

Loss of Delgado will sting and even more so if Halladay is unable to regain his 2003 Cy Young form



5. Toronto Blue Jays: Too many question marks about the 2005 Toronto Blue Jays. From 2000-2003 they won between 78-86 games, very consistent. The big dip came last year with Toronto going 67-94 and finishing dead last in the AL East. We saw signs of maybe a bad year when ace Roy Halladay struggled in his season opening start and the Jays got swept in their first home series of the year. It was not the fact they got swept in their first home series of the year. Of course, that did not bode well for them. It was the fact that they got swept in their first home series of the year by the Detroit Tigers, baseball's laughingstock during 2003. Toronto had a miserable April, going 7-15, although they rebounded with a pretty good 15-14 month of May. After that month, the Jays did not have another winning month (discounting three October games), replaced managers and really sputtered to a new low in August.

Jays don't have a designated hitter, especially with the loss of Carlos Delgado. What's it all mean as far as their overall lineup goes heading into April of 2005? They must move Eric Hinske from one corner to the other with the addition of Corey Koskie, formerly of the Minnesota Twins. They can go a number of ways with their starting lineup, but none of them are real promising with powerful Baltimore, Boston and the Yankees in the division. Battling for one of the spots in the order is shortstop Russ Adams, an instinctive rookie the Jays are rather excited about.



Roy Halladay's inability to stay on the mound for more than 21 starts due to injury was a major reason why Toronto went 67-94 and ranked 11th in the American League in ERA.

Center fielder Vernon Wells is their franchise offensive player and the guy they will now build around. Wells is a five-tool player that owns most of the AL pitchers out

there. Numbers are slightly above solid all-star status with 117 doubles to his credit since 2002. Couple that with 115-130 RBI's and an OPS sure to be over .800 and you've yourself a ball player. Toronto will have to win games in 2005 with defense and two or three other players helping out Wells on most nights. Orlando Hudson - dog-on good baseball player that seldom makes bone-head mistakes. While catcher is a three-player race, Frank Catalanotto will try to fit in the equation somewhere. Once an infielder, Catalanotto can serve in either left or right field, still take an infield spot, or battle Shea Hillenbrand for DH duties. Incredibly, in eight seasons and 663 games he's only made 28 errors. Could Reed Johnson or semi-hot prospect Alexis Rios be on the trading block to make room veteran Catalanotto? Possibly, and keep in mind the Jays have three areas to improve significantly (catcher, another quality starter and closer). On the corners Hinske and Koskie are not prone to making errors either; just savvy plays with the stick or glove. Despite that, neither will punch a ticket to the Hall-of-Fame, meaning they are not the saviors of a franchise enduring Manager #6 since 1997.

Because of the team's pretty good defense it makes me feel someone is due to emerge next to Halladay and All-Star Ted Lilly (12-10 with 168K) in the rotation. RHP Dave Bush has his name penciled in as the fourth guy on the staff. No definitive closer has been set, spelling trouble for ex-Diamondback Miguel Batista, someone who looks like an All-Star caliber starter at times. Then at other times he looks very average at the very best, forcing Gibbons to ponder moving Batista to the back-end of the pen.

Bottom Line: Toronto has to sweep the teams they are suppose to beat and not get swept by the really good teams. If they do that then they have an outside chance of finishing as high as third in their division. So why should a team that won a World Series back in the days of Joe Carter (early 90's) settle for mediocrity? When you lose a player of Delgado's caliber, a 75+ win season would be much better than what most people would expect out of you.

**Projected Order: LF Reed Johnson
2B Orlando Hudson
CF Vernon Wells
3B Corey Koskie
DH Shea Hillenbrand
1B Eric Hinske
RF Alexis Rios
SS Russ Adams
C Gregg Zaun/Guillermo Quiroz/Greg Myers**

**Projected Staff: R Roy Halladay
L Ted Lilly
R Miguel Batista
R Dave Bush
R Josh Towers**

Pick: 5th in the AL East; Jays good defense won't get them in 4th.