

YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CRUSH THE 2022 BASEBALL SEASON

THE SPORTS BETTOR'S ULTIMATE **2022 SEASON** **BASEBALL** **BETTING GUIDE**

5 Advanced Betting Strategies You Need to Know:

Sabermetrics, Umpires, Bullpens, Line Value, Weather

Future Odds & Predictions:

World Series, AL & NL Pennant, AL & NL MVP,
AL & NL Cy Young, and AL & NL Rookie of the Year

Timely 2022 Season Preview:

Analysis of teams and key players inclusive of the
most recent Free Agent signings, roster moves, and more!

Longshots, Best Bets, and More!



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2021 SEASON IN REVIEW

Written by Mark Ruelle

With the cardboard cutout fans replaced by real fans, baseball got back to a sense of normalcy in 2021. New stars emerged, the starting pitcher became even less relevant and dominant bullpens ruled the day.

In the American League, the Tampa Bay Rays emerged as the best team in baseball's best division, the American League East. Tampa would go on to win 100 games and produce

the Rookie of the Year in 2020 postseason hero Randy Arozarena and the Manager of the Year in Kevin Cash. The Rays also perfected the use of an 'opener' to start the game and leaned on a deep and talented bullpen to finish games out from as early as the 4th inning. The strategy led the Rays to an American League best 100 wins. The American League East would provide both wild card teams with long time rivals the Red Sox, bolstered by the return of manager Alex Cora who returned after a 1-year suspension, and Yankees, led by superstar Aaron Judge, both tied with records of 92-70. Toronto finished just behind the top 3 teams and has a deep and talented young lineup that should keep them in contention. Baltimore continues its long rebuild.



Nov 2, 2021; Houston, Texas, USA; Atlanta Braves first baseman Freddie Freeman (5) celebrates after forcing out Houston Astros first baseman Yuli Gurriel (10) for the final out during game six of the 2021 World Series at Minute Maid Park.

Credit: Jerome Miron-USA TODAY Sports



In the Central Division, the White Sox emerged as one of the best teams in the American League and rolled to an easy division title with 93 wins, finishing 13 games ahead of second place Cleveland. Chicago took a more traditional approach with its starting rotation with 4 pitchers making at least 28 starts on the season. The fifth, lefty Carlos Rodon, made just 24 starts due to injury but led the team in wins, 13, and ERA, 2.37. The White Sox took an early lead in the division and never looked back. At the trade deadline, they bolstered their bullpen by adding Craig Kimbrel to a group of power arms led by closer Liam Hendricks, who had 38 saves. SS Tim Anderson led the team in runs, steals and finished second in average and total bases for the Chisox. Detroit, Kansas City and Minnesota rounded out the Central Division with Minnesota the most disappointing team as they were picked by many to win the division.

The Western Division was led once again by the Houston Astros. The league villains since their cheating scandal was uncovered prior to the 2020 season, the Astros overcame hostile crowds on the road all season to win 95 games. They did so despite a series of injuries to their starting rotation, including Justin Verlander who missed the entire season, which forced the Astros to rely on a number of unproven arms. Houston's lineup remained stellar with long-time star Jose Altuve once again leading the way and supported by young slugger Yordan Alvarez and veteran Yuli Gurriel, who would win his first ever batting title. Long time superstar Mike Trout missed the majority of the season due to injury for the Angels but his superstar status was taken up by teammate Shohei Ohtani. Ohtani won the AL MVP by hitting 46 home runs and a league leading 8 triples while also making 23 starts on the mound and compiling a 9-2 record with a 3.18 ERA and 156 strikeouts in one of the best overall seasons in MLB history. Seattle was in the mix until a controversial cost-cutting trade at the deadline curtailed their momentum. Oakland finished with 86 wins and Texas finished in the cellar as they prepared to rebuild this offseason through free agency.

FINAL STANDINGS

AMERICAN LEAGUE, 2021

KEY: + Division Winner, * Wild Card

East Division	W	L	GB
Tampa Bay+	100	62	-
Boston*	92	70	8
NY Yankees*	92	70	8
Toronto	91	71	9
Baltimore	52	110	48
Central Division	W	L	GB
CHI White Sox+	93	69	-
Cleveland	80	82	13
Detroit	77	85	16
Kansas City	74	88	19
Minnesota	73	89	20
West Division	W	L	GB
Houston+	95	67	-
Seattle	90	72	5
Oakland	86	76	9
LA Angels	77	85	18
Texas	60	102	35

In the National League East Division, the division was wide open for much of the season as Atlanta, New York and Philadelphia jockeyed for position for more than half the season. The Atlanta Braves emerged down the stretch, overcoming off the field issues and a season-ending injury to superstar outfielder Ronald Acuna Jr. to win the division. Freddie Freeman, Austin Riley and Ozzie Albies all hit over 30 home runs and veteran starter Charlie Morton spearheaded a relatively young staff that won the division by 6 games. NL MVP Bryce Harper kept the

FINAL STANDINGS

NATIONAL LEAGUE, 2021

KEY: + Division Winner, * Wild Card

East Division	W	L	GB
Atlanta+	88	73	-
Philadelphia	82	80	7
NY Mets	77	85	12
Miami	67	95	22
Washington	65	97	23.5
Central Division	W	L	GB
Milwaukee+	95	67	-
St. Louis*	90	72	5
Cincinnati	83	79	12
CHI Cubs	71	91	24
Pittsburgh	61	101	34
West Division	W	L	GB
San Francisco+	107	55	-
LA Dodgers*	106	56	1
San Diego	79	83	28
Colorado	74	87	32.5
Arizona	52	102	55

Phillies in the race until September despite a subpar starting staff and bullpen. The Mets were able to stay competitive until the injuries started to pile up, most notably to staff ace Jacob deGrom. The defending champion Nationals never quite got off the ground and became sellers at the trade deadline, parting with ace Max Scherzer and two of their best everyday players in SS Trea Turner and OF Kyle Schwarber. Miami finished just ahead of the Nationals but well out of contention as well.

In the Central Division, the Milwaukee Brewers won 95 games and led the division for much of the season. They were led by dual staff aces Corbin Burnes and Brandon Woodruff. Burnes would win the Cy Young but Woodruff's numbers were nearly as impressive. The St. Louis Cardinals made an incredible run at the end of the season to earn a wildcard spot. The team won 17 straight games down the stretch and 19 out of 20. The power hitting Reds were competitive for most of the season thanks to the long ball antics of Rookie of the Year Jonathan India, Joey Votto and RF Nick Castellanos, who had a career-year with a .309 average, 34 home runs and 100 RBIs. The Cubs traded away what was left of the core of the 2016 World Series team in Kris Bryant and Anthony Rizzo. In addition, they dealt superstar SS Javier Baez away to the Mets at the deadline. The Pittsburgh Pirates continued their long standing rebuild and were led by OF Bryan Reynolds, who led the team in nearly every major offensive category.

The fireworks in 2021 were reserved for the National League West Division. The Giants and Dodgers continue their long rivalry with a season-long pennant race. The surprising Giants would win out, winning a team-record 107 games to sneak past the 106 game winning Dodgers. Manager of the Year Gabe Kapler pushed all the right buttons in a lineup featuring a large number of left/right platoon players. One of the non platoon players, veteran SS Brandon Crawford, led the team in average, hits and RBIs. Veteran catcher Buster Posey, in what would turn out to be his final season, came back following a year removed from sitting out due to COVID and once again led the Giants behind and at the plate. The Giants had four starters with at least 10 wins led by Kevin Gausman's 14 wins. The star-studded Dodgers stayed with the Giants throughout the year despite a number of injuries to their lineup. At the trade deadline, a deep team got deeper as the Dodgers added Scherzer to the starting staff and Trea Turner to 2B in a major trade with Washington. The San Diego Padres made it a 3-team race until just after the all-star break but fell back when they failed to bolster their roster at the

trade deadline. SS Fernando Tatis Jr belted 42 home runs as he continues his ascent as one of the game's best players. The Rockies finished over 32 games back and the Diamondbacks over 50 games back to round out the West Division. The Rockies season was most noted for not being able to trade away valuable assets to bolster their future roster.

The Playoffs

Wild Card Games

The American League wildcard game featured long time rivals Boston and New York. The game was played in Fenway Park and the Red Sox rolled 6-2 behind a solid pitching performance from staff ace Nathan Eovaldi.

The National League wildcard game matched up the 106-win Dodgers vs. the red-hot Cardinals. A walk-off home run by Dodgers all-everything utility man Chris Taylor saved the Dodgers from being the most decorated one and done team in history, defeating the Cardinals 3-1.

Division Series

(Best of 5)

The American League Division Series' featured Boston vs. Tampa Bay in a matchup of East Division foes and Houston vs. Chicago.

The National League Division Series' featured the Dodgers vs. the Giants and Milwaukee vs. Atlanta.

Boston would defeat the Rays, 3-1 after falling behind 1-0. The Rays dominated game 1 using their typical formula. They jumped all over Eduardo Rodriguez for five early runs and utilized their deep bullpen to shut out the formidable Boston lineup. In Game 2, after spotting Boston a 2-0 lead, it looked like the Rays would dominate yet again after scoring 5 runs off the recovering Red Sox ace Chris Sale. The Boston lineup would not let up, however, and came back to win 14-6 on the strength of 20 hits and 5 home

runs. Back at Fenway Park, the Red Sox bats pounded out 27 hits and 12 runs in two thrilling wins. Game 3 they won 6-5 in 13 innings and Game 4 they won 6-5 in another walk-off, this one in the 9th inning.

Like Boston, Houston was able to take care of the Chicago White Sox in four games. The Astros jumped out to a 2-0 series lead after winning games 1 and 2 in Houston, 6-1 and 9-4. The Astros bats pounded Chicago pitching for 20 hits in the two games. The White Sox showed life in game 3, coming back from a 5-1 early deficit for a 12-6 win. Houston, however, closed out the series in Game 4, 10-1. Jose Altuve hit his first home run of the series and 19th career playoff home run to help propel Houston to their fifth straight league championship series.

The Dodgers and Giants did battle in a series that many felt would result in the World Series champion. This would be the first ever post-season matchup between the long time rivals. The Giants jumped out to a 1-0 lead in the series behind a dominant performance by Logan Webb, who pitched into the 8th inning. Buster Posey cranked a 2-run home run in the win. The Dodgers bounced back in Game 2 behind an outstanding start by Julio Aries. LA won 9-2 and went home with a road split. Alex Wood and three relievers held the Dodgers scoreless in Game 3 and the Giants won 1-0 despite a 7th inning, 10K performance by Max Scherzer. In a do-or-die Game 4, the Dodgers' bats came alive for a 7-2 win led by a Mookie Betts' home run. In the decided game 5, the Dodgers pieced together a run in the 9th to take a 2-1 lead and Max Scherzer came back on two days' rest to record the save and catapult the Dodgers to the NLCS.

