curveball out of the hand and swinging and missing more than ever.



The big question is, is this change sustainable? Last year his HR/FB rate was 7.2%, which was the second lowest of his career. You may be thinking his time in Oakland suppressed that number, but in fact he had a 6.5% HR/FB rate with the Red Sox before being traded to Oakland so he actually got lucky last year. It's possible the reemergence of the curveball caused the lower HR/FB rate, but I think there is going to be some regression next year.

In regards to his wins potential I have questions about their infield and outfield defense. The defense was below average last year and I don't see any reason for a dramatic improvement in 2015. I have questions about the Cubs bullpen's ability to hold leads (especially if **Pedro Strop** is given high leverage innings again).

Tim Lincecum

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Giants | Position: SP | RK: (114) | Player Rater: ESPN (120), NFBC (54)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	186	10	190	5.18	1.47	23.0%	10.9%	0.309	67.8%	16.7%	25.6%	47.0%
2013	MLB	29	197.7	10	193	4.37	1.32	22.9%	9.0%	0.3	69.4%	16.9%	22.0%	46.6%
2014	MLB	30	155.7	12	134	4.74	1.39	19.9%	9.4%	0.299	69.6%	18.8%	21.4%	48.6%
Proj.			170	6	145	4.50	1.39							

After **Tim Lincecum** threw his second no hitter [I said](#), "Tim Lincecum threw his second no-hitter of his career (both against the Padres) and this was easily the better-pitched game of the two. He had excellent command of all four pitches, throwing them for strikes consistently regardless of the count and he kept the ball down. His command was so good he only had five three-ball counts the entire game.

I don't want to take away from what he did, but there is one caveat; he did it against the Padres. Through 75 games the Padres had the sixth lowest park- and league-adjusted offense since 1950. Before Wednesday Lincecum had a 4.90 ERA and 1.48 WHIP with a 21.3% strikeout rate (almost two percentage points less than last year) and 9.7% walk rate.

Basically, up to this point he has been a below average starting pitcher. In fact you could argue he has been awful if you adjust for his home ballpark. His command has been erratic all year, but he's still missing bats at the rate of a top 30-starting pitcher.

When I wrote my first draft of this post, my conclusion was the no-hitter was a complete fluke and that he is an awful pitcher. However, on Wednesday he looked like a top 40 fantasy starting pitcher. Obviously if he faced a competent lineup he wouldn't have thrown a no-hitter, but he could have gone 6-7 innings and given up two earned runs.

I doubt that he is going to have the command he showed again, but what if he does? In the preseason I liked Lincecum as a deep sleeper because he looked like he was making the biggest change he needed to make: stop throwing the fastball up in the strike zone. In 2012 he threw the fastball up in zone 45.3% of the time; last year it was 40% and this year it's 44.6%.

*The fantasy community views declining velocity as a death nail for starting pitchers, but pitchers can survive with diminished velocity. The greatest personification of this is **Felix Hernandez**. His velocity has been in decline for years and he has not missed a beat. If Lincecum can limit the walks, induce more weak contact and not throw the fastball up in the zone he could be fantasy relevant in every format. I believe the odds of this coming true is less than 10%, but if I'm in the bottom half of the pitcher standings I would roll the dice."*

After the no-hitter he was awful, posting a 5.20 ERA, 1.47 WHIP, 9.5% walk rate and a surprisingly low 18.0% strikeout rate. The big reason for the decrease in strikeout rate was due to the lack of command of the changeup and slider. I wrote after his no-hitter he has the possibility to be a top 40 starting pitcher if the command improves, but at this point I don't see it happening. If I'm in a deeper mixed league I would take a flyer on him and stash him on my bench. Also, I would not be surprised the slightest if becomes the Giants closer sometime next year. Giants ownership wants to keep Lincecum in a Giants uniform, he can be quite effective in short bursts and most importantly, the Giants do not have a clear cut closer.

Francisco Liriano

Throws: L | Age: 31 | Team: Pirates | Position: SP | RK: (73) | Player Rater: ESPN (76), NFBC (71)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	156.7	6	167	5.34	1.47	24.1%	12.6%	0.3	66.5%	14.2%	31.0%	45.6%
2013	MLB	29	161	16	163	3.02	1.22	24.5%	9.5%	0.29	77.5%	11.3%	18.2%	52.5%
2014	MLB	30	162.3	7	175	3.38	1.3	25.4%	11.7%	0.28	74.7%	21.3%	14.2%	56.8%
Proj.			160	10	175	3.55	1.30							

Resigning with the Pirates was the best thing for both the team and **Francisco Liriano**. Last year I said Liriano was going to regress because I didn't think the new found command was for real and that his 16 wins was fluke. The reason I thought the wins were a fluke was because he doesn't pitch deep into

games. Last year he only averaged 5.2 innings per start. Therefore, the bullpen has to hold leads for 4-plus innings, which is incredibly hard to achieve.

In regards to the ground ball rate; last year was the highest ground ball rate since 2006. After looking at the data I don't think it's going to repeat in 2015 because the percentage of balls thrown down in the zone were actually less than last year. I'll still think he'll have a ground ball rate in the 48-52% range but nowhere near the 54% he showed last year.

At this point fantasy owners know what they're going to get. They're going to get a lot of strikeouts, not a lot of innings, a lot of walks and high WHIP.

Kyle Lohse

Throws: R | Age: 36 | Team: Brewers | Position: SP | RK: (82) | Player Rater: ESPN (39), NFBC (32)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	33	211	16	143	2.86	1.09	16.6%	4.4%	0.262	77.1%	10.1%	27.7%	43.0%
2013	MLB	34	198.7	11	125	3.35	1.17	15.5%	4.5%	0.276	79.1%	15.4%	26.3%	43.5%
2014	MLB	35	198.3	13	141	3.54	1.15	17.3%	5.5%	0.268	72.6%	14.3%	24.8%	41.8%
Proj.			200	11	139	3.90	1.17							

For the past four years **Kyle Lohse** has had BABIPs less than .276, ERAs less than 3.54 and FIPs and xFIPs were far greater than his ERAs. What made those statistics so surprising is he played two of those seasons for the Brewers and that bam box of a home ballpark. For the second year in a row he was a much better pitcher at home than on the road (table below are his statistics the past two seasons).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Away	3.96	1.24	.282	15.9%	6.0%	8.8%	71.1%
Home	2.86	1.07	.287	17.0%	3.8%	11.2%	82.1%

When I look at his home statistics it's hard to believe he will be able to pitch so much better at home, but he's had 28 starts and 186 innings so something may be going on. Eventually I have to believe the performance at home will regress, but I'm not very confident that's going to occur.

The most surprising statistic from last year was he had the highest strikeout rate of his Major League career last year. The biggest reason for this is was due to the [increased usage of the slider](#). The changeup also missed more bats, but the usage of the pitched decreased too.

Lance Lynn

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Cardinals | Position: SP | RK: (52) | Player Rater: ESPN (26), NFBC (22)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	176	18	180	3.78	1.32	24.2%	8.6%	0.321	75.6%	12.8%	25.5%	46.1%
2013	MLB	26	201.7	15	198	3.97	1.31	23.1%	8.9%	0.314	71.8%	10.4%	23.6%	44.7%
2014	MLB	27	203.7	15	181	2.74	1.26	20.9%	8.3%	0.29	78.1%	9.6%	22.3%	45.9%
Proj.			200	14	180	3.78	1.29							

When I look at **Lance Lynn's** 2014 final numbers he doesn't pass the smell test for me. Last year's .293 BABIP was 26 less than his career BABIP prior to 2014. Last year's 78.1% strand rate was four and half percentage points higher than his career rate. Last year's 6.0% HR/FB rate was two percentage points less than his career rate. Basically, he got lucky and his numbers are going to regress in 2015 especially because he's a high walk pitcher.

The big adjustment he made last year was he threw his fastball a lot more against both righties and lefties. By throwing the fastball more he morphed into a bat-to-ball pitcher. Therefore, I'm not surprised his strikeout rate was the lowest of his career. I expect the strikeout rate to be in the 19-20% range next year. Even though the strikeout rate was lower, it was still passable for a 10-team mixed league. What probably will not be talked about is in the past three years he's had at least 15 wins each season. The Cardinals should be good in 2015 so it's very likely he'll have at least 14 wins if he makes 30-plus starts next year.

Carlos Martinez

Throws: R | Age: 23 | Team: Cardinals | Position: SP | RK: (102) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	21	28.3	2	24	5.08	1.41	19.4%	7.3%	0.345	64.9%	5.9%	19.3%	54.5%
2013	AAA	21	68	5	63	2.51	1.19	21.8%	9.3%	0.268	78.5%	5.5%	28.5%	56.5%
2014	MLB	22	89.3	2	84	4.03	1.41	21.8%	9.3%	0.333	71.5%	11.1%	13.7%	55.3%
Proj.			145	9	129	3.65	1.32							

A player comp that's been used to describe **Carlos Martinez** is **Pedro Martinez**, which makes sense from a pure physical profile. Last year Carlos Martinez was mostly used as a reliever, but he did start seven games. However, he only pitched 4-5 innings in all but one start. As of early January it looks as though he is the front runner for the fifth spot in the rotation.

My biggest question is how many innings will he throw next year? He only threw 90 last year and I don't think the Cardinals are going to allow him to double his work load, which means he'll likely only throw 130-150 next year.

He certainly has the stuff to be a starter. His fastball sits in the mid-90s and he can bump it to 99 mph if he needs it. His fastball has good downward movement too; he also can cut it to bore in on lefties. The

slider is a true out pitch as he can throw it for strikes and out of the zone to get swings and misses. The change-up is basically a “show me” pitch but since his fastball and slider are so good the changeup doesn’t have to better one and two times through the order.

Now here is the rub. Last year he didn’t have to face very many hitters three times in a game so he didn’t really have to use the changeup. If he’s going to be a successful starter the changeup needs to improve. At this point he may only be a five inning pitcher in 2015 which means he’ll pile up the strikeouts but wins will likely be hard to come by.

Justin Masterson

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Red Sox | Position: SP | RK: (89) | Player Rater: ESPN (235), NFBC (94)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	206.3	11	159	4.93	1.45	17.5%	9.7%	0.309	66.4%	13.6%	20.4%	57.1%
2013	MLB	28	193	14	195	3.45	1.2	24.3%	9.5%	0.285	75.4%	15.7%	16.1%	60.0%
2014	MLB	29	128.7	7	116	5.88	1.63	19.6%	11.7%	0.339	64.8%	22.2%	13.8%	60.2%
Proj.			190	13	165	4.23	1.39							

My question about **Justin Masterson** for the past four years has been can he get lefties out? The table below shows career lefty-righty splits.

Splits	SLUG	OPS	BABIP	K%	BB%
LHB	.427	.794	.323	15.1%	10.2%
RHB	.301	.607	.289	24.7%	8.7%

The reason why he struggles against lefties is because he doesn’t have a pitch to get them out. He’s basically a two-pitch pitcher (fastball [four-seam and two-seam] and slider). In general, the slider is a divesting weapon against righties because the pitch is thrown down and away from the batter (i.e. away from the fat part of the hitters bat). However, against lefties that pitch is thrown right into the wheel house of a lefties bat. Last year I thought if the changeup improved he could breakout because the changeup is thrown down and away (i.e. away from a left handers bat).

Despite posting poor numbers against lefties in his career, in 2013 he was able to neutralize lefties, but last year he regressed significantly. Therefore, I don’t see a major improvement coming. He’s going to have the benefit of pitching behind really good infield defense and a really good offense so he could see a slight improvement in his peripherals and wins totals.

Tyler Matzek

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Rockies | Position: SP | RK: (122) | Player Rater: ESPN (135), NFBC (116)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	142.3	8	95	3.79	1.57	15.2%	12.1%	0.306	76.7%	10.6%	27.3%	42.4%
2014	MLB	23	117.7	6	91	4.05	1.39	18.1%	8.7%	0.312	73.8%	13.6%	18.1%	52.3%
2014	AAA	23	66.7	5	61	4.05	1.52	20.2%	10.3%	0.302	67.9%	12.7%	30.0%	51.0%
Proj.			100	5	70	3.80	1.34							

In 2012 I saw 4-5 of **Tyler Matzek** starts in High-A and all but one of those times he looked awful. He couldn't throw any pitches for strikes and struggled so much he only pitched 1-3 innings. However, that one start when he had everything working he was really good. At the end of the season I didn't think he would ever make it to the majors as a starting pitcher because his command was so bad and I didn't think he had a pitch to get out righties.

I've seen him pitch in the majors and I believe he can stick in the majors as a starting pitcher. Command is always going to be loose with him but he has the stuff to get out righties consistently. The major improvement I've seen is in the slider. For some reason hitters have a hard time picking him up (especially lefties), which is a good and bad thing.

The good is he doesn't need to have impeccable command to get outs. His plan of attack is to get ahead in the count and throw the slider down in the dirt to get batters to swing and miss. The bad is if hitters get multiple looks at him they will be able to lay off the slider down in the dirt. If that happens he doesn't have the command of the fastball (he can spot the fastball in spurts, but he usually just gets over in a general area) to setup the slider down and in.

Brandon McCarthy

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Dodgers | Position: SP | RK: (90) | Player Rater: ESPN (83), NFBC (73)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	111	8	73	3.24	1.25	15.6%	5.1%	0.295	77.1%	9.8%	27.9%	42.6%
2013	MLB	29	135	5	76	4.53	1.35	13.2%	3.6%	0.32	68.7%	15.1%	18.1%	50.5%
2014	MLB	30	200	10	175	4.05	1.28	20.9%	3.9%	0.328	70.9%	24.3%	16.5%	53.9%
Proj.			150	10	130	3.45	1.26							

What's not to like about **Brandon McCarthy**? Both the [fastball velocity](#) and strikeout rate increased last year. After he got traded to the Yankees he really took off (table below) and one of the reasons why he succeeded was due to the cutter. Specifically, the Yankees let him throw the [cutter a lot more](#).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
ARI	5.01	1.38	.347	20.0%	4.3%	19.0%	66.7%
NYN	2.89	1.15	.308	22.2%	3.5%	12.8%	76.9%

If McCarthy can continue to strikeout batters out at a 21% clip he is rosterable in 10-team mixed leagues (as a streaming option). Since he fills up the zone with all of his pitches he's always going to be home run prone because if he misses with a pitch it can leak out over the middle of the plate. The Dodgers remade their defensive infield, which bodes well for McCarthy's high ground ball rate. He's going to be discounted on draft day because of his lengthy injury history (he's only averaged 139 innings the past three seasons prior to 2014), but I would take a chance on him as a streaming option.

Collin McHugh

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Astros | Position: SP | RK: (17) | Player Rater: ESPN (20), NFBC (52)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	26	26	0	11	10.04	1.92	8.8%	4.0%	0.379	50.5%	20.0%	27.5%	42.2%
2013	AAA	26	100	5	88	3.69	1.36	20.4%	6.3%	0.341	71.3%	5.7%	28.4%	46.1%
2014	MLB	27	154.7	11	157	2.73	1.02	25.4%	6.6%	0.259	76.1%	14.0%	22.4%	45.1%
Proj.			190	13	190	3.09	1.11							

Last year **Collin McHugh** literally came out of nowhere and one was of the best starting pitchers in baseball. For example he was and/or had the (all stats are for pitchers with at least 25 starts last year):

- 6th lowest WHIP
- 16th lowest ERA
- 9th best strikeout rate
- 8th best swing and mix percentage on pitches in the strike zone

Generally speaking what happened last year was he got better. Sometimes players can inexplicably “get it” without any warning or indication. The greatest personification of this was **Cliff Lee**. He was literally a below average pitcher for the first six seasons in the majors before the light turned on and became an ace. I'm not indicating McHugh is going to be an ace, but what I am saying is it's possible for players to get dramatically better.

What I love about McHugh is he can throw 3-4 pitches for strikes consistently against both sides of the plate. On top of that he throws those pitches at the same arm slot, which allows each pitch to play-up. Specifically this delays the hitters ability to know what pitch is coming; hence the 8th best swing and miss percentage on pitches in the strike zone. To put that number into perspective some of the the guys ahead of him are: **Chris Sale**, **Clayton Kershaw**, **Cole Hamels** and **Max Scherzer**. Lastly, his fastball velocity ticked up almost [two mph](#) since 2012. Doug Thorburn wrote an [amazing piece](#) about why he also believes in McHugh as well.

It's easy to look at the low BABIP and high strand rate and say he's going to regress, but I do not believe that is going to happen. McHugh has the best shot to be this year's **Corey Kluber**. The Astros are not

going to be a bad team next year. They signed two very good relievers and they offense is going to have a lot of right handed power. If things break right McHugh could find himself with 15-plus wins next year.

