

## Major Overhaul has LA feeling blue heading into April 2005



**4. Los Angeles Dodgers:** Make no mistake about it, the Dodgers surprised us all, including myself by winning the 2004 NL West division. Will they do it again? I highly doubt it and for a number of reasons. First of all, just about every off-season decision they made I disagree with on so many levels. LA had a good young nucleus and Paul DePodesta broke most of it up. It really could come back to bite him, the franchise and everyone involved.

The Dodgers are going to have trouble hitting outside of the #1, 3, 4 and 5 spots. Hitting in the #2 hole is outfielder Jayson Werth, an ex-Toronto Blue Jay. Werth batted .262 with 16 homers and 47 runs driven in last year. He's a decent player defensively and played his best baseball at home. On the corners I don't think Jose Valentin, who can hit for power but makes an abundant amount of errors, and Hee Seop Choi are the answers. They definitely do not look like the answers when you talk about catching the baseball. Cesar Izturis (32 doubles) is such a rock when it comes to defense; Gold Glove preseason favorite at shortstop in the National League if you ask me (would be his second consecutive). Not only does he do that, but he's gotten better with the bat in his hands. Izturis drove in 62 runs from the leadoff spot, stole 25 bags, hit .288, and had nine triples in 670 at-bats.



**Dodgers closer Eric Gagne is the most feared 9<sup>th</sup> inning pitcher now that John Smoltz is back in the rotation for Atlanta.**

As mentioned earlier, they are fine with Izturis, J.D. Drew (if he decides to show up and play baseball - which was not the case in St. Louis), Kent and Milton Bradley. Hazardous personalities - those two words describe Bradley and Drew to a tee. Bradley tends to lose it every now and then, while Drew tried to shed the label of 'I play when I want to and as hard as I want to' with Atlanta in '04. Worked pretty well, as the lefty outfielder hit .305, 31 homers, 93RBI, 12 steals, and was kind of the MVP for Atlanta in replacing ex-Dodger/Marlin/Brave Gary Sheffield. Judging by their production last year and will to play hard, I don't think Tracy will let these Dodgers sink back to where they were prior to 2004. Having that said, this lineup is not overly potent by any stretch of the

imagination. There are tough outs, but one of them is not #8 batter Jason Phillips - a nice guy that can help AAA teams and do something coming off the bench. Phillips does not hit like Mike Piazza, Paul Lo Duca or other former Dodgers catchers. Don't believe me? Go ask the Mets, who saw him hit .218 in 118 games last season. All they are asking him to do is hit over .230 and give them about 14-19 home runs this year and they will have gotten everything out them that they want.

Looking at the pitching staff it does not look like the same one that exceeded past expectations. There's no Hideo Nomo or Kevin Brown, but the real kicker is losing Jose Lima. Lima-time was really starting to fit in with the Dodgers and becoming a fan favorite. In fact, he was the only real guy that showed up in the postseason, fanning a bunch of Cardinals in Game 3 of the NLDS. Left-handed starter Odalis Perez was retained in the off-season, and rightfully so. Since joining the Dodgers in 2002, Perez has won 34 games and K'd at least 125 batters in each of the past three seasons. More than anything what he has done is get a lead to closer Eric Gagne, who is lights out and as unhittable as any closer in baseball. Jeff Weaver... he was decent going 13-13 with an ERA around 4.00. Many, including myself, still wonder can Weaver be a legit #1 or #2 come postseason time. Probably not, and it's always in the realm that he goes ice cold and pitches his way out of the rotation. Kaz Ishii's 13 wins from last year are gone after dealing him to acquire Phillips. Derek Lowe was very low before the postseason as he had some bad starts against your ordinary teams like the Orioles and your better teams such as the Yankees and Angels. Brad Penny now has the opportunity to be the ace of a staff - which he's wanted. **The Most underrated loss for the Dodgers besides Lima will be Guillermo Mota, the team's outstanding setup man for the past couple of seasons.**

**Bottom Line: The bottom line with this baseball team is they got rid of Adrian Beltre, who had a career year in 2004, and got Jeff Kent, a traditional clubhouse problem child. Also gone are Shawn Green, Jose Lima, Steve Finley and others. You are not going to win more than 93 games, period. Heck, this franchise would settle for 83 wins after Kent, Derek Lowe and J.D. Drew, all of which have either been unreliable throughout their career or a cancer in the locker room (i.e. Kent), big dollars.**

**Projected Order: SS Cesar Izturis  
LF Jayson Werth  
RF J.D. Drew  
2B Jeff Kent  
CF Milton Bradley  
1B Hee Seop Choi  
3B Jose Valentin  
C Jason Phillips**

**Projected Staff: R Brad Penny  
L Odalis Perez  
R Derek Lowe  
R Jeff Weaver  
R Edwin Jackson/L Wilson Alvarez**

*Pick: 4<sup>th</sup> in the NL West; finish 2-3 games back of Arizona for third place*