The Atlanta Braves took on the Milwaukee Brewers in the other NLDS. This was another first ever matchup in the NL. The Braves generated just 4 hits and one run and took a 2-1 loss in Game 1. In Game 2, the Braves bounced back with a 3-0 win behind Max Fried's starting pitching and an Austin Riley home run. Back in Atlanta, the Braves took control of the se-

ries with a second straight 3-0 win. Will Smith picked up his second straight save and Joc Pederson picked up his 2nd home run of the series in the win. Looking to avoid a return trip to Milwaukee, the Braves pulled out all the stops in Game 4. Spotting the Brewers leads of 2-0 and 4-2, the Braves battled back each time to tie the game. Six pitchers were used to keep the game tied before the longest tenured Brave, Freddie Freeman, homered off of Brewers' relief ace Josh Hader in the 8th inning. Will Smith came on to pick up his 3rd save of the series to push Atlanta to the NLCS.

Championship Series

(Best of 7)

AL: Boston vs. Houston

Boston and Houston did battle in the ALCS. Houston took a 1-0 lead after the two teams combined to use 16 pitchers in a 5-4 Astros' win. In Game 2 Boston bounced back for a 9-5 behind Nathan Eovaldi's second postseason win and an offensive explosion. They scored 8 runs in the first two innings behind two grand slams by JD Martinez and Rafael Devers in the first two innings. The series shifted back to Boston in Game 3 and the Red Sox continued to roll in a 12-3 win. Rodriguez rebounded from his poor outing in Game 1 to give the Red Sox six strong innings. Boston hit four more home runs including one more each by Martinez and Devers. Trailing 2-1, the Astros looked like they were about to be behind 3-1 before tying the game in the 8th inning 2-2 off of Boston's ace reliever Garrett Whitlock thanks to yet another home run by Jose Altuve. The Astros tacked on 7 runs in the 9th for the 9-2 win. Houston was able to maintain momentum in Game 5 behind a dominant performance by starter Framber Valdez. Houston got to Boston's Sale in the middle innings and rolled to a 9-1 win. Back in Houston, the Astros were able to wrap up the series with a 5-0 shutout win behind a second straight dominant start, this time by Luis Garcia. The Astros were once again in the World Series. Yorlan Alvarez took MVP honors in the series after batting .522.

NL: LA Dodgers vs. Atlanta

The Atlanta Braves matched up with the defending champion and heavily favored Dodgers in the NLCS. Atlanta held the home field advantage as a division winner despite having won nearly 20 less games than the Dodgers.

In Game 1, the two teams each gave up one run leads and the game was tied at 2 heading into the bottom of the ninth. A bloop single by Ozzie Albies led to a stolen base and a game winning run thanks to yet another clutch hit by Austin Riley. Trailing 1-0 in the series, the Dodgers turned to Max Scherzer to even the series. After leading 2-0, however, the Dodgers gave it back by allowing a 2-run home run to former Dodger Joc Pederson in the 4th. The Dodgers re-took the lead 4-2 in the 7th and looked to be in good shape before the Braves battled back yet again in the 8th. Riley delivered yet again with a double to tie the game at 4. Eddie Rosario delivered in the 9th for the Braves, singling home Dansby Swanson with 2 outs in the 9th off Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen.

Trailing 2-0 in the series, the Dodgers faced a must-win in Game 3. Trailing 5-2 heading into the bottom of the 8th, the Dodgers bats came battling back to take a 6-5 lead, highlighted by a 3-run Cody Bellinger home run. Kenley Jansen closed out the Braves in the 9th for a 6-5 win. In Game 4, showing that they wouldn't buckle under to the Dodgers, the Braves hit four home runs to take a commanding 3 games to 1 lead in a 9-2 win. The Dodgers came back in game 5, despite the news that they'd lost Justin Turner for the series due to a hamstring injury. An 11-2 Dodger win was highlighted by 5 home runs, 3 by AJ Pollack and 2 by Chris Turner.

Back in Atlanta, the Dodgers turned to Walker Buehler to try and force a game 7. The Braves took a 4-1 lead thanks to a 3-run home run by Eddie Rosario. LA got a run in the 7th to cut it to 4-2 but Will Smith closed the game out and put the Braves into the World Series for the first time since 1999. Eddie Rosario took NLCS MVP honors with his record-tying 14 hits.

World Series

(Best of 7)

Atlanta vs. Houston

Houston came into the World Series as the prohibitive favorite despite Atlanta's dethroning of LA in the NLCS. The Game 1 matchup featured Braves' ace Charlie Morton, facing his former team, opposing ALCS Game 5 hero Framber Valdez. Atlanta jumped out to a 5-0 lead through 3 innings thanks in large part to a Jorge Soler home run in the first at bat of the World Series. Morton would leave after 3 innings with a leg injury that was discovered later to be a broken fibula that would sideline him the rest of the series. Behind a series of relievers, the Braves cruised to a 6-2 win and a 1-0 lead in the series. In game 2, José Urquidy outdueled Max Fried and Jose Altuve homered in a 7-2 Astros' win to knot the series at 1 game apiece heading back to Houston. Back in Atlanta, the Braves got an outstanding lift by starter Ian Anderson. Anderson pitched five no-hit innings before giving way to the bullpen. The Astros finally got a hit to start the 8th but it would be too little, too late. Behind an RBI double by Riley and a home run in the second straight game by catcher Travis d'Arnaud, the Braves took a 2-1 lead in the series. The two depleted pitching staffs utilized a combined 12 pitchers in Game 4. The Astros chipped away for two runs over the first four innings and held that lead heading into the bottom of the sixth. Another clutch hit by Riley cut the lead in half until the 8th inning. Back-to-back solo home runs by Dansby Swanson and Soler gave the Braves a lead they wouldn't relinquish. Closer Will Smith slapped away the Dodgers in the 9th for his second save of the series and a 3-1 Braves lead. Houston would not go away that easily in Game 5 in front of a raucous Atlanta home crowd looking to celebrate their first World Series since 1995. Instead, they jumped out to a 7-0 lead and held on for a 9-5 win. Urquidy picked up his second win of the World Series to bring things back to Houston for Game 6. Max Fried stepped to the forefront for the Braves in Game 6. The young lefty pitched 6 shutout innings and watched as the

Braves built a commanding lead behind two-run home runs by Soler and Swanson. Freeman would chip in with a solo blast and an RBI double as the Braves cruised to a 7-0 win and the 2021 World Series title. Soler would take home the World Series MVP in Atlanta's first title since 1995.

The Aftermath

The 2021 season will be known as the season that baseball got the fans back and a continuation of a style of play consisting mainly of the long ball, power relievers and infield shifts. The playoffs would be a testament to the gritty determination of the Braves but would also open up baseball to criticism for its reliance on shifts, relievers and the abundance of all or nothing at bats of strikeouts or home runs. Change is in the year as the 2022 season looms.

2021 FUTURES UPSETS ODDS SURPRISES & DISAPPOINTMENTS

Win Total O/U	Odds	Actual	Dif
Arizona	74.5	52	-22.5
Washington	84.5	65	-19.5
Minnesota	88.5	73	-15.5
Milwaukee	82.5	95	+12.5
Tampa Bay	85.5	100	+14.5
Player Award	Winner	Odds	
AL MVP	Ohtani	+3000	
NL MVP	Harper	-275	
AL Cy Young	Ray	Not Listed To Start The Season	
NL Cy Young	Burnes	+4500	



BETTING 101 HOW TO BET ON BASEBALL

WRITTEN BY DAVID DELANO



Here are the key terms you want to be familiar with to understand what kind of baseball bet you are making and some tips.

Money Lines

You are picking which team will win the game on a money line bet, regardless of how close the game is. Although selecting the winner may seem cut and dry, it's not as simple as just picking the better team or better starting pitcher.

The oddsmakers want to get close to equal action on both sides, so the lines are set to make the favorite a risk. On the other side, the reward is more profitable if you can predict an upset at the right time.

A standard bet with a favorite is -110. The number with a (- minus) in front of it shows how much you have to risk to win an extra \$100 in profit. That amount you are risking on the favorite is the amount charged by a sportsbook for taking a bet, and it is often referred to as "vig" or "juice."

A number with a (+ plus) in front of it is how much additional profit you would make off a \$100 bet, and means that team is the underdog.

If you are betting standard -110 favorites, you need to win 52.4% of your bets long term to turn a profit. However, with baseball, the odds for most games are not just -110 for the money line. If you are mainly picking favorites, it is possible to win a lot more than 52.4% of the time and still lose money long-term. But if you are playing more underdogs, it is also possible to win less than 50% of your bets and still turn a profit.

For example, let's say the Dodgers are playing the Diamondbacks. Los Angeles is a -270 favorite as the superior team, and Arizona is a +220 underdog. Although you believe the Dodgers will win this game, the odds give you something to think about. If you take Los Angeles on the money line, you have to risk \$270 to win \$100. On the other side, you can put \$100 on Arizona with a chance to gain \$220 of profit.

If you are thinking about this long term, you only need a +220 underdog to win 32 times out

of 100 in order to turn a profit. On the other side, you need a +270 favorite to win 73.1% of the time for these types of plays to benefit you.

A common way to bet on sustainable favorites, and reduce the juice, is by making a pick on the run line

Run line

The run line is the spread in baseball. A standard run line bet will have the favorite at -1.5 and the underdog at +1.5.

On a run line bet, you need the favorite to win by at least two runs at -1.5. On the other side, at +1.5, as long as the underdog does not lose by two runs or more than they win against the run line.

The run line allows you to play favorites at a less risky price. However, you also need them to win by more than one run. Keep in mind that if you are taking a home favorite, you are at a disadvantage due to them getting three fewer outs on offense if they are winning before the bottom of the last inning.

Totals

If you understand football or basketball totals, then understanding what the over/under means in baseball is no different. When making a bet on the total, you are picking whether or not you think there will be more or fewer runs scored than the set number. If a line is set at 8 and you think less than 8 runs will be scored, you pick the under; if you think there will be more than 8 total runs in the game, you pick over. If the total amount falls exactly on your bet, then there is a push, and you are refunded your wager. There can be no ties when there is a total with half run added on.

With totals, the time you place your bet can have a lot to do with whether you win or lose. For example, let's say the Tigers are playing the

Royals and the total is showing an over/under of 8.5 when the line is first released. If you believe the total is too low, you may want to play the over as soon as possible because it could jump to 9 or even higher. However, if you think the total is too high, keep in mind, you may see the number go down to 8.0 or less later, so you may want to take the under before it does.

First 5

In this case, you are picking the result at the end of the first five innings instead of the entire game. First-5 bets are still available on the money line, run line and totals. In a first-5 money line bet, if the game is tied after the first five innings, the result is a push meaning that both sides will have their wager returned.

If you take a favorite on the run line, you will be taking that team at -0.5, and you need them to have the lead after five innings; a tie after five innings on a run line first-5 favorite results in a loss. If you take the underdog at +0.5, you will win your bet if they either have the lead or are tied after five innings.