Wade Miley

Throws: L | Age: 28 | Team: Red Sox | Position: SP | RK: (71) | Player Rater: ESPN (119), NFBC (129)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	194.7	16	144	3.33	1.18	17.8%	4.6%	0.293	72.0%	7.5%	29.8%	45.0%
2013	MLB	26	202.7	10	147	3.55	1.32	17.4%	7.8%	0.296	75.7%	16.9%	19.7%	54.0%
2014	MLB	27	201.3	8	183	4.34	1.4	21.1%	8.7%	0.317	72.1%	19.8%	19.2%	52.2%
Proj.			200	13	173	3.85	1.34							

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It’s easy to look at the low BABIP and high strand rate and say he’s going to regress, but I do not believe that is going to happen. McHugh has the best shot to be this year’s **Corey Kluber**. The Astros are not going to be a bad team next year. They signed two very good relievers and they offense is going to have a lot of right handed power. If things break right McHugh could find himself with 15-plus wins next year.

Shelby Miller

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Braves | Position: SP | RK: (101) | Player Rater: ESPN (88), NFBC (87)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	AAA	21	136.7	11	160	4.74	1.38	26.7%	8.3%	0.322	73.2%	15.2%	41.8%	35.2%
2013	MLB	22	173.3	15	169	3.06	1.21	23.4%	7.9%	0.28	80.1%	14.3%	28.5%	40.5%
2014	MLB	23	183	10	127	3.74	1.27	16.6%	9.6%	0.256	76.9%	16.3%	24.0%	42.2%
Proj.			190	10	140	4.20	1.27							

Shelby Miller may have an average ERA by the year ended but his season was saved by the month of the September. The table below breaks down his 2014 ERA and WHIP by month.

Splits	ERA	WHIP
April	3.15	1.46
May	4.94	1.46
June	4.38	1.38
July	4.30	1.22
August	4.35	1.23
September	1.48	0.86

Overall, his 2014 season was the complete opposite of his rookie season. He struck out far less batters and walked much more batters. The reason why he struggled so much last year was due to the old cliché of bad command. I wrote about his command throughout the season last year ([here](#) and [here](#)). Despite the poor command this is someone worth keeping on your fantasy radar because this is a pitcher who still has really good raw stuff.

In last year's guide I thought he could sustain his 2013 success if the changeup took a step forward because he needed a third pitch to neutralize lefties and I believe starting pitchers need three quality pitches to be effective. However, last year he threw the changeup less and opted to throw the cutter, which was a really good weapon against righties but not lefties.

Last year his curveball was one of the worst in the majors. His whiff-per-swing rate with the pitch was the lowest among 74 qualifying righties. I'm not convinced the cutter is a good enough third pitch. Without a third pitch the curveball becomes less effective and if the curveball isn't effective then the fastball will not be as effective. I think 2015 is going to be a developmental year. If he comes at a discount in a deeper format I'll take a chance on him because I still believe in the mystique of the Braves making adjustments and maximizing the value of a pitcher, but I'm not going to target him in drafts.

Mike Minor

Throws: L | Age: 27 | Team: Braves | Position: SP | RK: (26) | Player Rater: ESPN (159), NFBC (99)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	179.3	11	145	4.12	1.15	19.9%	7.7%	0.252	70.6%	13.9%	35.8%	37.2%
2013	MLB	25	204.7	13	181	3.21	1.09	22.1%	5.6%	0.272	75.1%	13.1%	28.4%	36.7%
2014	MLB	26	145.3	6	120	4.77	1.44	18.8%	6.9%	0.323	74.4%	20.6%	21.8%	42.8%
Proj.			200	12	180	3.35	1.14							

Before Spring Training stated **Mike Minor** had trouble getting ready. On 12/31/13 he surgery [on his urethra](#) and subsequently was a few weeks behind his normal training regimen because he had to rest the entire month of January. Then he aggravated his shoulder by pushing to make up for his late start to spring training. Specifically this resulted in him having shoulder inflammation and he missed the first month of the season. The injury may persisted throughout the year because on September 23, 2014 he was [shut down](#) for the rest of the season with an inflamed shoulder.

He struggled for the first three months of the season, but after a strong August (3.24 ERA and 1.02 WHIP) [I believed](#) he was back to the pitcher he was in 2013. However, he had an awful September and was shut down.

On the whole, it was a terrible season for Minor especially when you compare his numbers to 2013. Throughout most of the season he didn't have good command of his secondary pitches, specifically, the changeup and slider. In 2013 he was very good at keeping them down in the zone, but so often last year he left them up, in the middle of the zone. That's why he threw the fastball much more than the previous year.

Last year he started to throw a two-seam fastball and his ground ball rate increased five and half percentage points. It's possible he'll throw it less if he has better command of his secondary pitches, but I think this trend will continue.

With an injury offseason I'm expecting Minor to bounce back to the numbers he put up in 2013. The ERA will probably be in the 3.30-3.40 range, but he's generating more ground balls with the two-seamer and I expect the command of the secondary pitches to improve because he'll have a full amount of time to prepare for Spring Training.

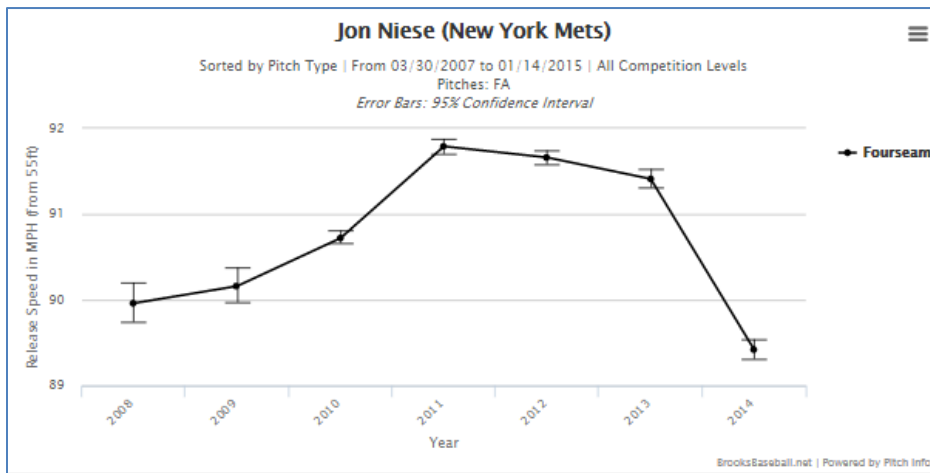
The last major concern I have is how many wins will he have if he has 30 starts? Other than **Craig Kimbrel** I have major questions about their bullpen. Currently their seventh and eighth inning relievers are **Jim Johnson** and **Jason Grilli**. Maybe both these pitchers regress, but I do not want these pitchers pitching high leverage situations. Also, I believe the Braves offense is going to be bad; in fact they're going to score least number of runs in the NL. Therefore, it's going to be hard for any Braves starting pitcher to have more than 11-12 wins next year.

Jon Niese

Throws: L | Age: 28 | Team: Mets | Position: SP | RK: (119) | Player Rater: ESPN (74), NFBC (72)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	190.3	13	155	3.4	1.17	19.7%	6.2%	0.272	76.5%	15.5%	24.5%	49.3%
2013	MLB	26	143	8	105	3.71	1.44	16.9%	7.7%	0.326	72.4%	10.3%	20.9%	52.6%
2014	MLB	27	187.7	9	138	3.4	1.27	17.6%	5.7%	0.304	74.6%	14.5%	19.6%	49.5%
Proj.			100	5	65	3.53	1.31							

Last year **Jon Niese's** average fastball velocity dropped two mph [and for the first time since 2008 the average velocity dipped below 90 mph \(image below from BrooksBaseball.net\).](#)



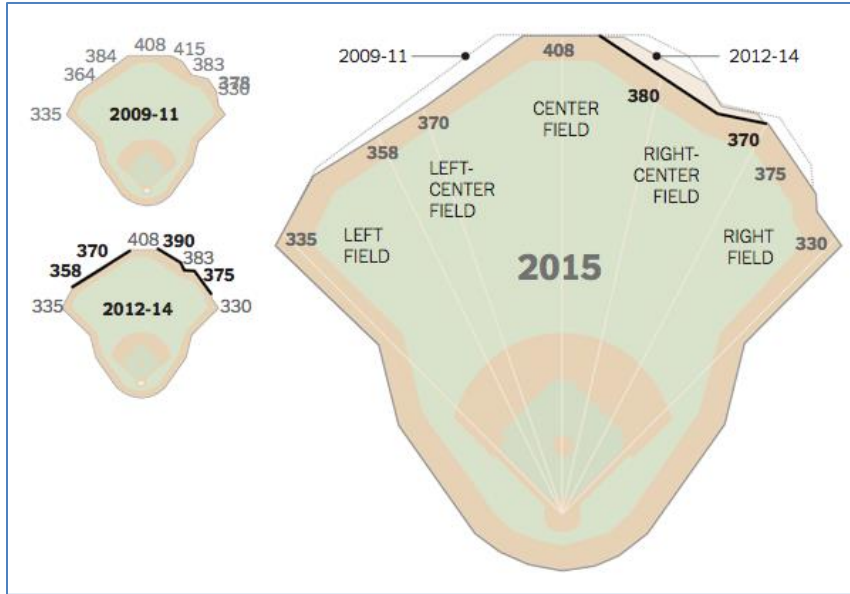
The image leads you to believe he's a soft thrower, but his max velocity was consistently 94.5 the four seasons prior to 2014. Last year his max velocity was only 92.3 mph.

In last year's guide I said Niese had value as a streaming option because of the home ballpark. The table below shows his home-road statistics since 2008.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Home	3.53	1.31	0.307	18.9%	7.1%	9.1%	73.6%
Away	4.25	1.4	0.33	18.2%	6.7%	11.8%	70.2%

Injuries have been a big part of his career (mostly shoulder and elbow), which is why he's never thrown more than 191 innings in his Major League career. Maybe he was dealing with an undisclosed injury last year? That would explain why the velocity in the fastball suddenly dropped.

During the offseason the Mets [brought in the fences](#) in right and right-center field (image below).



This change could be minimal, but I believe the impact is at least going to be moderate. Combine that with the fact his average fastball velocity and max velocity were way down makes me more cautious about him as a must streaming option at home.

Sean Nolin

Throws: L | Age: 25 | Team: Athletics | Position: SP | RK: (77) | Player Rater: ESPN (172), NFBC (256)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	23	92.7	8	103	3.01	1.23	26.8%	6.5%	0.333	77.1%	7.8%	30.2%	36.1%
2014	MLB	24	1	0	0	9	1	0.0%	0.0%	0	0.0%	100.0%	25.0%	25.0%
2014	AAA	24	87.3	4	74	3.5	1.25	20.0%	9.5%	0.27	73.4%	8.8%	26.4%	42.2%
Proj.			200	10	153	3.60	1.22							

Barring injury, **Sean Nolin** will either be on the Opening Day rotation or will be in the rotation some time in April because he’s currently the fourth best healthy starting pitcher on the team. He’s never been a highly touted prospect or an eye popping [scouting report](#) because he doesn’t have overpowering stuff, but what he lacks in raw stuff he makes up with command. Nolin’s stuff will never light up radar guns or buckle the knees of the games best hitters in baseball, but Nolin is going to be a really good out getter. Fantasy owners and baseball fans in general have forgot the name of the game is to get outs and it doesn’t matter how they’re accumulated.

Archie Bradley has lights out stuff, but he has no idea how to command that stuff. Bradley’s upside is much higher than Nolin’s, but if I were a betting man I would bet on Nolin having the longer Major League career as a starting pitcher.

He won't miss a lot of bats, but he's going to be a good out-getter, which has value especially in Oakland's ballpark. A comparable I'm seeing for Nolin is **Tommy Milone**. The only thing they have in common is they're left handed. Nolin's fastball may only sit in the 89-91 mph range, but as a reliever he touched 94 mph; Milone cannot throw that fast. Nolin is the better pitcher and will have the benefit of pitching in a ballpark suited to his skillset. I expect him to be good enough to streamer in 12 team mixed leagues.

Bud Norris

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Orioles | Position: SP | RK: (74) | Player Rater: ESPN (53), NFBC (43)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	168.3	7	165	4.65	1.37	22.5%	9.0%	0.301	72.1%	14.4%	32.4%	40.5%
2013	MLB	28	176.7	10	147	4.18	1.49	19.0%	8.7%	0.333	73.3%	12.1%	25.5%	42.1%
2014	MLB	29	165.3	15	139	3.65	1.22	20.2%	7.6%	0.279	78.6%	17.5%	23.7%	44.0%
Proj.			170	12	140	4.25	1.36							

I wasn't a believer in **Bud Norris** entering 2014 drafts because of his inability to get lefties out. For his career lefties has a .800 OPS compared to a .696 OPS from righties. The reason why lefties light him up is because he's essentially a two-pitch pitcher (fastball and slider) and neither of those two pitches can miss bats against lefties (because the slider is thrown down and in to lefties, which is right in the direct path of the fat part of the hitters bat).

From 2009-13 he had a .323 BABIP against, but last year it was only .289. On top of that he had a 78.6% strand rate, which easily the best strand rate of his career. Therefore, his 3.65 ERA was extremely fluky and this year he's going to regress. He finished as high as he did in ESPN's Player Rater was due to his 15 wins. Since he only averages 5.2 innings per start those wins are extremely fluky and I do not expect the win totals to repeat itself.

Daniel Norris

Throws: R | Age: 21 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: SP | RK: (108) | Player Rater: ESPN (-), NFBC (-)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2014	AA	21	35.7	3	49	4.54	1.37	31.6%	11.0%	0.329	75.0%	16.7%	34.5%	39.1%
2014	AAA	21	22.7	3	38	3.18	0.97	44.7%	9.4%	0.324	72.9%	15.4%	33.3%	51.3%
2014	MLB	21	6.7	0	4	5.4	1.5	13.3%	16.7%	0.2	69.8%	12.5%	38.1%	38.1%
Proj.			150	9	110	3.90	1.35							

Before the 2014 season began **Daniel Norris** was a fringe top 101 prospect at Baseball Prospectus, but by mid-season he was [number 33](#). I watched his only Major League start and I was impressed with the quality of the raw stuff (in only brief samples because he only threw 3.1 innings). In that start he struggled with his command (because he was clearly amped up to make his first start in the majors). That said, he also struggled with his command in the minors too so he's far from a finished product.

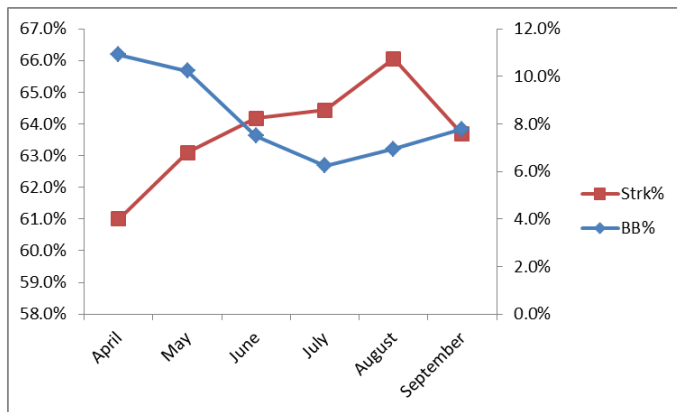
If you would like to read scouting reports on him I suggest you go: [here](#) and [here](#). The biggest takeaway from everything I've read about Norris is he'll feature a four pitch mix and he can throw all of them for strikes. Combine that with the fact his fastball can touch the upper 90s in bursts means he could be a top 40-50 pitcher the minute he gets called up to the majors. Since he's a young pitcher he's going to be inconsistent so he may burn you if you stream him in a good matchup.

Jake Odorizzi

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Rays | Position: SP | RK: (49) | Player Rater: ESPN (79), NFBC (70)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	23	124.3	9	124	3.33	1.13	25.2%	8.1%	0.282	74.3%	11.0%	33.2%	36.6%
2013	MLB	23	29.7	0	22	3.94	1.21	18.0%	6.6%	0.287	74.0%	11.5%	28.9%	34.4%
2014	MLB	24	168	11	174	4.13	1.28	24.2%	8.2%	0.295	73.4%	12.7%	32.6%	31.8%
Proj.			185	13	175	3.76	1.23							

Among qualified starting pitchers **Jake Odorizzi** was tied for 15th (with **Garrett Richards**) in strikeout rate among qualified starting pitchers. When looking at his walk rate (8.2%) it's easy to be a little squeamish, but upon closer inspection you'll notice his walk rate decreased dramatically after the first two months of the season (image below). Also, you will notice the strike percentage increased during the same time period.



His fastball sits 89-92 so he has to have really good command of the pitch in order to be successful (baseball cliché alert), but it's true. I re-watched his starts and he was at his best when he had good command of the fastball. Since his velocity is so low he needs to have hitters respect the fact he can put it anywhere. If the fastball looks good it makes all of his pitches play-up because hitters won't be sitting on the fastball.

What could be a concern for some fantasy owners is his home-road splits last year (table below).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Home	2.62	1.04	0.259	25.2%	7.9%	3.1%	75.7%
Away	6.32	1.62	0.349	22.9%	8.6%	16.5%	71.0%

When looking at his road statistics the road BABIP should positively regress while the home HR/FB rate and BABIP should regress. The home BABIP probably will not regress as much as you think because the Rays pitchers had a team BABIP of .280.

Overall, if you're looking for a pitcher to take a giant leap forward look no further than Odorizzi. When I try to identify pitchers who can take the next step forward I look to see if he can miss bats and he can certainly do that. His command improved after the first two months of 2014, but he's still far from a finished product. He'll take a step forward next year, but I'm not expecting a gigantic step.

