

**MLB Season Picks:**  
**BY MATTHEW HATFIELD – Monday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2005**  
**In-depth team previews in later weeks on [www.matthewhatfield.com](http://www.matthewhatfield.com)**

**AL East:**

1. NY Yankees - Talk about bolstering your pitching rotation, the Yankees traded for the most dominant left in the game Randy Johnson, got two of the NL's best from 2004 in Carl Pavano and Jaret Wright (33-16 combined) and got vets Tony Womack and Tino Martinez to fill out the infield at 2B & 1B. Men in pinstripes won't collapse this time.
2. Boston - My biggest question for the Red Sox is how healthy is Curt Schilling? He was definitely more important than Pedro was, though I kind of question whether Wade Miller, Matt Clement and David Wells are three good enough starters to get it done without him. Sox fans: don't expect back-to-back titles after that long drought.
3. Baltimore - O's batting order is looking good with Sammy (a.k.a. corky) Sosa, Javy (a.k.a. 'roids) Lopez and Rafael Palmeiro (viagra guy) providing the power along with Miguel Tejada and Melvin Mora. After that the question of who's going to win 15 games and not lose 15 arises.
4. Tampa Bay - Rays didn't gain much of anything in the off-season, but have a legitimate flame throwing lefty in the making in Scott Kazmir, who was acquired last year in a deal with the Mets. Speedy Carl Crawford (59SB) and doubles stud Aubrey Huff will need youngsters Rocco Baldelli, B.J. Upton and Jorge Cantu to produce fast.
5. Toronto - Which Roy Halladay will we see? The one that won the Cy Young in 2003 or the one that went 8-8 with a 4.20 ERA through an injury riddled 2004? Weak at the top of the lineup, weak at the bottom and lost Carlos Delgado in the middle.

**AL Central:**

1. Minnesota - Twins are in position to win their fourth consecutive division crown, though could use a 30+ home run threat in the lineup. Corey Koskie and Cristian Guzman each departed, which could spell trouble for them if Mike Cuddyer and Juan Castro do not hit well. Best farm system, best pitching staff and best pen = top spot.
2. Cleveland - I want to put this team ahead of Minnesota to win the division. However, Cleveland's bullpen has been a mess and the loss defensive shortstop wizard Omar Vizquel will hurt. Adding Kevin Millwood is a plus, but it all comes down to whether or not the Indians are able to improve on a 24-34 record vs., left handed starters.

3. Detroit - Is five years, \$65 million dollars too much for Magglio Ordoñez? Can the Tigers young aces - Mike Maroth and Jeremy Bonderman - put it together this year to make a run at the AL Central's top slot? We'll find out about those things later, and what we do know is that Troy Percival and Ugueth Urbina shut the door well.
4. Chicago White Sox - Ozzie Guillen's club may have tied for the AL lead in homers hit with 242. Those same guys strike out a lot so management dealt Carlos Lee to Milwaukee for Scott Podsednik - someone who struck out more times than Lee. Moves the past two years haven't made sense and could be the AL's Dodgers.
5. Kansas City - To put it bluntly, this time is bad. Take that back - they aren't bad - they're awful. I tell ya', I am convinced some of the International League's teams could beat the Royals on any occasion. Should've never gotten rid of Beltran!

#### **AL West:**

1. Anaheim - New third baseman Dallas McPherson is a prime AL Rookie of the Year candidate taking Troy Glaus' old place. Orlando Cabrera is an upgrade over David Eckstein and shortstop and Steve Finley has better range in the outfield than Jose Guillen. If any single player can repeat David Ortiz' heroics --- it's Vlad Guerrero.
2. Seattle - Were dreadful from the plate in 2004 as well as on the mound. Since Oakland got rid of two thirds of their devastating trio that makes the Mariners aging ace Jamie Moyer's age less noticeable and the signings of power hitters Richie Sexson (Arizona) and Adrian Beltre more conspicuous.
3. Texas - Kenny Rogers (the pitcher not the music man) isn't one of the newest pitchers in the crayon box either. Texas ranked fourth or better in six different statistical batting categories. A fresh, 'new' ace will be mandatory for them to acquire come deadline time to out-hit their way to a playoff birth.
4. Oakland - All Mark Mulder and Tim Hudson did was help the A's to five straight 91+ win seasons. Billy Beane's spend-less approach could catch up to him this time in a division that no longer will be won with 98MPH strikes, but 400-foot shots out of the ball park. Closer Octavio Dotel (elbow Q's) must pick his pitchers better.

#### **NL East:**

1. Atlanta - I've been one of the few to stick with the Braves for years, and years and years atop this division. Last year I changed for some unknown reason and Atlanta ended up winning it by another comfortable margin. Most of the lineup from last season appears intact, while Hudson and Smoltz bolster an already good pitching staff.
2. Florida - Whether Carlos Delgado is able to translate what he did for so many seasons in Toronto and take it to the next level in the National League is irrelevant in my

opinion. Their young three starters (Beckett, Burnett and Willis) are genuine quality when healthy and the top of the order possesses speed on the base pads.