First-5 inning bets are compelling because you can focus more on the starting pitching matchups and give a lot less thought to the bullpens.

Prop Bets

A prop bet allows you to wager beyond the standard full-game odds and bet on different aspects of a game or event. Prop bets can be made on a team or individual player.

The most popular pitching props are going to be on the over/under for strikeouts. Offensively, there are also props on if and which players will hit a home run, who will hit the first home run and on how many hits and runs an individual or team will accumulate. There are a lot of different props available, and they can go deeper depending on the sportsbook. Each prop will clearly explain what you are betting on.

When betting props, it's good to look at the past head-to-head history between the pitchers and hitters. It's also good to look at the home/road splits as many pitchers perform better at home than on the road. Don't just look at wins and losses as that's an outdated stat.

Futures

Futures bets allow you to focus on long-term results. When you make a futures bet, you will need to wait a longer amount of time, usually the end of the season, to cash in a winning ticket.

The most common futures bets will be on who will be in the World Series, Pennant and division winners, win totals, and individual awards. Finding value for a team that may have made key moves but is under-the-radar is crucial if you want to make a nice score.

The over/under win totals will be the simplest. However, other bets, like the next MVP, will result in potentially higher payouts because there are so many different possible results.



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Rule Changes Starting in 2022

Written by Mark Ruelle



Credit: Charles LeClaire-USA TODAY Sports

Roster Size

Rosters will expand from 26 to 28 players through the month of April. This has been put in place as teams adjust to less time in spring training due to the lockout. Additionally, there will not be a limit placed on the number of pitchers that can be on a roster in April. Typically, the limit is 13.

The Ohtani Rule

Well let's just call it that since Shohei Ohtani is most likely the only pitcher to be affected by this rule. Pitchers can remain in the batting order after they are replaced on the mound. With the universal DH in place, Ohtani is likely the only starting pitcher that will hit in his starts. This rule allows the Angels to keep their star power hitter in games even if he is removed as the pitcher.

Extra Innings

An automatic runner will start on second base in extra innings. The rule is not universally loved but has created excitement and, in most cases, faster resolutions to games. As of now, this rule

is only going to be in place in 2022.

Doubleheaders

Doubleheaders will once again be 9 innings long as opposed to 7 innings.

One other key piece of the labor agreement; The new labor agreement also gives MLB the ability to unilaterally implement rule changes with 45 days' notice beginning in 2023. Previously, the league had to give a year's notice. This is significant because MLB brass has a number of possible changes on their plate, including:

- Larger Bases.
- Banning the shift.
- Adding a pitch clock.

All three of these changes have backing and each has been tried at the minor league level and will continue to be. Of the three, the shift will most likely have the biggest impact on baseball in the coming years.

2022 MLB FUTURES


BETMGM

World Series Winner








DODGERS**+500****BLUE JAYS****+900****ASTROS****+1000****METS****+1000****WHITE SOX****+1100****YANKEES****+1100****BRAVES****+1200****RAYS****+1400****BREWERS****+1600****PADRES****+1600****RED SOX****+1800****CARDINALS****+2000****ANGELS****+2500****GIANTS****+2500****MARINERS****+2500****PHILLIES****+3000****TIGERS****+3500****TWINS****+5000****MARLINS****+6600****RANGERS****+8000****CUBS****+10000****REDS****+10000****GUARDIANS****+10000****ROYALS****+10000****ATHLETICS****+10000****NATIONALS****+10000****ROCKIES****+20000****DIAMONDBACKS****+25000****ORIOLES****+25000****PIRATES****+25000**

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21+ only, other T&C apply.

AL Pennant

Blue Jays	Astros	White Sox	Yankees	Rays	Red Sox	Angels	Mariners
							
+450	+475	+550	+550	+650	+1100	+1400	+1400

Tigers	Twins	Rangers	Guardians	Royals	Athletics	Orioles
						
+2000	+2500	+4000	+5000	+5000	+5000	+12500

NL Pennant

Dodgers	Mets	Padres	Brewers	Padres	Cardinals	Giants	Phillies
							
+250	+475	+600	+700	+700	+1000	+1200	+1600

Marlins	Reds	Cubs	Nationals	Rockies	Arizona	Pirates
						
+3000	+5000	+6600	+8000	+8000	+12500	+12500

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American League MVP

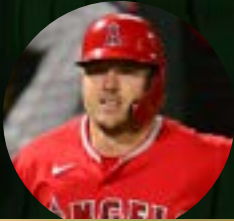


BETMGM

Shohei Ohtani

**+350**

Mike Trout

**+450**

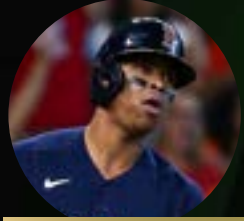
V. Guerrero Jr.

**+500**

Aaron Judge

**+2000**

Rafael Devers

**+2000**

WANDER FRANCO

+2000

LUIS ROBERT

+2200

JOSE RAMIREZ

+2500

BO BICHETTE

+2500

YORDAN ALVAREZ

+2500

KYLE TUCKER

+2500

COREY SEAGER

+3000

BYRON BUXTON

+3000

JOSE ABREU

+3500

BRANDONE LOWE

+4000

ALEX BREGMAN

+4000

CARLOS CORREA

+4000

JOSE ALTUVE

+5000

MARCUS SEMIEN

+5000

GEORGE SPRINGER

+5000

XANDER BOGAERTS

+5000

GIANCARLO STANTON

+5000

ELOY JIMENEZ

+5000

JESSE WINKER

+5000

TREVOR STORY

+5000

TIM ANDERSON

+6600

ANTHONY RENDON

+6600

SALVADOR PEREZ

+6600

RANDY AROZARENA

+6600

BOBBY WITT JR.

+6600

MITCH HANIGER

+8000

JAVIER BAEZ

+8000

JOEY GALLO

+8000

TEOSCAR HERNANDEZ

+8000

EUGENIO SUAREZ

+8000

GERRIT COLE

+10000

AUSTIN MEADOWS

+10000

YOAN MONCADA

+10000

JOSH DONALDSON

+10000

JEIMER CANDELARIO

+10000

DJ LEMAHIEU

+10000

FRANMIL REYES

+10000

MICHAEL BRANTLEY

+10000

MATT CHAPMAN

+10000

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National League MVP



BETMGM

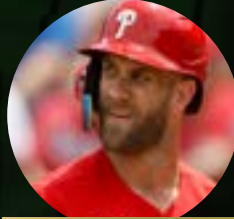
Juan Soto

**+300**

Ronald Acuna Jr.

**+700**

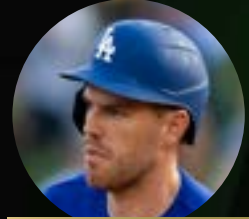
Bryce Harper

**+1000**

Mookie Betts

**+1000**

Freddie Freeman

**+1200**

TREA TURNER

+1600

FRANCISCO LINDOR

+2000

FERNANDO TATIS JR.

+2500

MATT OLSON

+2500

CHRISTIAN YELICH

+3000

AUSTIN RILEY

+3000

NOLAN ARENADO

+3000

PETE ALONSO

+3000

MANNY MACHADO

+3500

TYLER O'NIELL

+3500

OZZIE ALBIES

+4000

MAX MUNCY

+4000

MAX SCHERZER

+4000

WILLY ADAMES

+5000

CORBIN BURNES

+5000

KRIS BRYANT

+5000

NICK CASTELLANOS

+5000

STARLING MARTE

+6600

PAUL GOLDSCHMIDT

+6600

WALKER BUEHLER

+6600

SEIYA SUZUKI

+6600

JACOB DEGROM

+8000

J.T. REALMUTO

+8000

RHYS HOSKINS

+8000

JOEY VOTTO

+8000

BRANDON CRAWFORD

+8000

JAKE CRONENWORTH

+8000

CODY BELLINGER

+8000

MARCELL OZUNA

+8000

JONATHAN INDIA

+10000

JUSTIN TURNER

+10000

FRANK SCHWINDL

+10000

BRANDON BELT

+10000

JOSH BELL

+10000

BRYAN REYNOLDS

+10000

KETEL MARTE

+10000

MIKE MOUSTAKAS

+10000

JEFF MCNEIL

+10000

JEAN SEGURA

+10000

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American League Cy Young


BETMGM

Gerrit Cole


+425

Shane Bieber


+800

Lucas Giolito


+1100

Robbie Ray


+1200

Dylan Cease


+1600

LANCE MCULLERS JR

+1600

JUSTIN VERLANDER

+2000

SHANE MCCALAHAN

+2000

KEVIN GAUSMAN

+2000

JOSE BERRIOS

+2000

ALEK MANOAH

+2000

SHOHEI OHTANI

+2000

CHRIS SALE

+2500

FRANKIE MONTAS

+2500

LANCE LYNN

+2500

NATHAN EOVALDI

+3000

EDUARDO RODRIGUEZE

+4000

CASEY MIZE

+4000

MICHAEL KOPECH

+4000

LUIS GARCIA

+5000

HYUN-JIN RYU

+5000

TARIK SKUBAL

+6600

NOAH SYNDERGAARD

+6600

SONNY GRAY

+6600

LUIS SEVERINO

+8000

JOHN MEANS

+8000

FRAMBER VALDEZ

+8000

MARCO GONZALES

+10000

JOSE URQUIDY

+10000

JAKE ODORIZZI

+10000

AARON CIVALE

+10000

CHRIS FLEXEN

+10000

SHANE BAZ

+10000

DALLAS KEUCHEL

+10000

ZACH PLESAC

+10000

JON GRAY

+10000

JORDAN MONTGOMERY

+10000

YUSEI KIKUCHI

+10000

COREY KLUBER

+12500

BRAD KELLER

+20000

JAMESON TAILLON

+20000

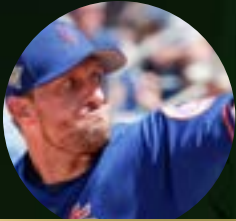
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National League Cy Young



BETMGM

Max Scherzer

**+600**

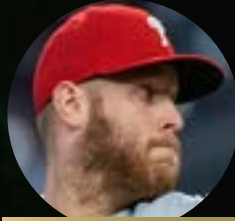
Corbin Burnes

**+800**

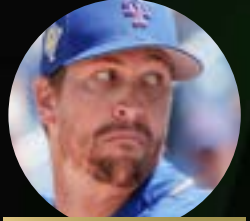
Walker Buehler

**+900**

Zack Wheeler

**+1000**

Jacob DeGrom

**+1200**

BRANDON WOODRUFF

+1200

LOGAN WEBB

+1600

SANDY ALCANTARA

+1600

AARON NOLA

+2000

MAX FRIED

+2000

JOE MUSGROVE

+2500

JULIO URIAS

+2500

CHRIS BASSITT

+2500

FREDDY PERALTA

+3000

TREVOR ROGERS

+3000

JACK FLAHERTY

+4000

YU DARVISH

+4000

SEAN MANAEA

+4000

BLAKE SNELL

+5000

CHARLIE MORTON

+5000

LUIS CASTILLO

+5000

PABLO LOPEZ

+5000

IAN ANDERSON

+5000

MIKE CLEVINGER

+6600

MARCUS STROMAN

+8000

GERMAN MARQUEZ

+8000

WADE MILEY

+8000

ADAM WAINWRIGHT

+8000

MIKE SOROKA

+8000

RANGER SUAREZ

+8000

PATRICK CORBIN

+10000

ANTHONY DESCLAFANI

+10000

ADRIAN HOUSER

+10000

KYLE HENDRICKS

+10000

STEPHEN STRASBURG

+10000

MADISON BUMGARNER

+10000

KYLE BIGSON

+10000

DUSTIN MAY

+10000

MILES MIKOLAS

+10000

TYLER MAHLE

+10000

ALEX WOOD

+10000

ZAC GALLEN

+10000

ALEX COBB

+10000

STEVEN MATZ

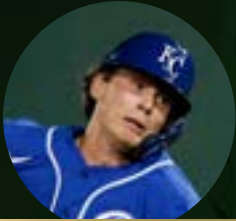
+12500

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American League Rookie of the Year


BETMGM

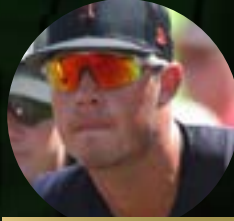
Bobby Witt Jr.