James Paxton

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Mariners | Position: SP | RK: (79) | Player Rater: ESPN (105), NFBC (141)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	24	24	3	21	1.5	0.92	22.3%	7.4%	0.203	88.5%	22.2%	13.6%	59.1%
2013	AAA	24	145.7	8	131	4.45	1.48	20.5%	9.1%	0.338	65.9%	9.1%	24.6%	51.3%
2014	MLB	25	74	6	59	3.04	1.2	19.5%	9.6%	0.27	71.1%	10.0%	14.0%	57.5%
Proj.			170	10	145	3.45	1.22							

In his Major League career **James Paxton** has really impressive numbers. In 17 starts (98 innings) he has a 2.66 ERA, 1.13 WHIP, 20.2% strikeout rate and the really high 9.1% walk rate. The reason why he only started 13 games last year was because he missed 102 games with a [shoulder strain](#). The reason why he's been so effective with a high walk rate is because he has a high ground ball rate (53.6% in his Major League career).

The reason why his walk rate is so high is because he has a lot of moving levers in his delivery, which causes him to lose command from batter to batter. At times, that could be a good thing because it does make him harder to hit at times (because he doesn't know where the ball is going to go).

I have strong doubts that command is going to improve in 2015. Let me rephrase, I don't see the command being any better to start the year because there are so many moving parts in his delivery.

Heading into 2015, since he's a young pitcher, there are going to be times where he will look brilliant and seven days later will look like a bad Triple-A pitcher (which will probably come in a great streaming matchup too). He still pitches in one of the best pitchers parks and one of the best defenses in the majors, which bodes well for his future performance.

Jake Peavy

Throws: R | Age: 34 | Team: Giants | Position: SP | RK: (84) | Player Rater: ESPN (92), NFBC (90)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	219	11	194	3.37	1.1	22.0%	5.6%	0.272	76.3%	12.3%	35.0%	37.4%
2013	MLB	32	144.7	12	121	4.17	1.15	20.5%	6.1%	0.268	70.0%	14.2%	32.7%	33.6%
2014	MLB	33	202.7	7	158	3.73	1.28	18.5%	7.4%	0.289	75.1%	14.3%	25.9%	41.6%
Proj.			170	10	150	3.80	1.20							

It was a tale of two halves for **Jake Peavy** last year. The table below shows his 2014 statistics when he played with the Red Sox and Giants.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
BOS	4.72	1.41	.304	18.6%	8.6%	11.0%	74.3%
SF	2.17	1.04	.274	18.5%	5.4%	3.1%	76.4%

By looking at the data Peavy was extremely lucky playing with the Giants and it's very likely those numbers are likely to repeat in 2015. You may be thinking since the Giants use a lot of defensive shifts that it could be repeatable, but contrary to popular belief the [Giants didn't shift that much](#).

One trend that emerged last year was Peavy was really good the first two times through the order, but in the third time hitters hit him really hard. The table below shows his 2014 statistics for the first, second and third time through the batting order. The biggest takeaway is if the Giants limit Peavy to 5-6 innings he could be a solid pitcher.

Splits	AVG	OPS	K%	BB%
1st PA	.229	.662	21.9%	8.0%
2nd PA	.224	.648	18.8%	5.9%
3rd PA	.323	.933	15.7%	8.6%

Wily Peralta

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Brewers | Position: SP | RK: (56) | Player Rater: ESPN (52), NFBC (36)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	29	2	23	2.48	1.21	20.4%	9.7%	0.304	77.1%	0.0%	20.3%	57.0%
2013	MLB	24	183.3	11	129	4.37	1.42	16.1%	9.1%	0.293	66.6%	18.3%	17.5%	52.3%
2014	MLB	25	198.7	17	154	3.53	1.3	18.4%	7.3%	0.295	76.1%	22.3%	16.7%	55.8%
Proj.			190	13	166	3.45	1.28							

Despite a mid-90s fastball and good slider **Willy Peralta** doesn't miss a lot of bats. I think he's taking the pre-2014 season version of **Jordan Zimmerman** in that Peralta don't care about missing bats, but instead wanting to induce weak contact (Peralta has a career 52% ground ball rate). The question is will the strikeout rate continue to grow in 2015?

For the strikeout rate to increase and for better overall numbers the changeup is going to have to take the next step. The changeup, if it improves, would be a true weapon against left handed batters and make him a more complete pitcher. He threw changeups to lefties 15 percent of the time in September, which was nine percentage points higher than the rest of the season. Therefore, it's at least an indication the changeup could take the next step.

What's often forgotten about Peralta is how bad he was the first two months of the 2013 season and how good he was the rest of the season. Table below shows his statistics from June 1, 2013 to the end of the 2014 season.

ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
3.51	1.29	.290	18.2%	8.0%	12.5%	74.8%

Judging by the numbers above he looks like a relatively safe player heading into 2015. What makes him different than other starting pitchers who will be drafted around his ADP is he has the upside to be a top 20 pitcher. Last year the strikeout rate increased, the walk rate decreased and he started throwing more changeups at the end of the season. This is a recipe for a breakout.

Michael Pineda

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Yankees | Position: SP | RK: (57) | Player Rater: ESPN (55), NFBC (151)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	24	23.3	1	26	3.86	1.03	27.1%	6.3%	0.267	69.0%	15.4%	21.0%	51.6%
2011	MLB	22	171	9	173	3.74	1.1	24.9%	7.9%	0.258	69.7%	11.9%	32.6%	38.9%
2014	MLB	25	76.3	5	59	1.89	0.83	20.3%	2.4%	0.233	80.4%	7.4%	30.4%	42.4%
Proj.			197	11	165	3.61	1.17							

After an incredible rookie season in 2011 it's hard to imagine that **Michael Pineda** didn't throw a pitch in the majors until 2014. In his first four starts he was really good. He posted a 1.83 ERA, 1.02 WHIP, 19.5% strikeout rate and an incredibly low 3.9% walk rate. Then he got suspended during his fourth start for pine tar.

While he was rehabbing during the suspension things took a turn for the worse. Below is a direct quote from Michael Axisa [piece](#):

"Pineda spent his ten-game suspension at the team's complex in Tampa. While throwing a simulated game to stay sharp, he felt a little something in his back and had to go for an MRI. Tests showed a lower lat strain, though when the Yankees announced he had been placed on the 15-day disabled list, they officially called it a shoulder injury. Regardless of what anyone called it, it was close enough to his surgically repaired shoulder to worry.

The injury was originally expected to keep Pineda out for 3-4 weeks, but that turned into 6-8 weeks after a setback in late-May. Then, in mid-June, Pineda suffered yet another setback to put the rest of his

season in question. It was starting to look like those first three starts in April were just a tease. Every time Pineda ramped up his throwing program, he back/shoulder injury flared up and he had to be shut down.”

After coming off the DL he was very good yet again in nine starts. He posted a 1.91 ERA, 0.80 WHIP, 20.7% strikeout rate and 1.9% walk rate. Unfortunately we’re still only dealing with a really sample size (76 innings) so it’s hard to gleam anything from his 2014 numbers. From watching him pitch he isn’t the same pitcher we saw in 2011, but what he lacks in stuff he made up for in control. I’m very curious to see how the market evaluates him (i.e. his ADP) heading into drafts, but if he becomes undervalued I’ll certainly take a chance on him.

Drew Pomeranz

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Athletics | Position: SP | RK: (115) | Player Rater: ESPN (94), NFBC (144)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	96.7	2	83	4.93	1.48	19.1%	10.6%	0.289	70.6%	18.2%	25.6%	44.9%
2013	MLB	24	21.7	0	19	6.23	2.03	18.1%	18.1%	0.339	76.1%	25.0%	24.2%	54.5%
2014	MLB	25	69	5	64	2.35	1.12	23.0%	9.4%	0.244	82.1%	17.5%	21.4%	47.6%
Proj.			100	5	80	3.75	1.24							

Other than injury potential, the 2015 fantasy ceilings for **Jesse Hahn** and **Drew Pomeranz** are the same. In 2013 Pomeranz missed 41 games because of [bicep tendinitis](#) and he missed 24 games last year after he [punched a wooden chair](#).

In early May, after two starts [I said](#), “I’m not buying Drew Pomeranz yet. In two starts as a starter he has 13 strikeouts to two walks and has a .143 batting average against. Pomeranz is a two-pitch pitcher (fastball and curveball), which requires a high degree of fastball command in order for the curveball to be effective. I haven’t seen the fastball command necessary to sustain his current performance.”

Unlike Hahn, Pomeranz doesn’t have a third pitch, which means he’s ultimately a longer reliever or lefty specialist. It’s possible for a pitcher to be a successful starter with only two pitches, but the command and overall stuff have to be exceptional and that’s not what I saw from Pomeranz last year.

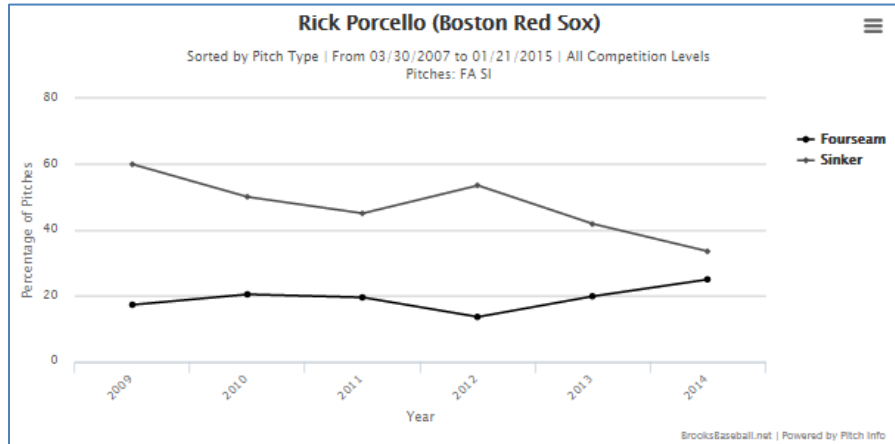
Rick Porcello

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Red Sox | Position: SP | RK: (83) | Player Rater: ESPN (47), NFBC (44)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	176.3	10	107	4.59	1.53	13.7%	5.6%	0.344	69.0%	13.8%	18.5%	54.5%
2013	MLB	24	177	13	142	4.32	1.28	19.3%	5.7%	0.315	69.8%	17.3%	18.9%	56.1%
2014	MLB	25	204.7	15	129	3.43	1.23	15.4%	4.9%	0.298	72.4%	13.0%	20.7%	50.9%
Proj.			200	13	130	3.75	1.26							

After a huge strikeout increase in 2013 many fantasy owners thought **Rick Porcello** would finally take the big next step forward his underlying peripherals always teased. Last year he had the lowest ERA and WHIP of his career. However, despite the good results last year there are some negatives.

First, the ground ball rate was lowest of his career. The reason why the ground ball rate was so low was because he opted to throw the sinker less than ever before (image below from BrooksBaseball.net). Since the Red Sox acquired a lot of ground ball starting pitchers in the offseason I have to assume they are going to ask him to throw the sinker more in 2015.



Second, the strikeout rate decreased four percentage points compared to last year, but it was still much higher than any other point in his career. Last year all of his secondary pitches didn't generate nearly as many swings and misses as 2013, which is odd. Usually it's one pitch that's the cause for the decrease in strikeout rate. Since his contact rate increased three points from the year prior I have to assume he was trying to pitch to contact, which would explain why the contact rates increased to the levels seen before the 2013 season. I think he increased his strikeout rate in 2013 was because the infield was so bad he figured he was better off getting outs via strikeouts than ground balls.

Even though he's a ground ball pitcher the move to Fenway Park is still a negative. The infield defense is going to be better than any of the other infield defenses he had in Detroit. I expect him to allow more hard contact, but if he can continue to limit the walks he could be usable as a number four starter in a 12-team mixed league.

David Price

Throws: L | Age: 29 | Team: Tigers | Position: SP | RK: (4) | Player Rater: ESPN (8), NFBC (9)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	211	20	205	2.56	1.1	24.5%	7.1%	0.285	81.1%	13.2%	21.3%	53.4%
2013	MLB	27	186.7	10	151	3.33	1.1	20.4%	3.6%	0.298	70.0%	13.3%	21.5%	46.9%
2014	MLB	28	248.3	15	271	3.26	1.08	26.9%	3.8%	0.306	72.7%	13.5%	26.6%	43.2%
Proj.			215	14	233	2.99	1.08							

In 2013 **David Price** made one major adjustment: he started throwing strikes ... a lot of them. In fact since 2013 only two pitchers with at least 40 starts have a higher strike percentage (**Phil Hughes** and **Cliff Lee**). In 2014 he kept throwing strikes and much to my surprise he actually struck out more batters. Not only did the strikeout rate increase, it was the highest strikeout rate of his career.

The big reason for the uptick in strikeout rate was the heavy use of the changeup. When he was traded to the Tigers he basically abandoned the curveball and was primarily a fastball changeup pitcher, throwing those two pitches a little more than 80% of the time. The table below shows his splits in 2014 between his time with the Rays and Tigers.

Splits	IP	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB
Rays	107.2	3.11	1.05	.303	27.4%	3.3%	11.1%
Tigers	77.2	3.59	1.15	.318	25.6%	4.7%	6.4%

The first trend I noticed was the near elimination of the curveball did not have a big impact on Price's numbers. Also, what is not shown are the ground ball and fly ball rates. With the Rays a 40.6% ground ball rate and 38.3% fly ball rate and with the Tigers 44.4% and 35.0% respectively. One of the main reasons for the uptick in ground ball rate was the changeup as that pitch had 44% ground ball rate with the Rays and 49% with the Tigers. Basically, I believe Price, if healthy, can have another Cy Young caliber season if he can maintain the high ground ball rate and high strikeout rate.

He's only had one DL stint in his career and that came in 2013 when he missed 44 games with a [triceps strain](#). He may come at a discount on draft day because he no longer pitches at Tropicana Field, in front of the Rays great defense and has injury concerns, but it looks like Price can have a Cy Young caliber year.

Jose Quintana

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: White Sox | Position: SP | RK: (39) | Player Rater: ESPN (54), NFBC (50)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	136.3	6	81	3.76	1.35	14.3%	7.4%	0.299	74.7%	12.7%	24.9%	49.5%
2013	MLB	24	200	9	164	3.51	1.22	19.7%	6.7%	0.283	76.6%	16.1%	23.6%	44.0%
2014	MLB	25	200.3	9	178	3.32	1.24	21.4%	6.3%	0.318	69.2%	7.9%	21.2%	46.7%
Proj.			200	13	174	3.43	1.23							

Jose Quintana is one of the most underrated pitchers in baseball. For the past two seasons he's thrown at least innings and has averaged a 3.42 ERA, 1.23 WHIP and 171 strikeouts.

This is a scouting report Keith Law [said](#), "Quintana has improved his cutter since joining Chicago, which is about the least shocking thing imaginable given how much success White Sox pitching coach Don Cooper has had teaching that pitch. Both the cutter and changeup grade out as at least above-average, if not plus. But the real key for Quintana has been his outstanding fastball command; he doesn't throw

hard, but he locates extremely well, gets ahead in the count early, and doesn't pitch away from contact. I don't think his low home run rate this year will last, especially not with half his games in a home run park, but the rest of his formula for success is sustainable.”

With the additions the White Sox have made in the offseason there is going to be no shortage of runs on the board when he pitches, which means he should be able to reach double digit wins for the first time in his Major League career.

Garrett Richards

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Angels | Position: SP | RK: (15) | Player Rater: ESPN (15), NFBC (14)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	71	4	47	4.69	1.56	14.8%	10.7%	0.308	65.3%	10.3%	29.1%	47.4%
2013	MLB	25	145	7	101	4.16	1.34	16.3%	7.1%	0.302	68.6%	15.4%	16.5%	59.6%
2014	MLB	26	168.7	13	164	2.61	1.04	24.2%	7.5%	0.264	74.9%	5.9%	18.6%	51.8%
Proj.			200	13	189	3.24	1.17							

On April 26, 2013 [I said](#), “**Garrett Richards** has really good stuff; his fastball and cutter sat at 95 mph and maxed out at 97 mph. Richards is a reliever masquerading as starter. His biggest problem is the lack of command of his secondary pitches, which is primarily the slider. Without command of the slider there’s no velocity separation in the cutter and fastball, which makes those pitches easier to hit. Speaking of the fastball, if he misses up in the zone it becomes flat and more hittable.”

Three things happened last year. First the command of slider improved. Second, he threw his fastball a lot more. Third, overall he was more consistent with command and he showed a better feel for pitching.