3. NY Mets - No reason the Mets cannot go from winning 71 games to winning 85+ with the acquisitions of Beltran and Pedro. However, don't anticipate them finishing first in the NL East. Will finish between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> with an outside shot of earning a wild card berth. All comes down to fielding - something they've lacked since 2000.
4. Philadelphia - Not to be critical or anything, but getting Kenny Lofton, Jon Lieber and Aaron Fultz won't win you the division when the Mets, Braves and Marlins all added impact pieces during the winter. Although, didn't Philly make moves the last couple off-seasons? Tell me.... how did that pan out?
5. Washington - Still debating on who will win more games - them or the Royals. It does help when you have veterans on the team like Vinny Castilla, Livan Hernandez and a couple others. Also, an experienced Manager such as Frank Robinson helps (913-1,004 record). Okay, no more beating around the bush - this team stinks!

#### **NL Central:**

1. St. Louis - It would be foolish of me to say the Cubs, Astros or Reds will win this division after the regular season show the Cardinals put on in 2004. Biggest questions are how will David Eckstein and Yadier Molina do replacing Edgar Renteria and Mike Matheny? My answer: didn't they trade for Mark Mulder?
2. Chicago Cubs - I had them behind the Astros in second place last season and they ended up finishing third. So to say that I was tempted to put this team behind both St. Louis and Cincinnati would be an understatement. Despite losing Sosa (and Alou), it's doubtful this team has as many injuries as they did in 2004.
3. Cincinnati - Paul Wilson (11-6), Eric Milton (14-6) and Ramon Ortiz are three better than average starting pitchers. Whether Ken Griffey Jr. is able to stay on the field will determine how good the Reds can be (possibly finish 2<sup>nd</sup>). Adam Dunn, Austin Kearns Joe Randa and Sean Casey alone are good enough to get the third.
4. Houston - No team probably plummeted more so than the Astros did this off-season. Last season the injury bug caught the caught the Cubs pitchers and Chris Carpenter of St. Louis later in the year. Clemens and Pettitte aren't getting any younger and it will be tough to get a Beltran or Jeff Kent come deadline time.
5. Pittsburgh - Looking for a Padres like sleeper? Someone to win 10-20 more games than they did a season ago? Look no further than the Pittsburgh Pirates. Oliver Perez (2.98 ERA) was easily the best lefty on a bad team and the rest of the rotation is not bad. Jason Bay, Craig Wilson and Matt Lawton will need to produce runs.
6. Milwaukee - Lyle Overbay hammered a franchise best 53 doubles in 2004. The only way I see the Brewers staying out of the cellar is if a couple other pitchers not named

Ben Sheets are effective and Carlos Lee has the kind of impact in his first year with the Brewers that Overbay had.

#### NL West:

1. San Diego - Only finished six games out of first in the NL West and five games from the wild card seed. Made a lot of mini deals, including one to get blue-collar outfielder Dave Roberts in exchange for Jay Payton, who was a disappointment in '04. A Cy Young like season by Jake Peavy will win this division for the Padres, trust me.
2. San Francisco - Read that last sentence and substitute the words Jake Peavy and Padres for Jason Schmidt and Giants. Schmidt, not Barry Bonds believe it or not, holds the keys to the Giants car. Armando Benitez, Omar Vizquel, Mike Matheny and Moises Alou were four big additions that could have them World Series bound.
3. Arizona - D-backs simply cannot do any worse in 2005. Hard to remember this team's 2001 Championship win over the powerful Yankees because what's etched in Arizona fans' heads is the trading of Randy Johnson not long after another ex-Diamondbacks ace, Curt Schilling - brought home gold to the city of Boston.
4. Los Angeles - Is it conceivable they finish as high as second? Hard, but yes. Is it possibly the Dodgers end up dead last? Hard, but also yes. Is it conceivable LA wins another division title? Not a chance. Just about everything they did in the off-season made no sense except retaining near flawless closer Eric Gagne.
5. Colorado - Todd Helton is like a ten-time Pro Bowl offensive tackle in football or Elton Brand in basketball. He quietly plays 154 games, gets 127 free passes, drives in 90+ runs every baseball campaign and knocks 30+ balls out of the park. All of it would not be secretive information if he did not play in Coors and for the Rockies.



(AP) Carlos Delgado will try to get the Florida Marlins back for their third World Series appearance in a span of nine seasons.

**Want to know my preseason World Series picks? My preseason MVP, Cy Young, Manager of the Year awards as well? Well, be sure to visit [www.matthewhatfield.com](http://www.matthewhatfield.com) in March to find all that out and more!**