+300

Julio Rodriguez


+400

Spencer Torkelson


+500

Adley Rutschman


+700

Riley Greene


+1000
JOSH JUNG
+1000
JEREMY PENA
+1300
SHANE BAZ
+1400
JOE RYAN
+2000
REID DETMERS
+3000
TRISTON CASAS
+3000
LUIS GIL
+3000
KYLE ISBEL
+3000
VIDAL BRUJAN
+3500
MATT BRASH
+3500
GRAYSON RODRIGUEZ
+4000
JOSE SIRI
+5000
A.J. ALEXY
+5000
KEVIN SMITH
+5000
DAULTON JEFFERIES
+5000
A.J. PUK
+5000
STEVEN KWAN
+5000
GEORGE KIRBY
+6600
GABRIEL ARIAS
+6600
RICHIE PALACIOS
+6600
GABRIEL MORENO
+6600
JORDAN BALAZOVIC
+6600
NICK PRATTO
+8000
JAKE BURGER
+8000
ESTEVAN FLORIAL
+10000
SAM HUFF
+10000
JORDAN GROSHANS
+10000
TYLER NEVIN
+10000
XAVIER EDWARDS
+10000
JACK LEITER
+10000

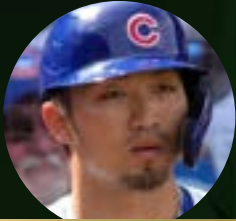
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National League Rookie of the Year



BETMGM

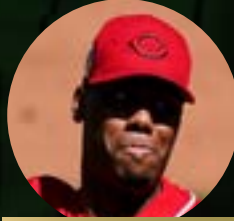
Seiya Suzuki

**+350**

Oneil Cruz

**+425**

Hunter Greene

**+700**

Bryson Stott

**+900**

C.J. Abrams

**+1000**

JOEY BART

+1100

SIXTO SANCHEZ

+1400

ALEK THOMAS

+1800

EDWARD CABRERA

+2500

MATT VIERLING

+2500

BRENNAN DAVIS

+2500

NOLAN GORMAN

+2500

CADE CAVALLI

+3000

MACKENZIE GORE

+3000

ROANSY CONTRERAS

+3500

NICK LODOLO

+3500

SETH BEER

+4000

MATHEW LIBERATORE

+4000

MAX MEYER

+4000

MICKEY MONIAK

+5000

CHRISTIAN PACHE

+6600

ETHAN SMALL

+6600

GERALDO PERDOMO

+6600

NICK FORTES

+6600

LUIS GAMPUSANO

+6600

TJ FRIEDL

+6600

DREW WATERS

+8000

HELIOT RAMOS

+8000

BOBBY MILLER

+8000

BRETT BATY

+8000

RYAN ROLISON

+10000

MARK VIENTOS

+10000

BRAILYN MARQUEZ

+10000

GERRETT MITCHELL

+10000

J.J. BLEDAY

+10000

JORDAN WALKER

+10000

RYAN VILADE

+10000

RONNY MAURICIO

+15000

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Top 10 Longshot Futures You Want To Consider

Written by Trenton Pruitt

It was a long 99 days of negotiations between the MLB owners and the MLB Players Association, but the two sides were able to strike a deal which means baseball is back for 2022. We're now just a week away from Opening Day, so let's look at my top ten longshot futures bets heading into the new campaign.

1: Freddie Freeman to Win N.L. MVP (+1200 via BetMGM)

One of the biggest moves of the offseason was Freddie Freeman departing from the Braves and heading to the Dodgers on a \$162 million deal for six years. Freeman will be slotted third or fourth in the most dangerous lineup in the league with plenty of opportunities to drive in runs.

2: Luis Robert to Win A.L. MVP (+2200 via BetMGM)

Similar to Freeman, Luis Robert returns to a lineup in the White Sox that is pretty much stacked from top to bottom. The outfielder only played in 68 games in 2021 but boasted a .338 batting average with 43 RBI's and 13 longballs.

He's continuing to develop into a young star and is set to have a monster year with Chicago. The x-factor is his speed and defense, so look for plenty of highlights from him in the outfield.

3: Detroit Tigers to Make the Playoffs (+375 via BetRivers)

With an expanded 12-team playoff heading into 2022, there is an extra opening in the American League for a team like the Tigers to try and punch their ticket to the playoffs. They have young developing prospects in Spencer Torkelson and Riley Greene while they made additions of Javy Baez and Tucker Barnhart. This team is still a year or two away from being a serious contender, but if things can go well for Detroit, they could easily find themselves in the thick of the playoff race in September.

4: Riley Greene to Win A.L. Rookie of the Year (+1000 via BetMGM)

One of the factors to the Tigers making the playoffs, would be rookies Spencer Torkelson and Riley Greene making huge contributions.

Greene is a 21-year-old centerfielder who slashed .301/.387/.534 in AA and AAA in 2021. In a division where pitching isn't necessarily the strong suit, Greene should have plenty of opportunities to put up big offensive numbers.

5: White Sox and Tigers to Finish 1st and 2nd in A.L. Central (+375 via BetMGM)

While we're talking Tigers, we might as well lock in this bet too. It's pretty much a given that the White Sox will win the A.L. Central at -190 odds. The odds say that the Twins should finish second, but in my opinion, they lack the pitching to finish that high in the division. The Tigers are a more well-rounded team and there is a buzz in Detroit for the first time in a while. Look for the White Sox to win the A.L. Central and the Tigers to come in second.

6: Philadelphia Phillies to Win N.L. East (+350 via BetMGM)

While a +400 ticket might not look like "long-shot odds," it's a tall task when you stack the Phillies up against the reigning champion Braves and the up-and-coming Mets. Philadelphia made the additions of Kyle Schwarber and Nick Castellanos over the offseason, adding them to a lineup with Bryce Harper, Rhys Hoskins, and J.T. Realmuto. Philly's best route to winning the division is slugging their way to it and these additions can help them get there.

7: Walker Buehler to Win N.L. Cy Young (+900 via BetMGM)

We've seen a trend over the last couple of seasons where Walker Buehler has started to overtake Clayton Kershaw for the top spot in the rotation. Buehler has proved he's a workhorse and capable of pitching in big time moments. Buehler has finished ninth and fourth in Cy Young voting and it's only a matter of time before he earns this trophy to put on his mantle.

8: Lance Lynn to Win A.L. Cy Young (+2500 via BetMGM)

The burley right-hander is headlining the White Sox rotation and coming off of an impressive first season with the Southsiders. Lynn was 11-6 over 28 starts with an ERA of 2.69. He struck out 176 batters over 157.0 innings of work. If Lynn is able to stay healthy for the whole season, he should be in the running for the Cy Young at the end of the season.

9: Yordan Alvarez To Lead the MLB in Homeruns (+1800 via BetMGM)

Yordan Alvarez will be a mainstay in the Astros lineup for years to come. He's mashed 61 long-balls in 233 games in the big leagues. The A.L. West doesn't have top of the line pitching, so Alvarez should have the opportunity to reach at least 100 career homers in 2022.

10: Jose Abreu Most RBI's in the MLB (+2000 via BetMGM)

Getting Abreu at +2000 to lead the MLB in runs batted in seems like a heck of a deal. The first baseman had the most RBI's in the American League in 2019 and 2020 and led all of the majors in 2020. Abreu has had 100+ RBI's in six out of his eight years with one of the seasons being the truncated 2020 season (where he led the league with 60 RBI's).

2022 Season Preview

Written by Mark Ruelle

2021 is now in the rearview mirror, the lockout is over and the new changes are in place in the MLB. The Atlanta Braves will look to be the first team since the 2000 Yankees to repeat as World Champions. The Dodgers will look to return to the World Series for the fourth time in six years. And, will this be the year that the Yankees return to the Fall Classic after a 12-year absence?

There are new faces in new places, rookies to watch and there will undoubtedly be surprise teams again this season. Let's take a look at the key aspects of this season and preview the sea-

son and possible award winners in 2022.

AL East Key Additions

Baltimore: Rougned Odor 2B

Boston: Trevor Story 2B

NY Yankees: Josh Donaldson 3B

Tampa Bay: Corey Kluber SP

Toronto: Matt Chapman 3B, Kevin Gausman SP

Odor will give the Orioles infield depth and a possible steal at 2B. He hit 33 home runs in 2016 for Texas so the friendly confines of Camden Yards may prove effective for his lefthanded stroke.



Nathan Eovaldi is scheduled to start for the Red Sox against the Yankees for the first game of the '22 season on Thursday, April 8th at Fenway Park.

Credit: Paul Rutherford-USA TODAY Sports

Story is the jewel of the Red Sox offseason spending. He provides the team with pop from the right side, speed and excellent defense. Donaldson is the biggest name of the Yankees' offseason acquisitions but he is 37 and not a huge upgrade at the position.

The Rays kept their cost-effective roster mainly intact and took a chance on Kluber. The former Cy Young winner pitched a no-hitter for the Yankees last season before missing three months with an injury. It will be interesting to see how he operates under the Rays system of reduced innings for starters.



Mar 18, 2022; Sarasota, Florida, USA; Toronto Blue Jays manager Charlie Montoyo (25) comes out to talk with starting pitcher Jose Berríos (17) during spring training at Ed Smith Stadium.

Credit: Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

The Blue Jays opened the purse strings to bring over Gausman from SF. A 5-year deal shows the commitment the Jays are making to their young and talented roster. Chapman at 3B adds just another power bat to a deep and talented lineup. He brings power and defense to a Jays' team that was already loaded with both things.