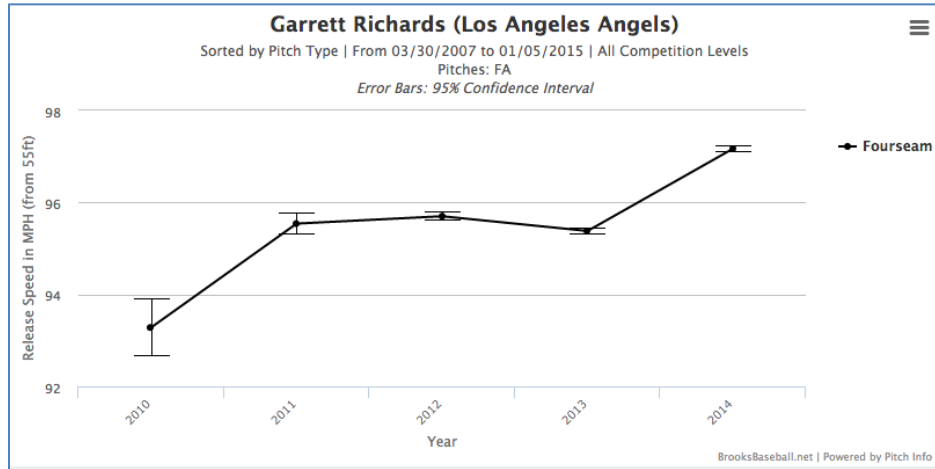
In 2013 he split his time between the bullpen and in the rotation. Starting in late July he was in the rotation for the rest of the season. Below is a breakdown of his last 13 starts in 2013 compared to the 26 starts in 2014. *Unless otherwise noted all the tables referenced will be using this date range.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%	HR/FB
2013	3.72	1.37	0.314	0.275	16.2%	7.6%	11.3%
2014	2.61	1.04	0.264	0.201	24.2%	7.5%	3.7%

Three major statistics stand out: the BABIP, HR/FB and strike out rate. Richards has great stuff but the HR/FB rate should regress and so should the BABIP. Since he misses so many bats and generates weak contact the BABIP will likely be in the .285-.295 range. A major reason why the strikeout rate ticked up was the command of the slider improved (table below).

Splits	AVG	K%	BB%	Swng%	Whiff%	Strk%
2013	.228	32.2%	8.9%	44.9%	35.0%	59.6%
2014	.156	44.0%	4.2%	43.1%	42.7%	65.7%

In regards to the fastball, the velocity improved almost two mph more (image below from BrooksBaseball.net)



Last year he suffered a [freak accident](#) trying to cover first base in late August. According to Jeff Fletcher (as of December 30th) Richards [will not be ready for Opening Day](#), but will be ready by mid-May.

Overall, he improved dramatically last year and those improvements should repeat itself in 2015. That said, there is going to be some regression in the HR/FB rate and the BABIP. If he doesn't pitch until mid-May he'll probably lose somewhere between 7-10 starts.

Tanner Roark

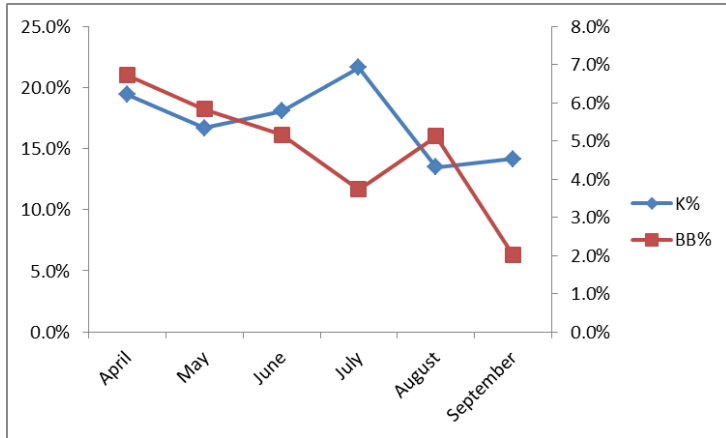
Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: Nationals | Position: SP | RK: (93) | Player Rater: ESPN (17), NFBC (17)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	26	105.7	9	84	3.15	0.99	20.5%	4.9%	0.255	65.3%	6.4%	30.6%	46.6%
2013	MLB	26	53.7	7	40	1.51	0.91	19.5%	5.4%	0.243	79.8%	4.2%	15.7%	50.3%
2014	MLB	27	198.7	15	138	2.85	1.09	17.3%	4.9%	0.27	79.3%	11.8%	22.1%	42.4%
Proj.			140	10	100	3.49	1.14							

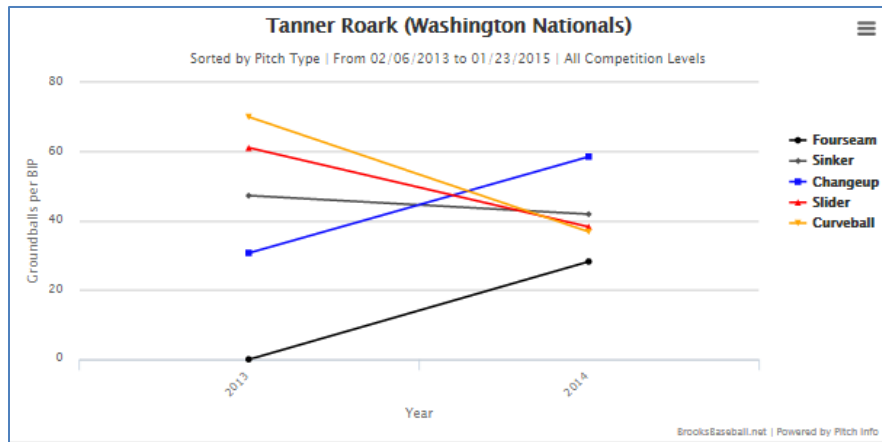
As of mid-January **Tanner Roark** is not expected to begin the year in the Major League rotation. This player capsule assumes he will be. Even if he does not begin the year in the rotation he'll most likely spend some time in the rotation because pitchers do get hurt and a lot can happen from January 22nd until Opening Day; a trade perhaps?

When looking at Roark's 2014 numbers it's easy to say he's going to regress when his strand rate was very high (79.3%), the BABIP is really low (.270), he doesn't strike batters out and he didn't generate a lot of ground balls. I do agree he's going to regress and last year will probably be the best fantasy season he will have in career, but he still has value as a streaming option in 10-team mixed leagues.

First, let's look at the strikeout rate. Before the month of August he had a slightly below average strikeout rate (19%), but it was still much higher than his season total would indicate. The image below shows his strikeout and walk rates by month last year.



If Roark is going to be a successful real life and fantasy starting pitcher it's going to come down to what kind of pitcher is he? Is he the pitcher who will generate ground balls 50% of the time in 2013 or 40% last year. The main reason why the ground ball rate was lower was due to the performance of the curveball and slider (image below from BrooksBaseball.net).



Since the ground ball rates were so low something must have happened to those two pitches? Maybe he left the pitches higher in the zone? The table below shows the percentage of times the curveball and slider were thrown down in the zone and the ground ball rate of those pitches down in the zone.

Splits	Down%	GB%
2013	55.1%	81.8%
2014	63.2%	39.1%

After looking at the table it looks like he was extremely unlucky with the ground ball rate last year. Therefore, I expect the ground ball rate to positively regress in 2015. If he's ground baller he's should be able to have an ERA less than 3.50 and a sub-1.20 WHIP with a lot of wins.

Tyson Ross

Throws: R | Age: 27 | Team: Padres | Position: SP | RK: (19) | Player Rater: ESPN (23), NFBC (20)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	25	73.3	2	46	6.5	1.81	13.5%	10.8%	0.36	64.0%	12.1%	22.8%	52.0%
2013	MLB	26	125	3	119	3.17	1.15	23.6%	8.7%	0.282	71.5%	11.6%	20.7%	56.6%
2014	MLB	27	195.7	13	195	2.81	1.21	24.0%	8.9%	0.291	75.1%	15.9%	15.3%	59.3%
Proj.			190	13	193	3.12	1.17							

On March 14, 2014 [I said](#), "He's currently going behind pitchers like **Matt Garza**, **A.J. Griffin**, and **Marco Estrada**. I would gladly take Ross over all of them, especially in shallower leagues where you can afford to take bigger risks."

Then on April 21, I further wrote about my love of Ross, "Tyson Ross looked hittable in his first two starts and dominant in his last two starts. I watched his brilliant start on Friday against the Giants; he was efficient and except for two innings didn't get into any sort of trouble. He always had amazing stuff, but the major roadblock was controlling it. The animated GIF below shows the type of stuff he has¹. This pitch was against **Buster Posey** in the eighth inning. If a pitcher can make Posey take a swing like that, then the pitcher's stuff is really good.

After Ross made a slight adjustment to his [warm up routine](#) last year he finally started to have command and finished the year (15 appearances and 13 starts) with a 3.13 ERA and 1.08 WHIP. His command is going to vary from start to start because of his size and the long levers, but this is someone who should stay in your lineup even if he has one or two poor starts in a row."

There are three concerns I have about Ross. First, even though his delivery was much improved last year the delivery still looks violent to me. **Chris Sale** has a violent delivery and he's been more or less healthy in his career so that doesn't mean Ross is going to get hurt. It is important to note he missed his last start of 2014 with a [forearm strain](#).

Second, despite his good results he walked a lot of batters (8.9%) last year. Since he struck out 24% of batters and had a ground ball rate of 57% he was able to get away with it, but a pitcher is going to be playing with any time a pitcher puts batters on base for free.

Third, his home-road splits are quite alarming (the table below is for his last 44 starts).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	AVG	K%	BB%	HR/FB
Home	1.93	0.99	.256	.192	26.5%	7.8%	6.3%
Away	3.71	1.31	.321	.250	23.6%	9.1%	12.8%

He's clearly benefitting from his home ballpark, but I think he's been unlucky on the road. In regards to the poor defenders that make up the Padres outfield, I'm not worried about it because he generates so many ground balls that he should be able to not be effected by the outfield. In his last 44 games started he has a 2.84 ERA, 1.15 WHIP, 25.0% strikeout rate and 8.5% walk rate. Ross will regress in 2015, but he should still be a very good pitcher next year.

Hyun-Jin Ryu

Throws: L | Age: 27 | Team: Dodgers | Position: SP | RK: (62) | Player Rater: ESPN (42), NFBC (45)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	MLB	26	192	14	154	3.00	1.2	19.7%	6.3%	0.296	78.2%	12.8%	20.2%	52.3%
2014	MLB	27	152	14	139	3.38	1.19	22.0%	4.6%	0.319	71.8%	8.9%	19.6%	50.2%
Proj.			180	12	155	3.45	1.22							

I've never been a **Hyun-Jin Ryu** guy because he doesn't pass the smell test. He doesn't have overpowering fastball velocity and his secondary offerings do not miss a lot of bats (the slider took a step forward last year). Since Ryu doesn't have terrific stuff he is going to have to rely on command and changing speeds, which makes the margin for error a lot smaller. Since he has good fastball command he'll rarely miss with the fastball up in the zone, which will limit the number of home runs he allows.

What I don't understand is why don't opposing hitters lean over the plate and gear up for the ball on the outer half of the plate because he throws 55-65% of his pitches on the outer half of the zone. After two years of doing well it's hard for me to not believe in him, but I still do not. I'm very aware of my bias and it's very possible I'll be wrong about Ryu again, but his profile isn't someone I want to take at the spot he's likely to go in drafts. On top of all that he dealt with left shoulder related injuries twice last year.

CC Sabathia

Throws: L | Age: 34 | Team: Yankees | Position: SP | RK: (76) | Player Rater: ESPN (177), NFBC (171)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	200	15	197	3.38	1.14	23.6%	5.3%	0.288	71.6%	13.8%	27.4%	50.3%
2013	MLB	32	211	14	175	4.78	1.37	19.3%	7.2%	0.308	67.4%	16.4%	25.8%	47.0%
2014	MLB	33	46	3	48	5.28	1.48	23.0%	4.8%	0.35	70.7%	29.4%	23.1%	50.3%
Proj.			200	11	157	3.85	1.24							

In last year's fantasy guide I said, "**CC Sabathia** was bad last year, but I believe he can still rebound and turn it around because he never relied on the fastball to get guys out." I thought based on where he was going in drafts that I thought he was worth a shot because he performed like an ace just one year prior.

However, I didn't think he would only be limited to eight starts due to [inflammation in his knee](#). He subsequently had surgery in July. As of early January he is [almost 100%](#) ready to anchor the starting rotation.

Some of his statistics from last year looked pretty good. For example, the 23% strikeout rate and 4.3% walk rate. However, he allowed a lot of home runs and hits that led to him having a 1.48 WHIP and 23.3% HR/FB rate. Since we're dealing with a small sample size it's hard to make any definitive takeaways from last year. Sabathia is another player we will have to wait and see how he looks in Spring Training.

Danny Salazar

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Indians | Position: SP | RK: (68) | Player Rater: ESPN (123), NFBC (101)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2014	AAA	24	60.7	4	76	3.71	1.42	28.1%	10.4%	0.323	76.4%	10.1%	41.8%	37.6%
2013	MLB	23	52	2	65	3.12	1.13	30.8%	7.1%	0.298	83.3%	19.4%	27.5%	37.4%
2014	MLB	24	110	6	120	4.25	1.38	25.3%	7.4%	0.343	71.6%	16.7%	24.7%	36.4%
Proj.			170	11	170	3.75	1.24							

Based on what I projected and where I ranked **Danny Salazar** it would be easy to say I was part of the hype train. I will admit that was a little true, but I came out with my rankings before a lot of other rankings came out. A large part of my recommendation was based on how good his stuff was and I liked how his mechanics were repeatable. However, last year the velocity on the fastball and all of his pitches [all ticked down](#). Maybe part of the reason why the velocity dipped and why he struggled was due to a [regression in every aspect of his mechanics](#).

He had an incredibly high BABIP, which should regress. Part of the reason why the BABIP was high was because of bad luck. Another part of the reason was due to poor command and leaving pitches out over the middle of the plate.

What has me the most confident about a positive regress in last year's BABIP is because of the percentage of pitches he threw down in the zone. Last year the percentage of pitches down in the zone was 34% and in 2013 29%. Overall, the BABIP and strand rate should positively regress if he continues to pitch down in the zone.

Like any young pitcher, Salazar is far from a finished product and still has a lot of room to grow, but his upside is very tantalizing. The fact his mechanics regressed so much last year makes it hard for me totally buy him as a breakout candidate. Since he's still a young pitcher he could make adjustments very

quickly and his fantasy owners could reap the rewards of those adjustments. Based on where he goes in drafts he could be an incredible bargain.

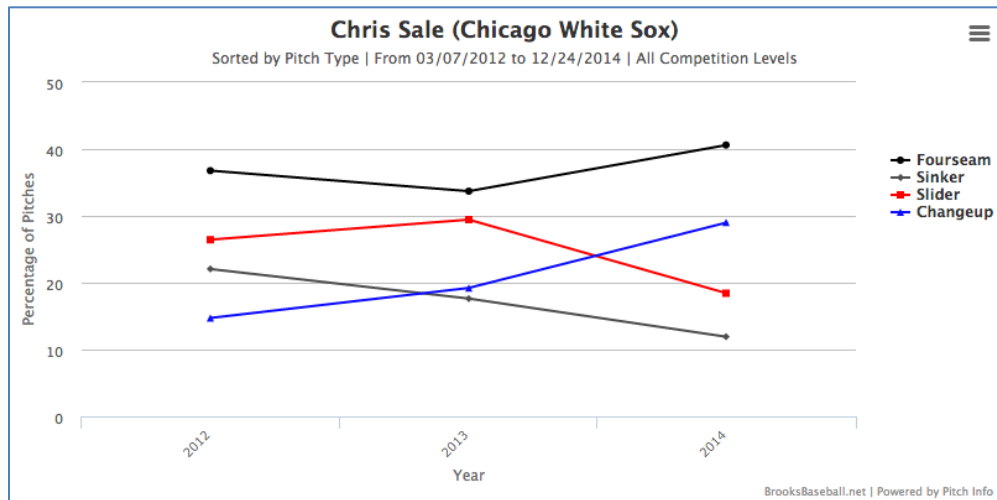
Chris Sale

Throws: L | Age: 26 | Team: White Sox | Position: SP | RK: (5) | Player Rater: ESPN (6), NFBC (6)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	192	17	192	3.05	1.14	24.9%	6.6%	0.294	80.0%	14.7%	24.7%	45.5%
2013	MLB	24	214.3	11	226	3.07	1.07	26.1%	5.3%	0.289	77.0%	16.5%	24.0%	47.1%
2014	MLB	25	174	12	208	2.17	0.97	30.4%	5.7%	0.28	81.5%	12.0%	25.3%	42.6%
Proj.			190	13	215	2.57	1.03							

Despite having stellar numbers the past two seasons **Chris Sale's** ADP was suppressed in 2014 primarily due to injury concerns. The reason for those concerns are because he has a violent deliver, he throws a lot of sliders (this pitch puts more strain on the elbow) and who slight his body is. After two injury free seasons (he had shoulder inflammation in 2013 but never went on the DL), Sale went on the DL for the first time in his career with a flexor muscle strain in his left elbow. Also, this was the [first time he has ever experienced elbow issues](#). He ended up spending 34 days on the DL, missing 32 games. When he came back from the DL he was fantastic, putting up a 2.15 ERA, 0.99 WHIP with 30.8% strikeout rate.

Not only did he put up fantastic numbers, the strikeout rate was the highest of his career as a starting pitcher. The increased strikeout rate came against both lefties and righties. The major adjustment he made was he started using the changeup more (image below from [BrooksBaseball.net](#)).



Last year the changeup had 29% strikeout rate compared to a 17% strikeout rate the previous two years. I believe the new strikeout rate with the changeup is repeatable because was throwing that pitch down in the zone more often (from 47.5% to 55.4%). The reason why that's important is that pitch is at its best when thrown down in the zone.

He got a little lucky with the HR/FB rate because last year was it was three percentage points less than his career rate (7.5% and 10.6% respectively). The fly ball rate increased nine percentage points from last year (32.0% to 40.9% respectively), but since his contact rate was so low he would have allowed the same number of fly balls as 2013. Therefore, he can continue to have a low contact rate he will not allow more home runs if the HR/FB were to regress.

Overall, the big question, once again, with Sale is going to be health. The fact he went on the DL last year should provide enough fear that he should slip in drafts, which could make him a value. The White Sox should have an improved offense, which could help him win more games but my biggest question is will the bullpen hold leads for him? I have doubts about the White Sox bullpen. The signing of **David Robertson** definitely helps, but whose going to hold leads to get to Robertson? The bullpen is full of unproven guys without much of a track record.

Jeff Samardzija

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: White Sox | Position: SP | RK: (21) | Player Rater: ESPN (21), NFBC (25)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	174.7	9	180	3.81	1.22	24.9%	7.7%	0.296	73.0%	13.8%	30.0%	46.2%
2013	MLB	28	213.7	8	214	4.34	1.35	23.4%	8.5%	0.314	71.6%	20.7%	19.7%	50.3%
2014	MLB	29	219.7	7	202	2.99	1.07	23.0%	4.9%	0.284	73.1%	16.9%	18.9%	51.4%
Proj.			210	13	200	3.40	1.18							

After getting a chance to see **Jeff Samardzija** pitch every fifth day with the A's there's no doubt he's a really good pitcher with really good stuff; the fastball sits 94-95 and a splitter and slider that true bat missers against lefties and righties. My question about his game is why does he give up so many home runs? And the home runs he's giving up are to fringe Major Leaguers and minor leaguers; players like that shouldn't be squaring him up, but they do.

Below are the hitters who hit home runs against Samardzija as a member of the Oakland A's:

- Jake Smolinski
- Robinson Chirinos
- Jon Singleton
- Chris Carter (3)
- Eric Campbell
- Lucas Duda
- Evan Longoria
- Marwin Gonzalez
- Jonathan Schoop
- Manny Machado
- Logan Morrison

What's odd about his high HR/FB rate is he fits a profile that shouldn't allow home runs because he generates a lot of ground balls, doesn't walk a lot of batters and racks up a lot of strikeouts. However, he still allows 11-12% of his fly balls to turn into home runs.

After watching him I think it's due to inconsistent command. I think that's going to always be part of his game (at least I don't see it changing in 2015) and it's going to hinder his ability to be a dominant fantasy pitcher. Now that he's moving to U.S. Cellular Field I don't see the home run issues suddenly going away. In fact it's more likely to get worse.

He's trending positively in terms of the ground ball and walk rates, which is encouraging. Even though, the strikeout has decreased year over year, it hasn't decreased that much and since there were other improvements in the two aforementioned rates I don't see the drop in strikeout rate as a concern.

Like I mentioned with **Chris Sale**, I still have huge concerns about the White Sox bullpen. The signing of **David Robertson** solidifies the closer position, but who are the relievers who are going to shut down the seventh and eighth innings? Therefore, I can only project 11-13 wins.

Anibal Sanchez

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Tigers | Position: SP | RK: (32) | Player Rater: ESPN (70), NFBC (95)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	195.7	9	167	3.86	1.27	20.4%	5.9%	0.31	70.2%	13.5%	24.7%	48.3%
2013	MLB	29	182	14	202	2.57	1.15	27.1%	7.2%	0.307	78.2%	8.6%	21.5%	48.0%
2014	MLB	30	126	8	102	3.43	1.1	19.9%	5.8%	0.277	63.5%	4.0%	26.1%	48.3%
Proj.			200	12	180	3.44	1.15							

Before I started doing any research on **Anibal Sanchez** the first thing I thought of was he's always hurt. If you look at his [injury history](#) you'll see the primary cause of his injuries have been due to his right shoulder, which is something you never want to see with a pitcher. Last year he went on the DL twice; once [for a blister](#) on his throwing hand and a [pectoral strain](#). Despite the long injury history he has made at least 29 starts in each year from 2010-13.

A big reason why the strikeout rate dropped (from 27.1% to 19.8%) so much last year was due to due to the slider. The table below shows the performance of slider since 2010.

Splits	SLUG	BABIP	K%	BB%
2010	.308	.266	30.4%	5.3%
2011	.393	.340	29.7%	7.7%
2012	.361	.307	29.3%	1.9%
2013	.277	.268	33.2%	4.3%
2014	.300	.263	17.8%	7.4%

What’s funny is even though the strikeout rate dropped significantly hitters were not making more or harder contact against the pitch. What the data is indicating is he became a pitch to contact pitcher when he threw the slider. This could be more beneficial from a real standpoint, but if he’s not going to miss bats his fantasy viability decreases substantially. The big question is will he revert back to his old slider usage or not. It’s possible the blister he sustained early in the season caused the different usage of the slider, but he sustained that injury in late April. Lastly, his slider usage has [not changed in the last five years](#).

It’s important to remember when he’s healthy he can be one of the most dominating pitchers in baseball. His lengthy injury history concerns me enough that I cannot project more than 170 innings next year. If he’s healthy, and that’s a big if, I believe the strikeout can be in the 20-24% range next year.

Ervin Santana

Throws: R | Age: 32 | Team: | Position: SP | RK: (67) | Player Rater: ESPN (68), NFBC (58)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	178	9	133	5.16	1.27	17.4%	8.0%	0.241	69.8%	21.8%	31.9%	45.3%
2013	MLB	30	211	9	161	3.24	1.14	18.7%	5.9%	0.267	76.9%	16.7%	24.3%	46.8%
2014	MLB	31	196	14	179	3.95	1.31	21.9%	7.7%	0.319	71.5%	13.1%	21.4%	45.4%
Proj.			195	12	162	3.72	1.25							

There’s a lot to like about **Ervin Santana’s** 2014 season. The strikeout rate was the highest it’s been since 2008. The fly ball rate was the same as the previous year. He was able to limit the number of home runs he allowed. He had the lowest FIP since 2008. The swinging strike rate was the highest of career.

There were some trends that were not positive. The walk rate increased nearly two percentage points, which makes sense considering the swinging strike rate was the highest of his career (i.e. he tried to get batters to chase pitches out of the zone). The batting average allowed was the highest it’s been since 2009 (and do not forget that including at-bats from pitchers). Against non-pitchers he had a slash line against of .269/.327/.411, which is far worse than his 2013 numbers.

In regards to his batting average spike, that was mostly fueled by left handed hitters. The table below compares his 2014 season against the 2008-13 seasons against lefties. The first thing you’ll notice is even though the batting average was really high he wasn’t allowing a lot of hard contact; instead he gave up singles that probably found holes.

Splits	AVG	SLUG	BABIP	K%	BB%	Strk%
2008-13	.262	.436	.295	18.3%	8.2%	62.4%
2014	.291	.432	.344	19.0%	6.2%	63.8%

The move from the Braves ballpark to the Twins ballpark there shouldn't have any negligible impact on his performance in regards to the ballpark. Since he can be fly ball prone at times he does get hurt by the Twins outfield. **Aaron Hicks** is a really good defender, but **Torii Hunter** and **Oswaldo Arcia** are both below average defenders. In regards to the infield defense, he greatly benefited from playing with really good defenses the previous two seasons. Every starting infielder for the Twins are all below average so I expect some regression to occur.

For the past two seasons he has morphed from a fly ball heavy pitcher to more of a ground ball pitcher. In 2013 his walk rate was the lowest it's been since 2008. This would indicate he threw more strikes, but that wasn't the case. His strike zone percentage was the same in 2012 as 2013. That indicates his command and approach didn't really change. I bring this up because in 2014 the walk rate rose to the levels of the previous four seasons before 2013. Therefore, I expect his walk rate to be in the 7.5-8.5% next year and the WHIP to be in the 1.23-1.33 range.

Hector Santiago

Throws: L | Age: 27 | Team: Angels | Position: SP | RK: (112) | Player Rater: ESPN (115), NFBC (105)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	70.3	4	79	3.33	1.34	25.8%	13.1%	0.259	86.2%	17.2%	32.2%	38.9%
2013	MLB	25	149	4	137	3.56	1.40	20.9%	11.0%	0.289	77.4%	13.1%	30.1%	39.1%
2014	MLB	26	127.3	6	108	3.75	1.36	19.9%	9.7%	0.288	72.9%	12.1%	32.6%	32.1%
Proj.			140	8	100	3.75	1.37							

If **Garrett Richards** is healthy on Opening Day then my guess (in early January) is **Hector Santiago** probably becomes the long man in the bullpen to begin the year. Injuries are inevitable so I wouldn't be surprised if Santiago ends up making 20-plus starts next year.

Last year he turned himself into a fly ball heavy pitcher (the fly ball rate increased seven and half percentage points last year). Since the rate of increase was so much higher I have to assume he was trying to generate more fly balls, which could be a good thing considering the Angels home ballpark. Also, what happened last year was both the strikeout rate and walk rate dropped last year, which is a good thing. There was no way he was going to be successful if he continued to walk 11% of the hitters he faced. That said, 9.7% is still too high for me, but he's still a streamable option when he's pitching in Oakland, Seattle, at home and other cavernous ballparks.

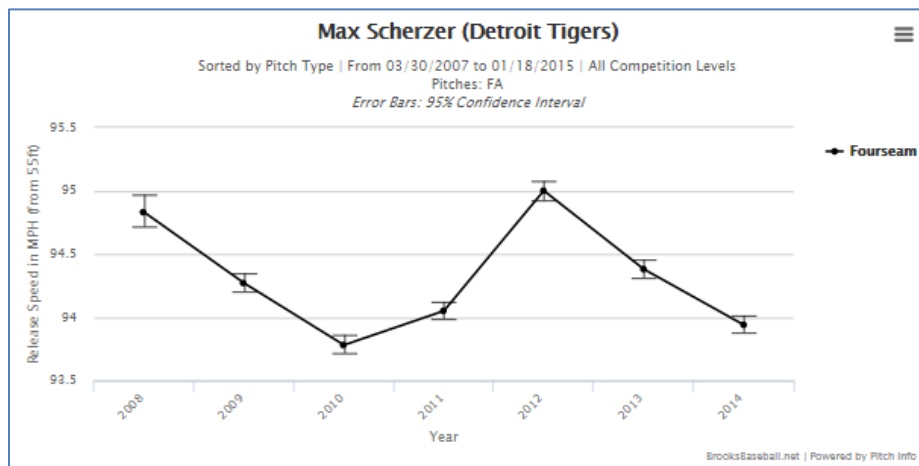
Max Scherzer

Throws: R | Age: 30 | Team: Nationals | Position: SP | RK: (3) | Player Rater: ESPN (10), NFBC (10)

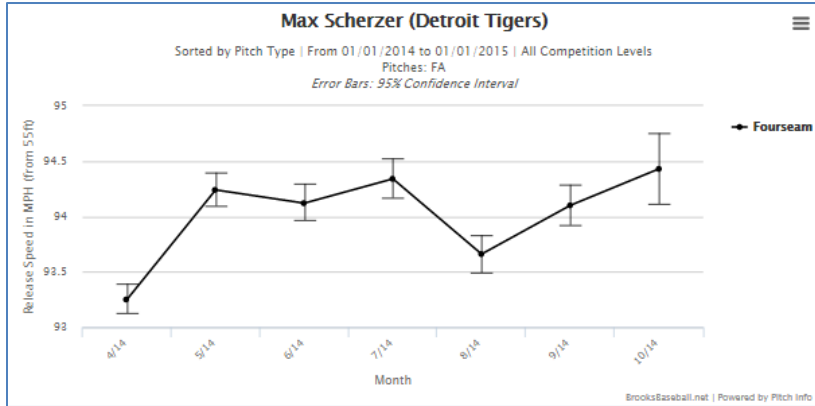
YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	27	187.7	16	231	3.74	1.27	29.4%	7.6%	0.333	76.5%	14.6%	32.2%	38.5%
2013	MLB	28	214.3	21	240	2.90	0.97	28.7%	6.7%	0.259	74.4%	10.0%	33.6%	38.2%
2014	MLB	29	220.3	18	252	3.15	1.18	27.9%	7.0%	0.315	77.1%	9.6%	32.1%	38.3%
Proj.			210	14	237	2.90	1.08							

What’s not to like about **Max Scherzer**? Since 2009 he’s made at least 30 starts every year. In past three seasons he’s averaged 241 strikeouts with a 3.24 ERA and 1.13 WHIP.

One troubling trend is the lower strikeout rate last year compared to 2013. The reason for the lower strikeout rate was because he [threw the slider less](#); instead opting to throw the curveball more. Some fantasy owners may be concerned about the [decreased fastball velocity](#), but it’s important to note his velocity has varied wildly from year to year (image below).



Also, a decrease in velocity [does not mean it will negatively affect his performance and statistics](#). Most of the reason why his velocity was “down” was due to the [first month of the season](#). Once the season got going his velocity improved. The last thing I’ll say about his velocity is his max velocity 98.2 mph was on par to the max velocity he’s shown in the past.



Scherzer can be fly ball heavy, but in the last two years he’s been able to limit the HR/FB rate to 7.5-7.6%, which is substantially lower than in the years prior. This indicates he’s figured out a way to limit home runs.

In regards to him landing with the Nationals I couldn’t think of a better situation for him to land. He leaves the AL, gets the face to the NL East, the worst division in baseball and goes to a slightly better ballpark. He’s in his prime and is one of the safest bets heading in 2015.

James Shields

Throws: R | Age: 33 | Team: Padres | Position: SP | RK: (35) | Player Rater: ESPN (28), NFBC (26)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	227.7	15	223	3.52	1.17	23.6%	6.1%	0.292	71.9%	16.4%	23.3%	53.3%
2013	MLB	31	228.7	13	196	3.15	1.24	20.7%	7.2%	0.298	79.5%	10.6%	28.0%	43.2%
2014	MLB	32	227	14	180	3.21	1.18	19.2%	4.7%	0.295	74.6%	13.4%	24.4%	46.7%
Proj.			210	13	175	3.55	1.19							

When trying to evaluate **James Shields** I don’t know how to evaluate him. For his entire career he’s played in pitcher’s parks and behind really good defenses. Those two things are big pluses for him because he throws a lot of strikes and his strikeout rate has decreased year-over-year for the past two seasons.

Shields' greatest fantasy asset is stability and I expect that to continue after signing with the Padres. The past two years he had ERAs well below his FIP and xFIP, which was aided greatly by how good the Royals' defense was. Royals ballpark is a really good pitcher's park, but he performed much better on the road than at home (table below).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Home	3.95	1.30	0.323	18.8%	5.7%	8.5%	72.8%
Away	2.52	1.13	0.276	21.0%	6.2%	9.6%	81.5%

Even though he's going to a great ballpark I have big questions about the Padres defense. Much has

been talked about the outfield defense and I'll admit that it's going to be bad. However, no one is talking about how bad the infield defense is. **Alexi Amarista** is maybe an average defender; **Jedd Gyorko** is below average; I love **Derek Norris** but at best he's an average defender; **Will Middlebrooks** would be the only above average defender, but it looks like **Yangervis Solarte** will be the everyday third baseman and he's below average too. Essentially he's going to be pitching behind a defense full of below average defenders, which means any gains he got from moving to the NL and to Petco have been negated by the Padres defense.

The year over year strikeout rate decline the past two seasons is not a positive, but even at a low strikeout rate he was still able to have 180 strikeouts. Moving to the NL adds additional 10-20 strikeouts, which means he could still strikeout 200 hitters. The biggest question is how many wins will he have by the end of the year? After all the moves the Padres are going to be better, but I still see them as 80-85 win team, which means I don't know if Shields will have more than 12-13 wins next year.

Matt Shoemaker

Throws: R | Age: 28 | Team: Rockies | Position: SP | RK: (42) | Player Rater: ESPN (31), NFBC (41)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	26	184.3	11	160	4.64	1.31	20.5%	3.7%	0.332	71.0%	14.9%	30.9%	44.1%
2014	AAA	27	25.7	1	26	6.31	1.68	22.6%	7.8%	0.421	64.0%	11.1%	23.1%	47.4%
2014	MLB	27	136	16	124	3.04	1.07	22.8%	4.4%	0.286	77.5%	12.7%	28.1%	43.2%
Proj.			190	13	166	3.50	1.19							

What's great about **Matt Shoemaker** was he literally came out of nowhere. In 2013 he led the PCL in strikeouts but the Angels called him up late and only gave him one start in the majors. However, by mid-May he was a mainstay in the rotation and one of the reasons why the Angels won the AL West.