BEST LINEUP: Toronto Blue Jays

The Jays have the most solid 1-9 in the Division if not all of baseball. A lot will depend on the health of certain players, particularly George Springer in CF. If the Jays stay healthy, a lineup featuring Springer, Bo Bichette, Vlad Guerrero Jr. and Chapman will produce.

BEST STARTING FIVE: Toronto Blue Jays

The Jays lost a Cy Young Award winner in Robbie Ray and replaced him with Gausman, a 14-game winner last season. José Berríos is likely the staff ace and should be better with another year in Toronto. Tampa Bay has a number of excellent young arms including Shane Bieber and eventually Shane Bieber but their starters are less critical to their success. Boston could eventually have a strong staff when Chris Sale returns and possibly James Paxton later this summer.

BEST BULLPEN: Tampa Bay Rays

Andrew Kittredge has the best stuff in the pen and he is the de facto closer, although the Rays don't employ their relievers in traditional roles. The Rays led the AL in bullpen ERA and led the majors in bullpen FIP. They also did so across an MLB-high 703 relief innings. Cash did an exceptional job managing his bullpen all year last year although he had some hiccups against Boston in the playoffs. The Rays' season will go as far as its bullpen takes them.

PREDICTION: 1st Toronto, 2nd Boston

1. Toronto
 2. Boston*
 3. Tampa Bay
 4. New York
 5. Baltimore
- (* Wildcard)

Toronto should finally break through the glass ceiling this season and win the division. The Red Sox have the second best lineup in the division and could see a huge upswing with Sale's return in early May and potentially Paxton's in the summer. Tampa Bay will be in the mix but I think it is too much to expect the bullpen to carry such a heavy burden yet again without some health consequences. The Yankees will finish a distant fourth with a lineup full of DH's and a staff that is underwhelming. Baltimore is still rebuilding and will welcome some of their top prospects this season, including #1 prospect C Adley Rutschman.

AL Central Key Additions

Chicago White Sox: Kendall Graveman RP

Detroit Tigers: Javy Baez SS, Eduardo Rodriguez SP

KC Royals: Zack Greinke SP

Minnesota Twins: Carlos Correa SS, Sonny Gray SP, Gary Sanchez C, Gio Urshela, Dylan Bundy SP

The White Sox added more depth to their bullpen with the biggest acquisition being Graveman. He had an outstanding season last year for both the Mariners and then the Astros and provides closers' stuff with his outstanding sinker.

The Tigers opened up their checkbook this season to bring in two key free agents in Baez and Rodriguez. Baez is likely a tier below the star-studded free agent SS class this year but does provide an upgrade to the Tigers' weak lineup. Rodriguez should provide Detroit with innings and, a year removed from illness, perhaps more consistent stuff.

The Royals welcome back old friend Greinke to the starting rotation. The cagey veteran is sure to give them innings and quality starts despite his diminishing stuff. The Twins certainly got right to work once the lockout ended.

Following a disappointing last place finish in 2021, the Twins added quite possibly the biggest fish in the free agent pond when they landed Correa. They then added Gray to bolster the staff and Sanchez to give the team even more pop. Urshela takes over at 3B and the Twins can only hope his bat returns to form. Dylan Bundy went 6-2 in 11 starts in 2020 before falling apart last season.

If the Twins can get him back to form, this pick-up will end up being huge.

BEST LINEUP: Chicago White Sox

The top three in this lineup, Tim Anderson, Yoán Moncada and José Abreu, are as good as any in baseball. The one thing the White Sox can't afford is a major injury to their starting nine. There is not a ton of depth on this roster, but they will score a ton of runs if they stay healthy. Minnesota certainly upgraded with Correa in the 3-hole but they still have a lot of players that will need to have bounce back years before we can give them the title of best lineup in the



Mar 27, 2022; Fort Myers, Florida, USA; Minnesota Twins shortstop Carlos Correa (4) stands at the plate during his at bat in the fourth inning against the Boston Red Sox spring training at CenturyLink Sports Complex.

Credit: Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports

Central Division.

BEST STARTING FIVE: Cleveland Guardians

Shane Bieber and Aaron Civale both endured injuries last season but, if healthy, they can keep the Guardians competitive this season despite their lack of offense. Cal Quantrill was also strong down the stretch last season, giving Cleveland a strong 1-2-3 rotation. Minnesota has improved with Gray at the head of the staff but isn't deep and the White Sox lost Carlos Rodon, which weakened their starting five.

BEST BULLPEN: Chicago White Sox

This is the true strength of the team. Liam Hendriks, Craig Kimbrel, Joe Kelly or Graveman can all close out games and can all get a strikeout in a big spot. Tony LaRussa will be tasked with

putting them in the best situations all season but the talent is there.

PREDICTION:

1st Minnesota, 2nd Chicago

1. Minnesota
 2. Chicago*
 3. Cleveland
 4. Detroit
 5. Kansas City
- (* Wildcard)

I'm banking on the Twins getting enough out of their patched together starting rotation to pull out the Central Division. Gray is steady, Archer could surprise and Bundy will be solid. I also expect Byron Buxton to stay healthy and have a huge year hitting in front of Correa. The Twins will win the Central Division.

The White Sox have a mediocre starting rotation and a superb bullpen. They also lack the kind of depth that can observe the injuries that will certainly occur throughout the season. They will be in the mix, but will finish 2nd in the Central. Cleveland will stick around thanks to their starting pitching but their lineup might be the worst in the division. Detroit made some improvement but still have a bad lineup and mediocre pitching. KC will showcase Bobby Witt Jr. this season as they start to bring up some young stars.

AL West Key Additions

LA Angels: Noah Syndergaard SP

Houston Astros: Hector Neris RP

Seattle Mariners: Robbie Ray SP, Jesse Winker OF, Eugenio Suarez 3B, Corey Seager SS

Texas Rangers: Marcus Semien 2B

The Angels whiffed on other available starters and are taking a chance on a former all-star in Syndergaard that has pitched 2 innings in 2 years. The Astros replaced Graveman quickly with Neris to try to keep their strong bullpen



Mar 30, 2022; Port St. Lucie, Florida, USA; Houston Astros designated hitter Yordan Alvarez (44) celebrates with teammates in the dugout after hitting a home run in the fourth inning against the New York Mets during spring training at Clover Park.
Credit: Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports

intact.

Seattle added a Cy Young winner in Ray and improved in the outfield and 3B with Winker and Suarez from the Reds in a trade and finally, the Rangers got appreciably better up the middle, particularly power-wise, by adding Seager and Semien in free agency.

BEST LINEUP: Seattle Mariners

The Astros, even without Correa, still have a strong lineup but Seattle has added 55 home runs with Winker and Suarez as well as former all star Adam Frazier at 2B. They have left-right balance throughout the lineup and the pop they lacked in 2021.

BEST STARTING FIVE: Houston Astros

Even with Lance McCullers Jr. set to begin the season on the injured list, the Astros have the best starting pitching in the division. Justin Verlander is set to return from his arm trouble and he will be backed by solid depth with young arms in Luis Garcia, Jose Urquidy, Cristian Javier and Framber Valdez, all of whom shined at various points in the playoffs last year.

BEST BULLPEN: Los Angeles Angels

The Angels smartly re-signed closer Raisel Iglesias who struck out a career-best 38% of batters faced last season. They also added left handed relievers Aaron Loup and Ryan Tepera along

with right hander Archie Bradley to give the team talent and depth in a bullpen that may be taxed with the Angels' subpar starting pitching.

PREDICTION:

1st Houston, 2nd LA Angels

1. Houston
2. LA Angels
3. Seattle
4. Texas
5. Oakland

Houston is still the class of the division and will win a tight race. They have depth in the starting rotation, a solid bullpen and Yordan Alvarez may be ready to put together an MVP season. The Angels will compete this season. They shored up the bullpen and will have a healthy Mike Trout to give them arguably the best 1-2 punch in baseball in Trout and Ohtani. Seattle will be a close third with a great lineup but holes in the pitching staff that they may have difficulty filling. Texas will hit but need more pitching and Oakland is clearly rebuilding.

NL East Key Additions

Atlanta Braves: 1B Matt Olson 1B Kenley Jansen RP

Miami Marlins: Joey Wendle IF, Jorgé Soler, Jacob Stallings C

NY Mets: Max Scherzer SP, Starling Marte OF, Mark Canha OF, Eduardo Escobar IF

Philadelphia Phillies: Nick Castellanos OF/DH, Kyle Schwarber 1B/DH- Philadelphia,

Washington Nationals: Nelson Cruz DH

Atlanta addressed the departure of Freeman with a younger, more affordable version in Olson and added depth to an already stacked bullpen with Jansen.

Miami brought in the versatile Wendle and hopes that WS MVP Soler becomes a Miami hero while shoring up the catching position with Stallings. The Mets added a ton and didn't part with a prospect. They spent cash to get Scherzer as baseball's best #2 pitcher now and strengthened the outfield with Marte and Canha while filling a hole at 3B with Escobar.

The Phillies moves were curious in that they added even more pop to their lineup but made a bad defense even worse by adding essentially 2 DHs to the mix. The ageless Nelson Cruz surprisingly signed with Washington but will help the middle of the lineup for the rebuilding Nationals.



Mar 27, 2022; Port St. Lucie, Florida, USA; New York Mets starting pitcher Jacob deGrom (48) throws a pitch in the first inning during spring training against the St. Louis Cardinals at Clover Park.

Credit: Reinhold Matay-USA TODAY Sports

BEST LINEUP: Philadelphia Phillies

The Phillies have versatility throughout the lineup and they will need it with a poor defense and suspect pitching. Schwarber will likely lead off for the Phillies as he did for Boston with great results and Castellanos provides excellent protection for Harper. Olson should fit in nicely to give Atlanta an imposing lineup again and the Mets will be solid as well but few teams can match the top to bottom power of the Phillies.

BEST STARTING FIVE: New York Mets

The debate begins and ends when your first two pitchers are Jacob deGrom and Max Scherzer. Carlos Carrasco could be sneaky good pen-

ciled in as the 4th starter for the Mets. deGrom is coming off an injury so the Mets will surely protect him early but this rotation has a chance to dominate this season.

BEST BULLPEN: Atlanta Braves

The Braves bullpen leading up to likely closer Jansen includes southpaws Will Smith, Tyler Matzek and AJ Minter and right hander Collin McHugh. Smith proved last season that he's certainly not a specialist and can get righties and lefties out equally. Luke Jackson, who had a 1.98 ERA in 63 2/3 innings last season, adds even more depth. Jansen will likely close because he is more of a 1-inning guy at this point but Smith and McHugh could serve that role if need be as well.

PREDICTION: 1st NY Mets, 2nd Atlanta

1. NY Mets
 2. Atlanta*
 3. Philadelphia
 4. Washington
 5. Miami
- (* Wildcard)

This is the Mets' time. They, of course, will cross their fingers and pray for deGrom to stay healthy but they are built to win now. Solid outfield, quality infield and the best 1-2 punch on the mound in baseball. Atlanta will contend because they always do and they have the bullpen to compete on a daily basis. Philadelphia will hit but will shoot themselves in the foot in the field all year. Miami and Washington are in 'wait til next year' mode as they start to bring in young players from their farm systems.