What's interesting about Shoemaker is he ranked 66th among starters with at least 20 starts in strike percentage, which is middle of the pack, but he was 13th in walk rate. Those two statistics tell me he has really good command; that he knows when to throw a pitch for a strike and when he can put it out of the zone for a strikeout.

He doesn't have overpowering stuff, but he can throw three pitches for strikes and he'll throw any of them at any time. If he doesn't have command of the secondary pitches he's going to have a bad night because his fastball isn't very special as it sits 90-92 mph. I expect some regression to occur, but if he continues to miss bats at a 22% clip and only walk less than five percent of batters he could be a top 30 starting pitcher.

Alfredo Simon

Throws: R | Age: 33 | Team: Tigers | Position: SP | RK: (97) | Player Rater: ESPN (43), NFBC (39)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	61	3	52	2.66	1.43	19.3%	8.2%	0.337	78.7%	6.3%	16.9%	56.1%
2013	MLB	32	87.7	6	63	2.87	1.07	17.5%	7.2%	0.236	78.2%	13.3%	22.9%	46.9%
2014	MLB	33	196.3	15	127	3.44	1.21	15.5%	6.8%	0.265	77.5%	20.6%	17.2%	50.4%
Proj.			190	13	121	4.30	1.29							

In mid-April, after two starts, [I said](#), “he should be owned in 12-team mixed leagues because he could change speeds effectively and would throw any pitch in any count.” By the end of the year he posted numbers I thought he would have finished the season with, but I didn’t think he would have an incredibly lucky first half (which earned him an All-Star selection). The table below shows his first half and second half splits.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
1st Half	2.70	1.05	.234	16.0%	6.0%	12.5%	85.1%
2nd Half	4.52	1.44	.313	14.9%	8.0%	9.9%	69.6%

One reason why he was able to put up such great numbers in the first half was due to luck and his ability to generate a lot of ground balls. It’s important to remember two things. First, last year was by far the most innings he pitched in the majors. His previous high was 80 innings. Second, he achieved those numbers in the NL so he’s going to have a decrease in the strikeout rate.

The major benefit to being traded to the Tigers is he should be in-line to earn a good number of wins and the Tigers ballpark is an upgrade over the Reds ballpark. Even after all of that he should only be owned in AL-formats because he’ll provide below average strikeouts, ERA and WHIP.

Drew Smyly

Throws: L | Age: 25 | Team: Rays | Position: SP | RK: (63) | Player Rater: ESPN (56), NFBC (69)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	99.3	4	94	3.99	1.27	22.6%	7.9%	0.295	71.0%	12.6%	33.1%	41.8%
2013	MLB	24	76	6	81	2.37	1.04	26.7%	5.6%	0.291	80.6%	6.8%	29.1%	43.3%
2014	MLB	25	153	9	133	3.24	1.16	21.5%	6.8%	0.278	79.3%	15.9%	25.6%	38.7%
Proj.			180	11	160	3.65	1.17							

In last year’s fantasy guide I said this about **Drew Smyly**, “In some circles he’s emerging as trendy sleeper, but I’m not totally buying in.” However, after being acquired by the Rays at the trading deadline I’m going to be a believer. First of all, after getting traded to the Rays he posted a 1.70 ERA (with a .186 BABIP) in seven starts. Obviously the ERA is going to regress, but the Rays, who have a very good analytics team, had [detected some of his lesser-known strengths](#) in his game by studying the numbers.

Combine that with the fact he's going to pitch half of his games in a home run suppressing home ballpark and he is going to be pitching behind a defense that has historically been very good then has a good chance to be a number 3-4 starter in 10-team mixed leagues.

However, the major issue I had with Smyly last year was still an issue in 2014 ... and that issue was getting righties out. Last year he struggled again against righties, allowing a .441 slugging percentage (he has a .433 career slugging against lefties). To put that into perspective there were only 34 lefties who started at least 20 games. Smyly had the 9th highest slugging percentage allowed (**Tommy Milone** had the 10th highest slugging allowed). The Rays are aware of his struggles and I know they will provide him with the information necessary to make the appropriate adjustments. That said it all comes down to execution, but from the scouting reports [I've read](#) he has the makeup and intelligence necessary to make those adjustments.

Dan Straily

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Astros | Position: SP | RK: (94) | Player Rater: ESPN (230), NFBC (190)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	39.3	2	32	3.89	1.32	18.6%	9.3%	0.225	90.7%	26.2%	34.4%	31.1%
2013	MLB	24	152.3	10	124	3.96	1.24	19.4%	8.9%	0.266	70.3%	12.3%	28.8%	38.5%
2014	MLB	25	52	1	47	6.75	1.48	20.3%	10.4%	0.291	58.5%	20.0%	31.6%	35.4%
Proj.			180	11	130	3.96	1.28							

After he made his Cubs debut in August this is what [I wrote](#) about **Dan Straily**.

"On Saturday Dan Straily made his Cubs debut at the New York Mets. Simply put, I was not impressed and he has a long way to go before he should be owned in a mixed league in 2015. The fastball sat 88-90 mph for the entire outing, but it looked flatter than earlier in the year (while with the A's). His fastball was always a little flat, but when he made his Major League debut the velocity was 92-93. Since his call-up the velocity has been in decline ever since. A drop in fastball velocity does not automatically mean a drop in performance, but if the fastball is flat a pitcher can get away with it more if its 93 mph than 89 mph.

Overall I was not impressed with the secondary offerings. He struggled to get feel for any of his secondary pitches. The best pitch was the change-up, which, in bursts, generated swings and misses and kept hitters off the fastball. However, he was only able a few good ones. The slider lacked bite and looked slurry and the hitters were not fooled except for one he threw to Matt Den Dekker, which struck him out. He hung a few curveballs that should've been hit hard, but weren't. I wouldn't be surprised if he abandons this pitch next year.

If Straily is going to be Major League pitcher the command of his secondary pitches has to jump a full grade (on the scouting scale) because he's going to have pitch backward. What I mean by that is he's going to have to use his secondary pitches to set up his fastball. Starting pitchers with good velocity usually throw a lot of fastballs the first time through the order and then they mix in their secondary

itches. Pitching backwards is exactly how it sounds; Straily will have to throw a lot of change-ups and sliders to set up the fastball because the fastball is extremely hittable if hitters are expecting a fastball.

After the start he was optioned back to AAA, which was the plan because the Cubs wanted to give all their starters an extra day of rest. The Cubs probably will call him back up in September, but the big question is where will he pitch in 2015? He likely gets a legitimate shot to earn a rotation spot in Spring Training, and if there's anyone who will make the necessary adjustments it's Straily.

He was cut by his high school baseball team then no Division One college program wanted him so he had to walk onto the Western Oregon team. After that he transferred Marshall University and to walk onto that team. He was drafted in the 24th round by the A's and had to work his way through the minors to make it to the majors. Straily has persevered for the majority of his baseball career and he is someone I'm going to watch in Spring Training."

Straily was traded to the Astros and looks like he'll have the inside track to being the their number five starter to begin the season. At this point he's a deep mixed option, but he is someone worth keeping an eye on.

Stephen Strasburg

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Nationals | Position: SP | RK: (6) | Player Rater: ESPN (14), NFBC (12)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	23	159.3	15	197	3.16	1.15	30.2%	7.4%	0.311	75.4%	13.8%	27.0%	44.1%
2013	MLB	24	183	8	191	3.00	1.05	26.2%	7.7%	0.263	73.2%	15.8%	21.4%	52.1%
2014	MLB	25	215	14	242	3.14	1.12	27.9%	5.0%	0.315	74.8%	18.9%	21.1%	48.1%
Proj.			210	14	236	3.10	1.10							

I [wrote this](#) on August 26, 2014 about Stephen Strasburg and this sums up what I think about why he hasn't put up the Cy Young type numbers his stuff says he should put up.

"Pitchability sometimes can be either and extremely damning or complimentary word to bestow on a pitcher, especially when he's a prospect fighting his way through the minor leagues. If used as the latter, he's seen as a gamer, a bulldog, or some other herculean adjective. When he fails it was because of bad luck or because balls found holes. If used as the former he's seen as soft, pitches with passivity, or some other onerous adjective. If a pitcher with pitchability issues struggles it's because his head was out of the game or he didn't "want it" enough. I think saying a pitcher lacks pitchability is usually an oversimplification and is usually said without much thought. However, after seeing [Stephen Strasburg's](#) last start I believe he doesn't have pitchability.

On Sunday he gave up four earned runs (and two home runs) in four innings against the Giants. The home runs he gave up were to [Gregor Blanco](#) and [Travis Ishikawa](#). That's not a misprint. He allowed Quad-A (or AAAA) hitters to take him deep. He was drafted as the seventh starting pitcher in ESPN drafts

this year. A player drafted that high should never allow multiple home runs to players like that in a one game (if he's healthy).

When I watch him pitch it seems as though he's a different pitcher when men are on base. It's almost as if when things begin to snowball he can't stop it from getting bigger. It seems as though he allows more runners to score than the average "great" pitcher. Over his career hitters have a .596 OPS when the bases are empty, but a .695 OPS when runners are on base. That's a 100 point difference, which seems really high, but let's put that into context.

I looked at starting pitchers with at least 20 starts from 2008-2014 and I wanted to see if the difference was comparable. When the bases were empty batters have a .718 OPS versus .752 with runners on base. Twenty starts may be a small threshold because it may have prospects that flamed out over a brief stay in the Major Leagues. Strasburg has 103 career starts so I then looked at pitchers with at least 100 starts since 2008. When the bases are empty batters have a .706 OPS compared to a .737 OPS. Regardless of the sample size, the difference in OPS is less than half the difference of Strasburg's, which indicates he may not have pitchability."

Marcus Stroman

Throws: R | Age: 23 | Team: Blue Jays | Position: SP | RK: (31) | Player Rater: ESPN (67), NFBC (65)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	111.7	9	129	3.30	1.13	28.1%	5.9%	0.301	73.1%	14.0%	31.1%	45.5%
2014	AAA	23	35.7	2	45	3.03	1.15	30.8%	6.2%	0.348	69.7%	7.1%	15.6%	54.4%
2014	MLB	23	130.7	11	111	3.65	1.17	20.8%	5.2%	0.306	68.4%	9.6%	18.6%	54.6%
Proj.			190	13	165	3.28	1.16							

Similar to **Kevin Gausman** and **Trevor Bauer**, before the year began I was big believer in **Marcus Stroman**.

This is what [I wrote](#) after Stroman made his debut as a starting pitcher on June 2, 2014:

"After a brief and brutal start (as a reliever) to Marcus Stroman's major league career, the Blue Jays sent him back to AAA so he could be stretched backed out as a starter. On Friday he received news he was getting called up to make a spot start on Saturday. Based on how well he pitched I find it hard to believe he will be sent back to the minors any time soon. He went six innings, threw 94 pitches, struck out six, and only allowed five hits. Of the five hits he allowed, one was hit with authority (by Alex Gordon in the first inning).

I was most impressed with his fastball command and that he was able to hold his velocity as the game progressed. He was able to throw the fastball up in the zone for strikes, which is extremely important considering his height. The command of his fastball allowed his above average secondary pitches to generate swings and misses even when they were thrown out of the strike zone. His best secondary pitch

is his disappearing slider that can miss bats from both lefties and righties. Check out what Eric Hosmer thought of the slider.

After watching Stroman turn over a lineup three times 1 my biggest concern with him moving forward is he's going to be a fly ball pitcher, which isn't ideal for Toronto's home ballpark. However, if can continue to have above average command he should not allow that many home runs. If he remains in the rotation he should have a 20-23% strike out rate with mid-3.00's ERA, 1.15-1.20 WHIP, and plenty of wins, which makes him a top 40 starting pitcher.

The Blue Jays are in first place and their best chance to stay there is to have Stroman in their rotation. Drew Hutchison is a 18 months removed from a TJ surgery and his fastball velocity has dropped progressively in his last two starts so he's not a sure bet to stay in the rotation the whole year. J.A. Happ and Liam Hendriks are fringe number four starters. Other than **R.A. Dickey**, Stroman has the highest ceiling of any starting pitcher in the Blue Jays organization, which is why he's going to stay in the rotation.

Obviously he struggled as a reliever, but I don't put a lot of weight into those numbers because the mentality and skill set of a reliever is completely different than of a starter. His next start is home against the Cardinals, which is not as bad as you may think. In the month of the May the Cardinals are only 17th in runs scored and OPS. If I'm in a 12-team mixed league I'm starting him."

This is what [I wrote](#) about Stroman on June 6, 2014 after his second start:

"When Stroman received his second call-up I extremely anxious to see him pitch as a starter. After the start I said he would be a top 40 starting pitcher the rest of the year if he stayed in the rotation. Friday's start wasn't as impressive as the first start (which is expected considering the quality of teams he faced), but it was still really good. The primary reason why the second start wasn't as good was because the slider didn't have the same bite to it. About half balls in play he allowed have been fly balls, which is due to his height. Playing the Rogres Centre and being a fly ball pitcher isn't ideal, but I think his fastball command is good enough to limit how many balls leave the yard. Overall, he has elite level stuff and has shown really good command and I'm sticking by my original evaluation of a top 40 starting pitcher."

Between Stroman, Gausman and Bauer the pitcher who will likely have the most fantasy value in 2015 is likely going to be Stroman. The biggest reason is his command is at least a full grade higher than the other two pitchers. Also, important to note as a starter (20 starts) he had a 3.29 ERA, 1.15 WHIP with a 21.1% strikeout rate and 5.5% walk rate.

Masahiro Tanaka

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Yankees | Position: SP | RK: (25) | Player Rater: ESPN (27), NFBC (49)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2014	MLB	25	136.3	13	141	2.77	1.06	26.0%	3.9%	0.299	79.5%	19.0%	21.0%	48.4%
Proj.			200	11	197	3.35	1.16							

By the time you are reading this we probably will not know the 2014 status of **Masahiro Tanaka**. He could pitch five innings or he could pitch 200. Either one of those scenarios are possible. Heading into March we have a much better idea of his health. Tanaka has a [partially torn UCL in his elbow](#) and it's possible for him to pitch with it. **Ervin Santana** has had a partially torn UCL for a couple of years and he's been able to keep pitching.

Julio Teheran

Throws: R | Age: 24 | Team: Braves | Position: SP | RK: (30) | Player Rater: ESPN (13), NFBC (15)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	AAA	21	131	7	97	5.08	1.44	16.8%	7.5%	0.318	68.8%	13.6%	31.4%	37.5%
2013	MLB	22	185.7	14	170	3.20	1.17	22.0%	5.8%	0.288	80.9%	14.4%	28.0%	39.4%
2014	MLB	23	221	14	186	2.89	1.08	21.0%	5.8%	0.267	75.9%	12.3%	27.8%	37.3%
Proj.			210	12	170	3.40	1.12							

Despite two years in a row of sub-3.20 ERAs and his high prospect ranking I'm still not buying **Julio Teheran**. The reason why is I have a hard time trusting pitchers who are fly ball pitchers and have had good luck on their side. By good luck I mean he's had below average BABIPs, HR/FB rates and strand rates the last two seasons, which has led to his ERAs to be far above his respective FIPs and xFIPs.

Mark Bowman at MLB.com [wrote](#) how the slider emerged in 2014, but the stats don't support it. The table below shows his performance of the slider the past two seasons.

Year	AVG	OPS	K%	BB%
2013	.169	.623	35.3%	3.8%
2014	.202	.544	33.0%	2.2%

The fact he's a low walk and fly ball pitcher works really well for him considering his home ballpark so I shouldn't have a bias about Teheran's ability to continue to repeat the numbers he put up the past two seasons.

The most recent case of a pitcher with a similar profile as Teheran is **Jeremy Hellickson**. Hellickson, is a fly ball pitcher, had extremely good BABIPs, HR/FB rates and strand rates from 2011-12. He defied the odds by consistently putting up ERAs below his FIP and xFIP. However, in 2013 Hellickson's good luck ran out.

Teheran is a better pitcher than Hellickson. First and most importantly, Teheran misses more bats because his stuff is much better. However, they still both rely on generating weak contact in order to get outs and for me, that's not a profile I want to pay top dollar for.

It's important how the offense was inept last year and how it's going to continue next year. In eight losses of his losses last season, the Braves scored a total of nine runs and were shut out three times. As

of late December I have serious questions of the Braves offense will score runs. Last year they were 27th in the majors in wOBA and 29th in runs scored. Now they lost **Justin Upton**, **Evan Gattis** and **Tommy LaStella** and replaced them with **Nick Markakis** and **Alberto Callaspo**. At the very least I don't think the offense is going to be even better so it's possible Teheran will struggle to earn wins.

Chris Tillman

Throws: R | Age: 26 | Team: Orioles | Position: SP | RK: (58) | Player Rater: ESPN (44), NFBC (40)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	24	86	9	66	2.93	1.05	19.0%	6.9%	0.221	71.4%	12.6%	37.1%	35.5%
2013	MLB	25	206.3	16	179	3.71	1.22	21.2%	8.0%	0.269	80.5%	18.6%	29.7%	40.5%
2014	MLB	26	207.3	13	150	3.34	1.23	17.2%	7.6%	0.267	76.7%	12.1%	26.8%	42.0%
Proj.			200	13	160	3.65	1.23							

Other than the month of May **Chris Tillman** was very good (table below). He struggled in May, but it's possible a [groin issue](#) contributed to the poor numbers. I have a strong belief it really [affected him](#) during his start on May 21. If you didn't click on the last link the cliff notes version of is he was throwing batting practice fastballs and looked awful.

Splits	ERA	WHIP
April	3.38	1.25
May	5.68	1.53
June	3.10	1.38
July	3.41	1.24
August	1.33	0.79
September	3.23	1.27

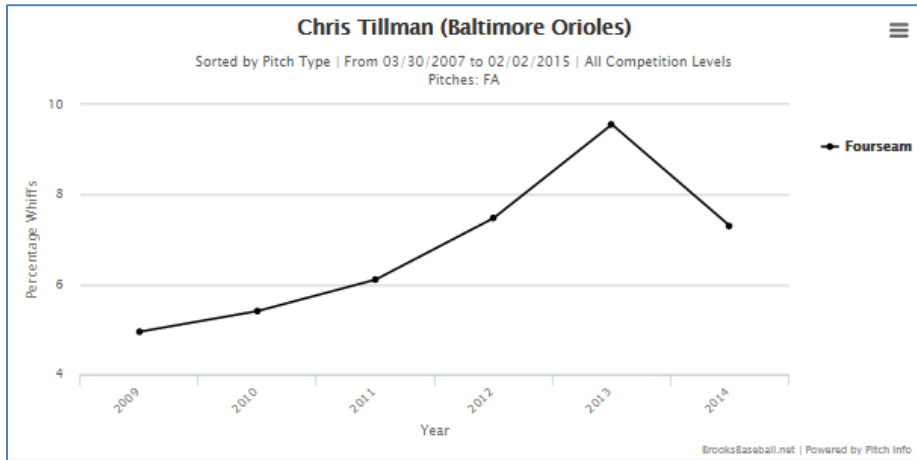
Tillman's biggest problem is settling into a grove at the beginning of games. The table below breaks down his performance by inning in 2014 (small sample caveat). I don't know if that's something that can be easily corrected, but I'm sure the Orioles are aware of it.

Splits	IP	ERA	BA	OPS
1st inning	34	5.56	.267	.805
2nd inning	32	4.78	.319	.886
3rd inning	32	3.38	.268	.671
4th inning	32	2.25	.226	.601
5th inning	31.2	2.27	.184	.544
6th inning	24	2.25	.182	.589
7th inning	15.1	2.93	.151	.445

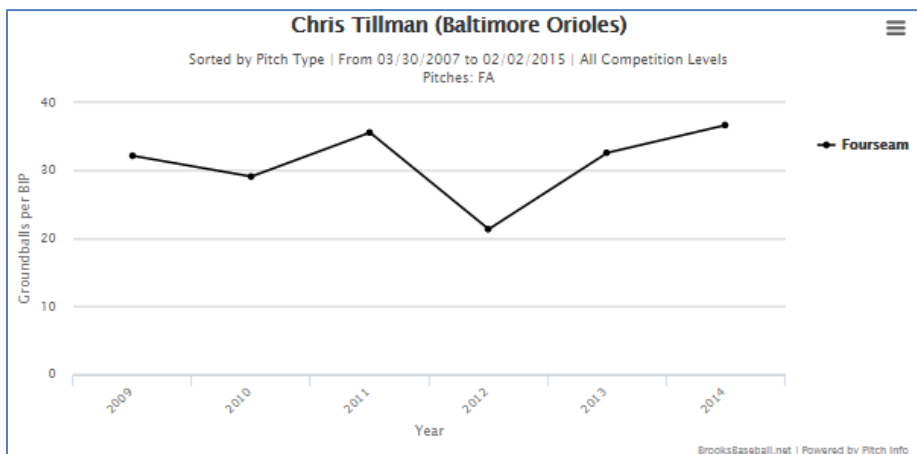
Every year Tillman is regarded as a regression candidate because he's had three extremely low BABIPs

and high strand rates, but he's done this for three years now. It's possible he'll have a 2013 **Jeremy Hellickson** type season where all that good luck runs out in one fell swoop.

What I'm more concerned about is the four percentage drop in strikeout rate. The biggest change I saw was he opted to induce more contact (i.e. ground balls) with the fastball than swings and misses. The image below (from BrooksBaseball.net) shows the whiff percentage of the fastball by year.



The second image below shows his ground ball per ball-in-play (from BrooksBaseball.net).



Overall trying to get outs by inducing more weak contact rather than the strikeout is a good adjustment especially because of the home ballpark, but it lowers his fantasy viability heading into 2015. Last year I said he should be owned in 10-team mixed leagues, but if he's only going to strikeout 17-18% of batters he's a backend starter in 12-team mixed leagues.

Jason Vargas

Throws: L | Age: 32 | Team: Royals | Position: SP | RK: (100) | Player Rater: ESPN (80), NFBC (81)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	217.3	14	141	3.85	1.18	15.9%	6.2%	0.254	78.6%	16.4%	31.0%	41.7%
2013	MLB	30	150	9	109	4.02	1.39	16.9%	7.1%	0.31	76.6%	13.7%	25.6%	41.7%
2014	MLB	31	187	11	128	3.71	1.27	16.2%	5.2%	0.299	74.5%	12.1%	25.5%	40.8%
Proj.			190	12	120	4.20	1.27							

Jason Vargas is a soft throwing lefty who pitches to contact. His fastball sits in the mid-80s and even though his stuff can be very homer prone, he's able to limit the number of home runs by consistently throwing the changeup to keep batters off balance.

Last year he had a 2.73 ERA on the road with a 1.26 WHIP. At home it was a 4.53 ERA and 1.28 WHIP. The road ERA is not going to repeat itself and he'll likely finish the 2015 season with an ERA north of 4.10.

Yordano Ventura

Throws: R | Age: 23 | Team: Royals | Position: SP | RK: (85) | Player Rater: ESPN (48), NFBC (38)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	57.7	3	74	2.34	1.02	32.2%	8.7%	0.279	78.2%	7.0%	32.6%	43.2%
2013	AAA	22	77	5	81	3.74	1.47	24.3%	9.9%	0.357	73.4%	5.2%	35.5%	41.9%
2014	MLB	23	183	14	159	3.20	1.30	20.3%	8.8%	0.288	77.3%	12.2%	20.9%	48.5%
Proj.			190	11	150	3.64	1.30							

I was huge believer of **Yordano Ventura** when he was named the [fifth starter out of Spring Training](#). I was such a big believer I said he would be a top 30 starting pitcher and would be the AL Rookie of the year. Obviously I was overly optimistic about his projection, but the reason why I was optimistic was because his raw stuff is so good.

Before I dive into the statistical analysis there are some red flags entering 2015. The first is he threw 208 innings between the regular season and post season, a gigantic leap in innings from the previous year (he threw 150 innings). Ventura is not a big man; he's listed at 6'0 and 180 pounds, but I would say he's 5'10-11. Either way he doesn't have a body for high workloads. Now that doesn't mean he can't handle high workloads, but it's still a concern.

The second is on May 26 he left the game with [elbow discomfort](#), but he never landed on the DL and only missed nine games. Even though his ERA was better after that incident his underlying statistics show he wasn't the same pitcher. The table below shows his statistics before and after leaving the game on May 26 (there is a small sample caveat because the "Before" sample is only ten starts).

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
Before	3.45	1.26	0.297	24.3%	7.3%	11.8%	77.4%
After	3.08	1.31	0.286	18.6%	9.3%	6.5%	77.3%

That 18.6% strikeout rate may not seem very small, but that puts him in the same company as **Dan Haren, Travis Wood** and **Jake Peavy** among starting pitchers. He's has an elite fastball, an above average curveball and at least an average changeup. So it's kind of baffling his strikeout rate was so low. The only conclusion I can make of this is he's still learning how to pitch, to sequence and to get hitters out three times through a lineup. As time goes on he'll improve and he has a chance to be a fantasy monster in the future.

What also could have played a role in the low strikeout rate was poor command. His 8.8% walk rate was the 12th highest among qualified starting pitchers last year. The walks didn't hurt him because he had a 77.3% strand rate, but if the walks do not subside his numbers are going to head south fast.

I still believe in Ventura long term, but I think he's going to be overrated heading into drafts. His lack of strikeouts and high walk rate scare me. He is the type of player I don't miss on if he breaks out because there's a lot of downside if he doesn't make the necessary steps to improve.

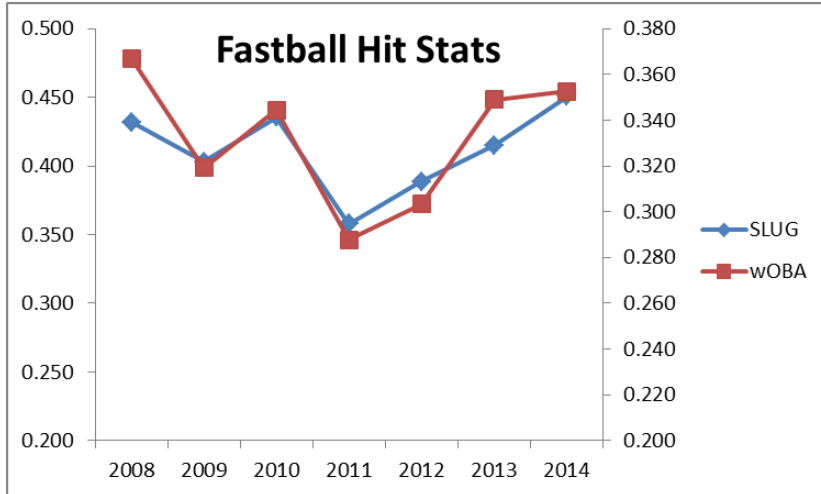
Justin Verlander

Throws: R | Age: 32 | Team: Tigers | Position: SP | RK: (60) | Player Rater: ESPN (107), NFBC (100)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	238.3	17	239	2.64	1.06	25.0%	6.3%	0.273	76.4%	10.7%	27.3%	43.3%
2013	MLB	30	218.3	13	217	3.46	1.31	23.5%	8.1%	0.316	74.5%	11.2%	26.9%	39.7%
2014	MLB	31	206	15	159	4.54	1.4	17.8%	7.3%	0.317	66.8%	10.5%	25.8%	41.1%
Proj.			200	14	175	3.74	1.32							

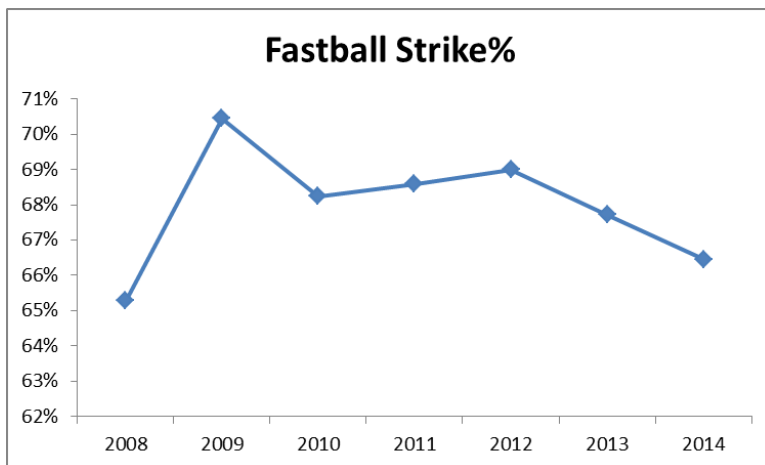
Before evaluating **Justin Verlander's** 2014 season it's important to remember he had core-muscle repair surgery after the 2013 season. Therefore, it's possible he was never 100% last year. This offseason he gets to train and condition himself without any restrictions.

There's been a lot of hubbub about Verlander's diminished velocity, but the numbers don't bear that out. The image below shows his slugging and wOBA against the fastball since 2008.



The first thing you'll notice is he's on a bad trend since 2011, but batters were squaring him up at the same rate from 2008 and 2010 and his numbers weren't as bad as 2014s. Okay, maybe 2008s were, but the average of those seasons were much better than 2014s numbers.

One of the big problems I saw with Verlander was fastball command. The image below shows the percentage of fastballs that were thrown for strikes since 2008. The first thing I noticed was he's been throwing far less strikes with the fastball and in fact it was nearly at the same level as his 2008 season, which he coincidentally had a 4.84 ERA and 1.40 WHIP (those numbers do not look all that different than his 2014 numbers).



Another troubling trend is the overall performance of his secondary pitches (table below). The poor performance could be due to the lack of fastball command, but he lacked command in 2008 and his secondary offerings still missed a lot of bats.

Splits	SLUG	BABIP	K%	BB%	WHIFF%
2008	0.297	0.293	33.2%	2.7%	30.4%
2009	0.314	0.31	37.4%	2.0%	31.7%
2010	0.207	0.241	35.1%	3.2%	31.1%
2011	0.269	0.247	35.7%	2.0%	32.7%
2012	0.283	0.277	29.2%	4.3%	31.5%
2013	0.342	0.314	27.8%	4.0%	27.5%
2014	0.409	0.318	19.5%	5.1%	22.7%

Bad fastball command can put hitters in good hitters counts which means they can sit on the fastball and not chance the curveball down in the dirt. Doug Thorburn wrote that Verlander's biggest problem has been finding [mechanical consistency](#) with his delivery. The numbers don't look promising, but he's still in a small class of pitchers who could literally finish the year as the number one rated fantasy pitcher.

Edinson Volquez

Throws: R | Age: 31 | Team: Padres | Position: SP | RK: (103) | Player Rater: ESPN (38), NFBC (31)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	28	182.7	11	174	4.14	1.45	21.7%	13.1%	0.292	73.1%	11.4%	23.9%	51.9%
2013	MLB	29	170.3	9	142	5.71	1.59	18.3%	9.9%	0.325	64.5%	16.1%	21.3%	49.0%
2014	MLB	30	192.7	13	140	3.04	1.23	17.3%	8.8%	0.263	77.5%	14.3%	20.4%	53.1%
Proj.			180	10	139	4.01	1.33							

When I look at **Edinson Volquez's** statistics I know he had good results, but I don't think they are going to be repeated in 2015. Both his BABIP and strand rates were extremely less than his career rate so regression is going to occur. The biggest question is how much will he regress?

In 2014, with the [help of the Pirates coaching staff](#), Volquez changed his approach. Instead of being a strikeout pitcher he became a pitch-to-contact and ground ball pitcher. Instead of throwing a four seam fastball he opted to throw a two-seamer. He also started throwing the curveball, which he used to generate ground balls too. It's also not a surprise he had a career low strikeout rate and walk rate.

After a lengthy injury history Volquez has been able to throw at least 170 innings the past three seasons. He will get an opportunity to pitch in front of one of the top five defenses in the majors (probably will be top three) and in one of the best pitcher's parks. However, he's not going to have the benefit of pitching to one of the best pitch framers in baseball (**Russell Martin**). Also, he's not going to have the same coaching staff that helped enable Volquez to perform so much better.

For the past two seasons he has been a pitch-to-contact and ground ball pitcher. Therefore, I believe this is who he is. For the past two seasons he has a 4.29 ERA and 1.40 WHIP and this almost represents his true talent level. I think he's a little better, but that's about it.

Michael Wacha

Throws: R | Age: 23 | Team: Cardinals | Position: SP | RK: (105) | Player Rater: ESPN (97), NFBC (122)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	21	85	5	73	2.65	0.99	21.9%	5.7%	0.241	81.2%	10.3%	36.1%	37.8%
2013	MLB	21	64.7	4	65	2.78	1.10	25.0%	7.3%	0.275	79.7%	11.9%	23.9%	46.0%
2014	MLB	22	107	5	94	3.20	1.20	21.0%	7.4%	0.288	73.8%	9.7%	19.7%	44.1%
Proj.			140	7	100	3.14	1.16							

The question with **Michael Wacha** is health because when's he's out there he's very good. In 34 Major League starts he has a 3.04 ERA, 1.16 WHIP, 22.5% strikeout rate and 7.4% walk rate. Last year he missed 68 games with a stress fracture in his shoulder. He made four starts at the end of the year and he wasn't the same pitcher (5.40 ERA, 1.62 WHIP with a 9.2% walk rate and only a 14.5% strikeout rate.

Stuart Wallace wrote an [amazing piece](#) about how rare Wacha's injury was and his long term viability moving forward. Based on his report I'm not optimistic about Wacha throwing more than 150 innings next year.

Adam Wainwright

Throws: R | Age: 33 | Team: Cardinals | Position: SP | RK: (14) | Player Rater: ESPN (5), NFBC (5)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	30	198.7	14	184	3.94	1.25	22.1%	6.3%	0.315	67.8%	12.0%	21.2%	52.0%
2013	MLB	31	241.7	19	219	2.94	1.07	22.9%	3.7%	0.305	74.5%	13.5%	15.9%	50.3%
2014	MLB	32	227	20	179	2.38	1.03	19.9%	5.6%	0.267	78.0%	8.3%	18.3%	48.8%
Proj.			190	15	170	3.15	1.10							

After a bad postseason and a lack of bite to **Adam Wainwright's** stuff, which was due to [elbow tendinitis and discomfort](#) and ultimately required surgery (specifically, to [trim the cartilage in his elbow](#)). The Cardinals are saying he should be ready for Spring Training.