NL Central Key Additions

Milwaukee Brewers: Hunter Renfroe RF

St. Louis Cardinals: Albert Pujols 1B/DH, Corey Dickerson OF, Steven Matz SP

Chicago Cubs: Marcus Stroman SP, Seiya Suzuki

OF

Renfroe is a power upgrade for Milwaukee and will move into the 4th spot in the lineup. While Pujols is a feel good story in his return to the Cardinals, Matz is the best get of their pickups as a ground ball pitcher with the Cardinals' stellar infield defense behind him. Chicago dipped



Apr 3, 2022; Phoenix, Arizona, USA; Milwaukee Brewers right fielder Hunter Renfroe (12) hits a single against the Texas Rangers in the second inning during a spring training game at American Family Fields of Phoenix.
Credit: Rick Scuteri-USA TODAY Sports

its toe in the free agent waters by signing Stroman to strengthen their rotation and taking a shot with Japanese-import Suzuki. Pittsburgh and Cincinnati stayed put and dumped salaries respectively.

BEST LINEUP: St. Louis Cardinals

In a weak field, the Cardinals get the nod. Tyler O'Neill exploded for 34 home runs last year and he sandwiches Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan Arenado, giving the Cardinals the best 2-3-4 in the division. They have multiple players to choose from in the DH slot, including Pujols from the right side and Nolan Gorman from the left side. They should hit for close to 30 or more home runs combined.

BEST STARTING FIVE: Milwaukee Brewers

The Brewers not only have the best rotation in the Central Division but perhaps the best in all of baseball. The staff is anchored by Cy Young winner Corbin Burnes and 5th runner-up Brandon Woodruff. Last year, every single member

of their starting five had an ERA+ of at least 132, or 32% better than league average. Health is the only thing holding them back from a repeat performance but there are no lingering signs of concern.

BEST BULLPEN: Milwaukee Brewers

The Brewers have arguably the best 1-2 bullpen punch in baseball in Josh Hader and Devin Williams. Hader had career bests in ERA (1.23) and ERA+ (348) to go with 34 saves last season and Williams has had a 1.78 ERA and 42.9% strikeout rate over the last two seasons. In addition, the Brewers have young left hander Aaron Ashby, who has dominant stuff, to utilize in the pen as well.

PREDICTION:

1st Milwaukee, 2nd St. Louis

1. Milwaukee
2. St. Louis
3. Chicago
4. Cincinnati
5. Pittsburgh

The Brew-Crew still possesses the best overall pitching staff in a division that features four other teams that did little to improve this off-season. Renfro should fit in nicely in their lineup and provide 30+ home runs along with his usual number of outfield assists in right field. St. Louis likely didn't do enough to contend and the Cubs have too many questions to make a run this season. Cincinnati and Pittsburgh are far out of the mix this season.

NL West Key Additions

Arizona Diamondbacks: Mark Melancon RP-

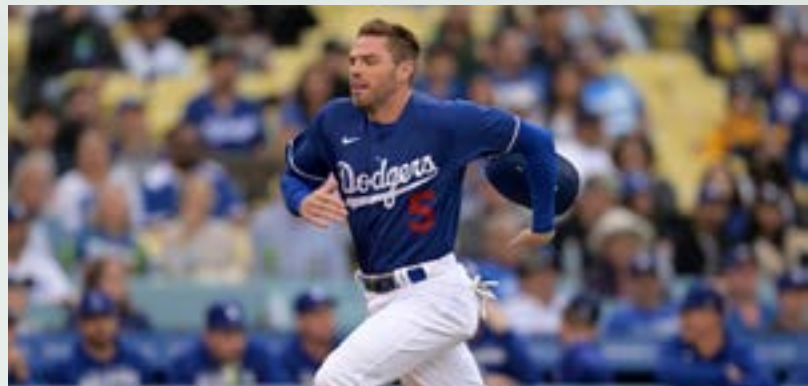
LA Dodgers: Freddie Freeman 1B

SF Giants: Joc Pederson OF, Carlos Rodon SP, Alex Cobb SP

Colorado Rockies: Luke Voit 1B/DH- SD, Kris Bryant 3B/OF

Melancon, even at 37, can still be an effective pitcher out of the Diamondbacks' pen. Freddie Freeman gives the Dodgers the league's most dangerous lineup and a defensive upgrade as well, Pederson will be another solid platoon player for Gabe Kapler to utilize in SF and Cobb and Rodon could both provide depth to the Giants' pitching staff. San Diego hopes Voit finds his power from 2020 again while Bryant will surely benefit from the thin air in Colorado.

BEST LINEUP: Los Angeles Dodgers



Apr 4, 2022; Los Angeles, California, USA; Los Angeles Dodgers first baseman Freddie Freeman (5) scores a run from third base in the first inning against the Los Angeles Angels at Dodger Stadium.

Credit: Jayne Kamin-Oncea-USA TODAY Sports

The Dodgers lineup now features three former MVPs in Mookie Betts, Freeman and Cody Bellinger. The projected starting lineup features 8 former all-stars. The only concern at the moment is the health of Max Muncy and whether or not Bellinger can return close to his 2019 MVP form.

BEST STARTING FIVE: San Francisco Giants

Despite losing Gausman, the Giants still feature a deep and talented starting staff. The Giants added both Cobb and Rodon to give them more quality arms to pair with Logan Webb, Anthony DeSclafani and Alex Wood. Webb leads the staff after having a 135 ERA+ in nearly 150 innings last season. If they can keep Rodon

healthy and he returns to form, the Giants could be back in the playoffs in 2022. The Dodgers staff falls right behind the Giants but do have more uncertainties, which places them right behind the Giants.

BEST BULLPEN: San Francisco Giants

Manager Gabe Kapler can turn to any one of five pitchers to close out games. He will start the year with lefthander Jake McGee in the closer role but could eventually turn to Camilo Doval and his tantalizing 102 MPH fastball. The Giants' season will hinge on the success of its pitching staff as a whole.

PREDICTION:

1st LA Dodgers, 2nd San Diego

1. LA Dodgers
 2. San Diego*
 3. San Francisco
 4. Colorado
 5. Arizona
- (* Wildcard)

The Dodgers are too deep and talented in all areas to suffer through any extended losing streaks and should surpass 100 wins again this year and take the division. I'm leaning to San Diego over San Francisco because I don't think Kapler's lineup juggling can be as successful two straight years. The Padres have added power in Voit and didn't overspend in the off-season so they may have the money to spend on a bat during the season. Fernando Tatis Jr's eventual return from injury will also add a spark to the lineup. Colorado and Arizona will finish in the back of the pack.

Playoff Predictions

Wildcard Series

AL Wildcard Game:

Boston over Chicago

NL Wildcard Game:

Atlanta over San Diego

Division Series

AL Division:

Toronto over Boston

Minnesota over Houston

NL Division:

LA Dodgers over Atlanta

NY mets over Milwaukee

Championship Series

AL Division:

Toronto over Minnesota

NL Division:

LA Dodgers over NY mets

World Series Prediction: LA Dodgers over Toronto



BETTING 605 FIVE ADVANCED BASEBALL BETTING STRATEGIES YOU NEED TO KNOW

WRITTEN BY DAVID DELANO

When betting on baseball, you will commonly hear some stats and trends mentioned more than others. Outside of some of the most pointed out things bettors notice, here are five advanced betting strategies that separate the sharps from the squares.

Umpires

Since starting pitching is weighed so heavily in baseball lines, you should not ignore the person calling the balls and strikes. Every umpire has his own strike zone. Some have larger ones that benefit the pitchers (under) and other have smaller strike zones that benefit the hitters, thus helping the over.

You can check on the past performances of starting pitchers when particular umpires are behind home plate. Umpire crews are announced before the start of the series and usually run clockwise from game-to-game. So if an umpire at home in Game 1 of a series, he'll move to third base the following night. If an umpire is at first base in Game 1, he'll move

behind the plate in Game 2.

For larger sample sizes, I also recommend checking the records of the home vs. road teams, favorites vs. underdogs, and over/under results for the home plate umpires. You can find MLB Umpire stats everywhere online and check out how the umpires performed in 2021 in terms of overs and unders.

Bullpens

While the listed pitching match-ups tell us who will start the game, that's only a piece of information. In 2002, 42 starting pitchers tossed at least 200 innings during the regular season. In 2021, there were only four starters who reached the 200 inning mark. In this day in age when most starting pitchers are unlikely to go beyond six innings, and more games are being pitched entirely by relief pitchers, you are doing yourself a disservice if you are betting an entire nine-inning game and not paying attention to the bullpen stats and splits.

This has become a huge factor when betting baseball as many teams have problems with getting to their closer and struggle to hold leads. Staying on top of good and bad bullpens when a mediocre pitcher is on the mound can be the difference between winning and losing. You can't just bet on the starting pitcher anymore unless he's Jacob deGrom or Max Scherzer.



Line Value

I can guarantee you that no team in MLB will win or lose every game this season, but a team with a losing record will likely finish ahead of a team with a winning record for betting profits.

In 2021, the Detroit Tigers finished the season with a 77-85 record, but according to covers.com were the third-best money team in baseball +2,303. That means if you made a \$100 money line bet on Detroit for all 162 games, you would have come ahead by \$2,303. Overall, only 10 of the 30 teams ended up profitable for bettors last season, but three finished with losing records (Colorado and Cleveland being the others).

Due to the heavy price tags that favorites and popular teams often carry, there were eight teams that finished the 2021 season with a winning record but were also losing teams overall

for money line bettors. Two of baseball's most popular teams, the Los Angeles Dodgers, who finished 106-56 were -\$73 in the money, and the New York Yankees who went 92-70 finished -\$184 in losses for bettors.

It's good to look beyond the teams and evaluate the numbers and situations to find value. Each team has a value at a certain price for every game based upon their chances to win. When the team's chances to win are better than the price, the bet makes sense. If the value is not there, then stay away. This is by no means easy to determine. All underdogs don't have value, and sometimes the big favorite is the correct play. The two worst teams in baseball last season were Arizona and Baltimore, who both went 52-110. They were also both horrible bets on most nights, as the Orioles finished 27th at -\$2,695, and the Diamondbacks were the worst money team in baseball at -\$3,941.

In 2022, try to find the sleeper that is winning games, but the market is slow to believe in. Seattle, San Francisco, were the top two profitable teams to bet on last season, with being Tampa Bay fourth.

Remember if you are betting teams with an average of +100 odds, then winning more than 50% of your bets will turn you a profit. However, if you are betting favorites at an average of -150, you need to win more than 60% of your bets.

Sabermetrics

Explaining advanced stats could be an entire book itself. Due to the complicity and not being talked about for as long, they are often overlooked but should not be. With so many advanced stats available, you have to determine which ones will be the most valuable to you when deciding which games to bet on.