He starting having elbow issues in June but the statistics do not indicate he was struggling. From June until the regular season he posted a 2.41 ERA, 1.10 WHIP with a 17.2% strikeout rate and 5.8% walk rate. The 17.2% strikeout rate was the lowest of his career since 2008. So even though the raw statistics looked good he wasn't the same pitcher we've been accustomed to seeing.

Looking at his overall 2014 numbers his BABIP was almost 30 points lower than his career mark and his strand rate was three percentage points higher than his career rate.

Overall, I have many questions such as how healthy will he be at the start of the season? Will he be able to play a full season? If he is healthy what kind of pitcher is going to be? If he's only striking out 17% of

hitters he may not even have 160 strikeouts. He'll likely be drafted as a fantasy ace, but if I'm drafting an ace I want 200-plus strikeouts and I do not know if Wainwright will be able to provide that.

Taijuan Walker

Throws: R | Age: 23 | Team: Mariners | Position: SP | RK: (78) | Player Rater: ESPN (137), NFBC (191)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	20	57.3	5	64	3.61	1.41	26.0%	11.0%	0.331	76.3%	10.6%	30.7%	49.0%
2014	AAA	21	73	6	74	4.81	1.27	23.5%	7.9%	0.281	73.3%	16.9%	36.8%	37.3%
2014	MLB	21	38	2	34	2.61	1.29	21.3%	11.3%	0.282	81.3%	10.5%	18.1%	48.6%
Proj.			170	10	145	3.59	1.19							

Taijuan Walker didn't make his return to the majors until early July (he was on the DL with a [right shoulder strain](#)) and this is what I said after I saw his first start:

"Yesterday [I wrote](#) I wasn't very optimistic about Taijuan Walker's 2014 fantasy value due the lack of a quality secondary pitch other than the cutter. After watching his start against the Astros my feelings about him are the same. He struggled with his fastball command throughout the entire game and was pitching behind in the count a lot. In fact, both of the home runs he allowed were on fastballs in 2-0 counts.

In the beginning of the game he threw more curveballs than change-ups. In the first two innings he was able to snap off 3-5 curveballs for strikes, but after that he couldn't throw it for strikes. After the third inning he only threw a couple curveballs and started throwing more change-ups, which like the curveball he couldn't throw for strikes consistently.

Walker throws his fastball with veracity (the velocity was in the 94-96 mph range), but if his command continues to be as loose as last night he's not going to be able to exploit the fastball as a true weapon. Last year his command was below average and if he doesn't get better command of either his fastball or his change-up/curveball, he's going to be a stream-only option in 12-team mixed leagues. If he has good fastball command, his fastball is good enough that he can get away with a get-me-over curveball and change-up. However, if his fastball command isn't there he's not going to be successful long term."

What's funny is he didn't throw his cutter, his second best pitch, [that much last year](#). Instead he opted to throw the curveball and changeup more. I looked at the game logs and those numbers were not skewed by his three relief appearances. He has the pedigree to make a giant leap next year if he's healthy, but he is still a work in progress.

Jered Weaver

Throws: R | Age: 32 | Team: Angels | Position: SP | RK: (54) | Player Rater: ESPN (32), NFBC (27)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	29	188.7	20	142	2.81	1.02	19.2%	6.1%	0.241	79.2%	10.4%	35.2%	37.2%
2013	MLB	30	154.3	11	117	3.27	1.14	18.5%	5.8%	0.268	78.5%	11.5%	31.3%	32.1%
2014	MLB	31	213.3	18	169	3.59	1.21	19.0%	7.3%	0.267	78.2%	14.2%	29.3%	35.0%
Proj.			200	14	167	3.89	1.23							

Every year I think **Jered Weaver** is going to fall off significantly and every year he continues to perform well. Since 2009 Weaver has outperformed his FIP and xFIP, which is most likely due to the fact he has incredibly low BABIPs and high strand rates. He's also been able to take the ball every fifth day. If he didn't [fracture a bone](#) in his left elbow (on a freak play) he would have started at least 30 games since 2008.

He was able to put up last year's numbers despite walking batters at a rate that hasn't been produced since 2009 and allowing the most contact on pitches in the strike zone in his career (my data only goes back to 2008). His track record speaks for itself, but I cannot believe he'll continue to have success allowing more contact and walking so many batters. Luckily for me he'll likely be drafted based on last year's numbers and his historical track record so I won't have to make a tough decision later in drafts.

Zack Wheeler

Throws: R | Age: 25 | Team: Mets | Position: SP | RK: (53) | Player Rater: ESPN (65), NFBC (61)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AAA	23	68.7	4	73	3.93	1.28	25.1%	9.3%	0.289	71.1%	15.0%	31.7%	42.3%
2013	MLB	23	100	7	84	3.42	1.36	19.5%	10.7%	0.279	77.8%	14.3%	23.6%	45.1%
2014	MLB	24	185.3	11	187	3.54	1.33	23.6%	9.9%	0.304	72.9%	16.1%	16.8%	55.3%
Proj.			200	12	195	3.55	1.31							

Last year I wasn't a **Zack Wheeler** believer because of his inconsistent command from batter to batter in his brief showcase in 2013. Specifically, I thought he walked way too many batters and the fact his proclivity to have long at-bats against 7-8-9 batters. Wheeler's stuff is so good he should be able to get those hitters out 1-3 pitches. Obviously he's a young pitcher and there will always be ups and downs, but he was still making this mistake at the end of the 2014 season.

At the start of 2014 he changed his delivery for the better. He reduced some of the movement in his delivery, which helped him make his delivery more repeatable. This alteration helped, but he still struggled with the walks. Last year he was 4th in the majors in walks allowed.

When I see him pitch I still only see a thrower and not a pitcher. From start to start I saw him make the same mistakes over and over again, which isn't atypical for a young pitcher. An example of this was he would always struggle throwing the fastball on the outer half of the plate to righties. Another example is

in two strike counts he would throw the slider down in the dirt to try to get batters to swing and miss, which batters wouldn't do. The reason is hitters know it's going to be a ball when the ball leaves the hand.

The positive takeaway is all of these things are correctable. The question is can he make the necessary adjustments. He has stuff for days; the fastball sits in the mid-90s and can reach 98-99 mph; the curveball and slider that can miss bats on both sides of the plate.

Some fantasy owners may be swayed by his second half numbers, but upon closer inspection it looks like he got lucky with the ERA because the walk rate and strike percentage were essentially the same as the first half.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%	Strk%
1st Half	3.90	1.36	.323	22.9%	10.0%	8.8%	70.8%	61.6%
2nd Half	3.04	1.29	.285	24.4%	9.8%	11.7%	75.9%	60.9%

Wheeler has the upside to be a top 20 fantasy pitcher if everything clicks, but from what I saw last year I don't see that happening. I am very curious to see what he his ADP is entering drafts in 2015. My guess is he'll likely be drafted in the 40-50 range in mixed leagues, which is too high for me because the likelihood of him putting it all together is less than 25%. If he slips to the 60s I'll gladly roll the dice.

C.J. Wilson

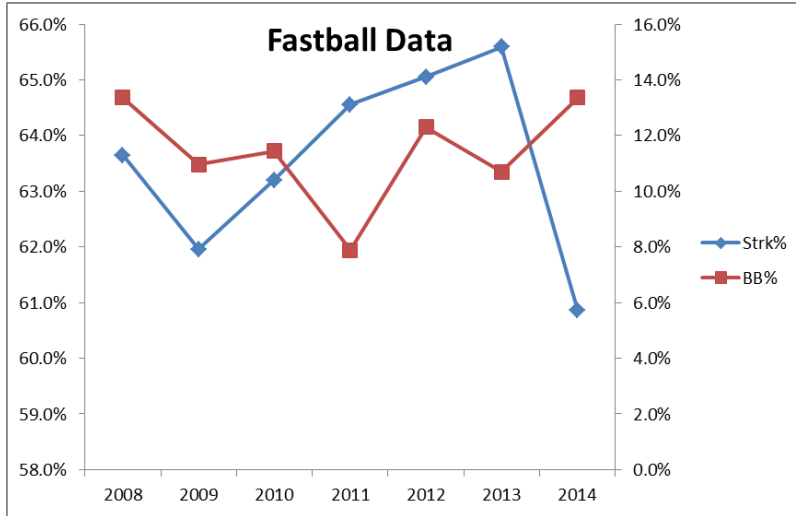
Throws: L | Age: 34 | Team: Angels | Position: SP | RK: (75) | Player Rater: ESPN (119), NFBC (132)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	31	202.3	13	173	3.83	1.34	20.0%	10.5%	0.281	70.0%	12.5%	25.5%	50.4%
2013	MLB	32	212.3	17	188	3.39	1.34	20.6%	9.3%	0.3	73.5%	9.6%	24.8%	45.6%
2014	MLB	33	175.7	13	151	4.51	1.45	19.8%	11.2%	0.306	70.5%	15.6%	21.2%	49.4%
Proj.			190	13	175	3.90	1.35							

It was a tale of two seasons for **C.J. Wilson**. For the first two months he was great, but after that he was awful (table below). When the year ended he led the league in walks and finished with the third worst WHIP among all qualified starter pitchers.

Splits	ERA	WHIP	BABIP	K%	BB%	HR/FB	LOB%
April-May	3.05	1.11	.260	22.6%	8.9%	11.3%	78.6%
June-Oct.	5.64	1.71	.339	18.0%	12.7%	11.1%	66.5%

The biggest reason why he struggled was fastball command. The image below compares the strike percentage and walk rate on the fastball. The first thing you'll notice is he had a career low strike percentage last year.



He's always had command issues, but in the past he was able to be so successful because of the high ground ball rate and strikeout rate. He has a long enough track record to suggest he should regress in 2015. He's going to play on a good team so he'll have a better chance to earn wins than other pitcher. Based on where he's going I would take a chance on Wilson in deeper mixed leagues. If he struggles with his fastball command to begin the year you can drop him and move on. If the fastball command looks good at worst he's streamable pitcher.

Alex Wood

Throws: L | Age: 24 | Team: Braves | Position: SP | RK: (37) | Player Rater: ESPN (30), NFBC (24)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2013	AA	22	57	4	57	1.26	0.98	25.1%	6.6%	0.261	84.5%	2.9%	22.7%	55.8%
2013	MLB	22	77.7	3	77	3.13	1.33	23.5%	8.3%	0.333	75.2%	7.1%	18.9%	50.5%
2014	MLB	23	171.7	11	170	2.78	1.14	24.5%	6.5%	0.295	80.2%	13.8%	24.5%	48.0%
Proj.			190	11	179	3.40	1.15							

No other pitcher had more conflicted forecasts, projections and evaluations than **Alex Wood**. On one hand I do not like how he throws a baseball. When I see him pitch it looks like his arm is going to blow off into the stands. I have no idea how he can throw strikes consistently because I don't know how he's able to consistently to throw strikes.

On the other hand he's been extremely successful for the past two seasons. The table below shows his Major League statistics as a starting pitcher. Last year he was a top 30 starting pitcher in mixed leagues and threw 180 innings between the minors and majors last year.

IP	ERA	WHIP	AVG	K%	BB%
212.3	2.84	1.19	0.243	23.50%	7.00%

The major improvement last year was the curveball got a lot better and he was able to throw it for more strikes while missing a lot of bats. The table below shows the strikeout rate and the percentage of strikes with the curveball.

Splits	K%	Strk%
2013	45.50%	50.0%
2014	43.50%	62.4%

The reason why I mentioned the curveball was because coming up through the minors he was a two-pitch pitcher (fastball and changeup). The lack of a third pitch and funky mechanics suppressed his name on prospect lists coming through the minors because his profile suggested he was going to be a reliever. Since the curveball has emerged as a legitimate third pitch he now has a good chance of having another solid season as a starting pitcher.

In regards to last year’s statistics there's no way he's going to have an 80% strand rate again so there is going some negative regression. However, when evaluating any left handed starter I always look at the lefty-righty splits because a lot of times lefties struggle to get righties out.

Splits	K%	Strk%
2013	45.5%	50.0%
2014	43.5%	62.4%

His numbers suggest he should be able to get righties out so the last major concern I have is how many wins will he have if he has 30 starts? Other than **Craig Kimbrel** I have major questions about their bullpen. Currently their seventh and eighth inning relievers are **Jim Johnson** and **Jason Grilli**. Maybe both these pitchers regress, but I do not want these pitchers pitching high leverage situations. Also, I believe the Braves offense is going to be bad; in fact they’re going to score least number of runs in the NL. Therefore, it’s going to be hard for any Braves starting pitcher to have more than 11-12 wins next year.

Chris Young

Throws: R | Age: 36 | Team: | Position: SP | RK: (113) | Player Rater: ESPN (73), NFBC (68)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2011	MLB	32	24	1	22	1.88	0.96	23.2%	11.6%	0.155	96.0%	11.1%	44.3%	21.3%
2012	MLB	33	115	4	80	4.15	1.35	16.2%	7.3%	0.287	73.6%	10.7%	39.7%	25.3%
2014	MLB	35	165	12	108	3.65	1.23	15.7%	8.7%	0.238	80.2%	14.1%	35.6%	25.0%
Proj.			115	6	70	4.70	1.33							

At the beginning of the season I wasn’t buying **Chris Young** because the last time he played in the majors was 2012 and he was constantly injured since 2008. To my surprise he was able to make 29 starts and he performed very well for most of the season. In September he fell off dramatically, posing a 8.59 ERA and 1.91 WHIP.

As of mid-February Young doesn't have a team. Eventually he'll sign with a team and the question is should fantasy owners roster him? If he plays in a cavernous home ballpark I can see him as a streaming option because he is a fly ball heavy pitcher. In regards to his 2014 statistics he was incredibly lucky last year as he had an incredibly low .238 BABIP and 80.2% strand rate. Both of those numbers are going to regress significantly in 2015 (even if he resigns with the Mariners).

Jordan Zimmermann

Throws: R | Age: 29 | Team: Nationals | Position: SP | RK: (11) | Player Rater: ESPN (12), NFBC (13)

YEAR	LVL	AGE	IP	W	SO	ERA	WHIP	SO%	BB%	BABIP	LOB%	HR/FB	FB%	GB%
2012	MLB	26	195.7	12	153	2.94	1.17	19.0%	5.3%	0.288	79.3%	12.1%	24.8%	44.1%
2013	MLB	27	213.3	19	161	3.25	1.09	18.6%	4.6%	0.271	74.4%	13.9%	20.9%	49.3%
2014	MLB	28	199.7	14	182	2.66	1.07	22.8%	3.6%	0.302	75.8%	12.3%	18.2%	42.0%
Proj.			200	14	175	2.89	1.10							

In last year's guide I wasn't buying **Jordan Zimmerman** as a top 20 starting pitcher because his below average strikeout totals would do more harm than good especially if you he was the ace of your pitching staff (for the record, other than the strikeout totals he would have been a top 10-15 pitcher in last year's fantasy guide). Well, after three straight years of sub-19% strikeout rates he increased it to 22.8% in 2014. The question is will the new strikeout rate repeat itself in 2015?

Zimmerman, like **David Price** and **Phil Hughes**, changed his approach and became more a strike thrower. Last year Zimmerman was second among starters with at least 20 starts in strike percentage.

Last year he threw the fastball 71% of the time, which is easily the most in his career. The fastball is the reason for the uptick in strikeout rate.

Last year he started throwing the fastball up in the zone more often and was able to get more swings and misses. From 2011-13 he threw the fastball up in the zone 43% of the time, but last year it was 48.6%. From 2011-13 he has 21.4% strikeout rate on fastballs up in the zone and last year it was 24%. Barring any major decrease in fastball velocity he should be able to maintain the heavy fastball approach and he should be able to repeat last year's strikeout rate.

Extremely Helpful Resources & Acknowledgements

I watch a good amount of baseball, but not nearly enough to watch every player. And frankly, other folks are smarter than me. I couldn't have written the fantasy guide without help from other extremely helpful resources. Below are the websites, books, and other source material that helped me create my fantasy guide.

Websites

BrooksBaseball.net
 BaseballProspectus.com
 FanGraphs.com
 Baseball-Reference.com
 BaseballAnalytics.org
 BaseballAmerica.com
 BaseballProf.com
 RotoWire.com
 ESPN.com
 MLB.tv
 Mastersball.com
 BaseballHQ.com
 NFBC.Stats.com
 MLBDepthCharts.com
 RotoPass.com
 MockDraftCentral.com
 BillJamesOnline.com
 ThroughTheFenceBaseball.com
 StatCorner.com
 HitTrackerOnline.com

Podcasts

Up & In
 The Baseball Show with Rany and Joe
 Effectively Wild
 Baseball Today
 Fantasy Focus
 Behind the Dish
 Productive Outs
 Towers of Power
 Dear Mr. Fantasy Podcast
 Baseball America Podcasts
 Pine Tar Podcast

Books/Written Material

Joe Sheehan's Newsletter
 Baseball America Prospect Handbook
 Larry Schechter's Winning Fantasy Baseball
 Baseball Prospectus Extra Inning