First, for some overlooked stats that don't involve too much extra research, I always recommend checking home/away and day/night splits for both teams and their starting pitchers.

Now, when it comes to starting pitching, don't just look at ERA. WHIP, which stands for hits/walks per innings, often tells a better story. For example, if you see a starter with a 2.90 ERA and 1.50 WHIP, they have likely been lucky, and you can expect to see their ERA rise in the future if they continue allowing the number of hits and walks they are on pace for. A starter with a 4.50 ERA but 1.00 WHIP is likely pitching much better than their ERA indicates.

The Adjusted ERA (ERA+) is another advanced stat to consider that adjusted for how much impact a pitcher's home ballpark has made on their performance compared to their peers.

Team defensive runs saved (DRS) is one of my favorite overlooked stats to consider, especially when betting totals, as it is common that a terrific or poor defensive play will either cease or open up the flood gates to a big inning.

Another important analytic teams use is Batting Average on Ball in Play or BABIP. This measures how often a ball in play goes for a hit. A ball is in play when the plate appearance ends in something other than a strikeout, walk, hit batter, catcher's interference, sacrifice bunt, or home run. The formula for BABIP: $(\text{Hits} - \text{Homers}) / (\text{At-Bats} - \text{Strikeouts} - \text{Homers} + \text{Sac Flies})$

The most popular analytic that baseball fans now use is WAR. That's wins above replacement to measure a hitter or pitcher's overall contribution to wins. Being an everyday player is more than about hitting the ball. It also includes defense and baserunning as well. It measures a player's value in all phases of the game by deciphering how many more wins he's worth than a replacement-level player at the same position.

(you can find more about WAR and other Advanced Stats on MLB.com: <https://www.mlb.com/glossary/advanced-stats/wins-above-replacement>)

Weather

The weather can heavily impact games in out-

door stadiums, and the wind can play a huge role in totals. At Wrigley Field in Chicago, you will see totals more affected by the wind than any other stadium. When the wind is blowing



out at Wrigley Field, the runs can add up quickly, but offense can be harder to come by when the wind is coming in.

The significance of wind and weather does not carry the same weight everywhere. At AT&T Park, traditionally, the weather does not impact the game as strongly, and the wind blowing out does little to benefit the offense in San Francisco.

Early in the baseball season, make sure you check the weather as the colder climates like Colorado, could see some icy cold conditions with no precipitation where the games have to go on and it could really have an effect on the totals and the pitcher's control.



Apr 4, 2022; Los Angeles, California, USA; Los Angeles Dodgers shortstop Trea Turner (6) singles in the third inning against the Los Angeles Angels at Dodger Stadium.

Credit: Jayne Kamin-Oncea-USA TODAY Sports

Best MLB Futures to Bet

Written by Nathaniel Reeves

After a winter full of uncertainty, the 2022 MLB regular season is finally set to get underway on April 7. With competitive races projected in categories such as the AL pennant and NL Rookie of the Year, here are some of the best future bets to place ahead of Opening Day.

World Series

Top 5 in terms of odds:

1. Los Angeles Dodgers +500
2. Toronto Blue Jays +900
3. Houston Astros +1000
4. New York Mets +1000
5. New York Yankees +1100

(See Page 13 for Complete Odds from BetMGM)

It's no surprise to see the Dodgers enter the season as a significant favorite, as the roster is loaded with both stars and young talent again. Helping its case is the fact that Los Angeles is the only team that is just about guaranteed a playoff spot having qualified nine years in a row while winning at least 104 games in three of the last four full seasons. Things will look a little different this year, as mainstays like Corey Seager

(.915 OPS in 2021) and Kenley Jansen (38 saves, 2.22 ERA) are elsewhere, yet the Dodgers still reloaded by grabbing Freddie Freeman (.896 OPS, 31 home runs).

Another player leaving the Dodgers in free agency was Max Scherzer, who put up a tremendous 1.98 ERA and 30.6 K-BB% in 11 starts with Los Angeles before taking his talent to the Mets to significantly bolster their odds. A star-studded rotation that also added Chris Bassitt behind Jacob deGrom will carry the Mets to contention, but there's still a few holes in the lineup and New York will badly need bounce-back seasons from Francisco Lindor and Jeff McNeil to win it all, so being tied for the second-favorite might be a little optimistic.

Toronto might be the most exciting team to watch in 2022 after an emerging squad just missed out on the playoffs last season despite both the lineup and rotation posting elite numbers. While Robbie Ray and Marcus Semien are huge losses, the Blue Jays retooled by adding Kevin Gausman and Matt Chapman to join an absolutely loaded young core.

Houston continues to grade out as a contender year after year, although losing the 5.8 WAR and continuously clutch postseason performance of Carlos Correa will likely lead to a slight dropoff, making them tough to bet. The Astros ability to develop young pitching has been excellent with Justin Verlander also returning from injury, but the lineup can only stay elite if players on the wrong side of 30 like Jose Altuve, Michael Brantley and Yuli Gurriel repeat their performances from last season.

The Yankees are coming in fifth after qualifying for a Wild Card last season, as another outstanding bullpen will have them in the mix and there are some mashers in the middle of the order. Still, New York didn't add any big name free agents to address some major needs, the bottom half of the lineup looks shaky, and there are all kinds of injury risks, making the Yankees overvalued here.

It's hard to argue against the Dodgers being

the best team on paper, but these are also tough odds to bet anyone no matter how good they are, and there are a few questions in the rotation with aging Clayton Kershaw, injury-prone Tony Gonsolin and struggling Andrew Heaney on the back end.

A better value is the Blue Jays, who took a big step forward with a young team last season and will do so again with arguably baseball's best offense, better health in the bullpen and a full-time return to their home park in Toronto.

WORLD SERIES PREDICTION:

Toronto Blue Jays +900

AL Pennant

Top 5 by Odds:

1. Toronto Blue Jays +450
2. Houston Astros +475
3. Chicago White Sox +550
4. New York Yankees +550
5. Tampa Bay Rays +650

(See Page 14 for Complete Odds from BetMGM)

The defending AL champs are almost the favorite to repeat, just barely edged out by the Blue Jays and followed by two more AL East teams and the White Sox joining a crowded contending field just behind. Chicago was another young team that clicked last season en route to winning the AL Central, and returns just about everyone outside of Carlos Rodon, who is a big loss after posting a 2.37 ERA and 34.6% strikeout rate. Still, the White Sox made minimal additions, and are tough to trust after they looked outclassed by contending AL teams including the Astros in the Division Series.

Another team in the mix is the Rays, who put up 100 wins to lead the AL before going down to the Red Sox in the Divisional Series. Most key pieces are back, with Tampa Bay again projecting to be one of MLB's best offenses plus a pitching staff that always gets the most out of its depth. Tampa Bay will hope improvement

will come from in-house rather than offseason additions, as top prospects Shane Bieber, Josh Lowe and Vidal Brujan are on the way to join elite young players Wander Franco and Shane Bieber.

One thing helping the AL East contenders to win the pennant is the new playoff format, as the teams who finish second and third in a tough division won't be punished by a single elimination coinflip anymore, getting a three-game series instead. Stick with the Blue Jays to win this one, but a Rays team that is always in the mix is also good value.

AL PENNANT PREDICTION:

Toronto Blue Jays +550

NL Pennant

Top 5 by odds:

1. Los Angeles Dodgers +250
2. New York Mets +475
3. Atlanta Braves +600
4. Milwaukee Brewers +700
5. San Diego Padres +700

After the aforementioned Dodgers and Mets, the next-best odds in the NL belong to the defending World Series champions. While losing a franchise icon like Freeman is tough, the Braves made an excellent move to replace him with Matt Olson, who piled up 5.0 WAR and 39 homers in the tough hitter's park in Oakland last season. The bullpen struggled at times in the regular season before putting it all together in the playoffs while now adding strong veterans in Jansen and Collin McHugh (1.35 ERA, 25.1 K-BB%).

Milwaukee is next up in odds as it looks like a strong bet to repeat as NL Central champions thanks to what looks like MLB's best pitching staff on paper. The problem is Milwaukee's offense wasn't good in the regular season before getting totally overmatched by Atlanta in the NLDS, and while small tweaks like adding

Andrew McCutchen (107 wRC+, 27 homers) and Hunter Renfroe (.816 OPS, 31 homers) certainly help, it's not enough barring a major bounce-back from Christian Yelich.

No team in baseball was more disappointing than the Padres last season at 79-83, but there's still enough upside here for them to mentioned among NL contenders. Luke Voit (career 133 wRC+) is the only major addition, as the Padres will hope adding an excellent manager in Bob Melvin plus better health will be enough to recover from a tough 2021. That latter point is not off to a good start with Fernando Tatis Jr. set to miss significant time with a fractured wrist, and the Padres face an uphill battle to make the playoffs dealing with the Dodgers and Giants in the NL West plus a host of Wild Card contenders in the East.

Again the Dodgers deserve to be the heavy favorite, but the best value is on the defending champs, who have already proven they can upset Los Angeles in a seven-game series. It's easy to forget the Braves did all that without Ronald Acuna Jr., who will be back providing MVP-level production soon enough, and the improved bullpen behind an excellent rotation will ensure a better regular season from Atlanta this year.

NL PENNANT PREDICTION

Atlanta Braves +600

AL Rookie of the Year

Top 5 by Odds:

1. Bobby Witt Jr. +330
2. Julio Rodriguez +400
3. Spencer Torkelson +500
4. Adley Rutschman +700
5. Riley Greene +1000

This is about as exciting of an AL rookie class than anyone could hope for, starting with an elite shortstop prospect in Bobby Witt Jr., who seems likely to be on Kansas City's Opening Day roster. Witt Jr. went off for a .933 OPS in 62

AAA games as a 21-year-old last season while blasting 17 homers, one of which went nearly 500 feet.

Torkelson is next as he should also be up Opening Day or shortly after at first base for the Tigers after putting together one of the best college seasons ever at the place before advancing quickly through the minors with a 149 wRC+ between A, AA and AAA last year. The 22-year-old is a safe bet to be great at the plate, but is truly going to have to mash given he plays a less glamorous defensive position than the others.

Rutschman is the top prospect in MLB after going off for nearly a .900 OPS between AA and AAA last year while also displaying off the charts defense and game calling skills from the catcher position. Unfortunately his debut will be delayed by a strained triceps, and the Orioles will be cautious with his timeframe as they are nowhere near contention.

Rodriguez is the top-ranked member of Seattle's No. 1 farm system after annihilating AA for a 173 wRC+ last season at the age of 20. With an outstanding Spring Training so far, Rodriguez is in line to be the Mariners' Opening Day center fielder as they think this is the year a lengthy playoff drought finally ends.

Baz looked outstanding in a small sample size last season with a 2.03 ERA and 18 strikeouts in 13.1 innings. While holding a rotation spot on a World Series contender helps his case, Baz underwent surgery to remove loose bodies from his elbow on March 21 and is shut down for at least three weeks, which is not ideal for a young pitcher.

It wouldn't be a surprise to see all of these rookies be outstanding, so going with a bit of a longer shot is the right move. Rodriguez has the right combination of good odds, likelihood of playing on Opening Day, and possibility of being on a playoff team to be the selection.

AL ROY PREDICTION

Julio Rodriguez +400

NL Rookie of the Year

Top 5 by odds :

1. Seiya Suzuki +350
2. Oneil Cruz +425
3. Hunter Greene +700
4. Bryson Stott +900
5. C.J. Abrams +1000

It's a more wide open race in the NL where someone totally off the board could take home the award, as the prospects don't grade out quite as highly here. Cruz is the lone top 10 prospect thanks to his unreal power as a shortstop, but the Pirates have already optioned him to AAA even before Spring Training ends, putting his playing time into question.

Suzuki is in a different situation as a 27-year-old with nine seasons of experience in Japan, where he hit .315/.414/.570 for his career en route to earning a five-year, \$85 million deal with the Cubs. While there's always a chance a player won't translate well to MLB, Suzuki looks like a fairly safe bet to be a well-rounded hitter with plus power and speed.

Ruiz narrowly maintained rookie eligibility after posting a .742 OPS in 96 plate appearances with Washington following a blockbuster trade with the Dodgers. The Nationals will certainly take a full season of that with plus catcher defense, but the numbers at the plate don't jump out enough to win Rookie of the Year.

With Buster Posey retired, Bart is finally set to have a full-time roster spot in San Francisco, hoping to improve on a .612 OPS through the first 117 plate appearances of his career. Multiple injuries have hurt Bart's status as a former top prospect, and he'll be splitting time with Curt Casali, making Rookie of the Year a longshot.

Stott is a top 35 prospect in baseball thanks to his combination of power and slick fielding from the shortstop position, although he might have to play third base to crack Philadelphia's lineup this season. A hot Spring Training has

given Stott a bump in odds, although his path to playing time isn't totally clear with the Phillies entering the season as Wild Card hopefuls, and moving to third would limit the value of his strong defense.

The best two values here are Suzuki and Ruiz, who both are locked in to everyday jobs while having more experience than the others. Having a positive nine-year track record in the world's second-best league gives Suzuki a leg up, and he will have a good mix of average and power right away.

NL ROY PREDICTION

Seiya Suzuki +350

2022 MVP Predictions

Written by Chris King

After a winter of discontent, an extended lock-out that seemed to threaten the very fabric of major league baseball, and an eventual reconciliation, we're on the precipice of the 2022 major league baseball season. It seems like an eternity ago that the Braves won their first World

Series crown since 1995. Since then, we've seen plenty of big names head to different places than they were a season ago.

Marcus Stroman left the Big Apple for the Windy City, signing a deal with the Cubs. Corey Seager and Marcus Semien left the Dodgers and Blue Jays, respectively, for long-term lucrative deals to play for the Rangers. Trevor Story left the Rockies for the Red Sox while Kris Bryant, traded to the Giants last year at the deadline, signed with the team from the Mile-High City.

What does that mean when it comes to post-season hardware? Well, there's no telling at this point. We could see guys that got big contracts flop in their new location while unsung players step up and have career years. What we can do is take a look at the race for the prominent hardware handed out in each league.



Mar 26, 2022; Tampa, Florida, USA; Toronto Blue Jays first baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (27) looks on in the third inning against the New York Yankees during spring training at George M. Steinbrenner Field.

Credit: Nathan Ray Seebeck-USA TODAY Sports

American League MVP Predictions

Today, we take a look at what should be an interesting MVP race in the American League. Here's a look at the top five candidates with their odds to win.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Blue Jays (+500)

It seems fitting that last year's runner-up would be near the top of the food chain when it comes to the odds this season. Guerrero Jr. didn't earn a first-place vote but finished comfortably ahead of his teammate, Marcus Semien (232 points), who finished third in the voting. He posted big numbers on the season, leading the majors in home runs (48), total bases (363) and runs scored (123) on the year. Guerrero Jr. led the American League in on-base percentage (.401), slugging percentage (.601) and OPS (1.002) on the year as well while driving in 111 runs. He earned his first All-Star Game nod and his first Silver Slugger Award in the process. While things won't be the same for Guerrero Jr. in the lineup this season with Semien signing a big deal with the Rangers, there's no shortage of support for him in the mix. The Blue Jays acquired Matt Chapman from the A's to play the hot corner. Throw in a full season of George Springer (who hit 22 homers in 78 games last season), along with the further development of Bo Bichette (.298, 29, 102), and there is plenty of protection in the lineup. If Teoscar Hernandez (.296, 32, 116) and Lourdes Guerriel Jr. (.276, 21, 84) can help, along with Chapman, offset the production of Semien, Guerrero Jr. could well be on his way to matching the accomplishments of his father, who won AL MVP with the Angels back in 2004.

Shohei Ohtani, Angels (+350)

I guess if you're going to talk about who could

win the MVP, why not talk about last year's winner? Ohtani, a two-way player, was a unanimous selection for the AL MVP Award last season, earning all 30 first-place votes and 420 points to leave runner-up Vladimir Guerrero Jr., who finished with 269 points, in the dust. He did it all last season, leading the American League in intentional walks (20) while leading



Apr 4, 2022; Los Angeles, California, USA; Los Angeles Angels starting pitcher Shohei Ohtani (17) beats the throw to Los Angeles Dodgers third baseman Justin Turner (10) in the third inning at Dodger Stadium.

Credit: Jayne Kamin-Oncea-USA TODAY Sports

the majors in triples (eight) and, on a less positive note, caught stealings (10) over the course of the year. His average at the plate was mediocre (.257) but a stark increase over the .190 mark he posted in the shortened 2020 campaign. It's still a drop-off from the .285 and .286 marks he posted in his first two big-league seasons but let's take a look at all the gaudy numbers he did manage to put up a season ago.

Ohtani slammed 46 home runs, putting him third in the American League, while he led the AL in WAR with 9.1 wins above replacement. He stole 26 bases, scored 103 runs, posted a .372 on-base percentage and a .592 slugging percentage and drew 96 free passes. Sure, he fanned 189 times as a hitter but with the power and speed combination he provided, that's something most teams will take without complaint. Did we mention he could pitch? He was in the All-Star Game as a pitcher. Ohtani posted a 9-2 mark with a 3.18 ERA, a 1.09 WHIP, 44 walks and 156 strikeouts over 130.1 innings of work in 23 starts. When you have a guy that can make an impact on the mound every fifth or sixth day AND do damage with his bat on the

days in between, you have a force to be reckoned with. That sums up Ohtani in a nutshell.

Aaron Judge, Yankees (+2000)

Judge finished fourth in the AL MVP race last season though he had what seemed like a quiet year for the Bronx Bombers. Despite the lack of chatter about his performance, he picked up his third All-Star appearance and his second Silver Slugger Award for his efforts. Judge posted a .287 average with 39 home runs and 98 runs batted in on the season. Those numbers marked his best season marks since he broke onto the scene as a dominant rookie back in 2017, when he won AL Rookie of the Year honors after posting a .284 mark with 52 homers and 114 RBI while scoring 128 times.



Apr 2, 2022; Tampa, Florida, USA; New York Yankees right fielder Aaron Judge (99) scores a run during the fourth inning against the Atlanta Braves during spring training at George M. Steinbrenner Field. Credit: Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

Like Trout, Judge is older than some of the rest of the favorites as he'll turn 30 April 26, and last season's 148 games marked the most he played since his rookie campaign, when he logged 155 contests. In a lineup flanked by Anthony Rizzo, Joey Gallo, Giancarlo Stanton, Josh Donaldson and Gleyber Torres, the potential for prodigious power numbers are there. Opposing pitchers won't be able to just arbitrarily issue free passes because there's always another power bat coming up behind them. If Judge can stay healthy this season, he could make an impact. He's motivated with a potential lucrative long-term deal looming in the offseason: can he deliver a verdict?

Mike Trout, Angels (+450)

It might be a bit surprising to see Trout this high up the board given that 2021 was pretty much a lost season for him. After all, he played in only 36 games, posting a .333/.466/.624 slash line with eight doubles, a triple and eight homers to go with 18 RBI. He stole a pair of bases but went on the injured list after injuring his calf on May 17. The thought process was that he would miss six to eight weeks. Instead, it came out later in the summer that Trout had torn his calf muscle and he was out for the rest of the season. It's hardly what the Angels would have wanted after handing Trout a 12-year deal worth \$426 million before the 2019 season.

Sure, Trout has three MVP Awards to his credit at this point of his career and that's something that can't be overlooked. He's also 30 and will turn 31 in August. With the shortened 2020 season, Trout has played only 89 combined games over the past two years. Of course, 2021 marked the first time since 2011, Trout's first taste of the majors (when he played only 40 games), that he failed to finish in the top five of the MVP voting. A bounce-back season would be nice for Trout the player and the Angels as a whole. Keep an eye out for how he looks early on in the year to get a feel for how he may perform.

Wander Franco, Rays (+2000)

This one seems to be a bit of a wild card situation as Franco simply doesn't have much in the way of major league experience. He's only 21 years old, having reached that lofty age on March 1, and didn't make his major league debut until June 22 last season. Franco has all of 70 major league games to his credit, though his performance was enough to allow him to finish third in the AL Rookie of the Year voting. He earned two first-place votes and finished with 30 points, leaving him behind Houston's Luis Garcia (63 points) and teammate Randy Arozarena.



Apr 4, 2022; Port Charlotte, Florida, USA; Tampa Bay Rays manager Kevin Cash (16) and shortstop Wander Franco (5) talk before the start of their game against the Atlanta Braves during spring training at Charlotte Sports Park.
Credit: Jonathan Dyer-USA TODAY Sports

Now, Franco did hit .288 with seven homers and 39 RBI in his major league action last season. He posted a .347 on-base percentage and a .463 slugging percentage while striking out 37 times in 308 plate appearances. Franco was solid in the postseason, going seven of 19 (.368) with two homers and four RBI in the Rays' four-game AL Division Series loss to the Red Sox. The problem is, we don't know if major league pitchers will find his weaknesses and exploit them like we've seen with countless other young hitters. Throw in that Tampa Bay isn't necessarily an offensive powerhouse, with question marks abound in their lineup, and it could be a challenge for Franco. He's a bit of a dark horse in this race. There is never a shortage of names bandied about as to who will end up as the MVP before the season starts.

We broke down the top five candidates but one could easily have mentioned Jose Ramirez, Bo Bichette, Rafael Devers, Corey Seager or Yordan Alvarez, among others. Will any of this group end up with the hardware at the end of the year?

We'll have to wait to find out. Now, onto the National League.

National League MVP Predictions

Juan Soto, Nationals (+300)

Soto comes in as the odds-on favorite to win the NL MVP award this season. Only 23 as the season gets underway (he won't turn 24 until October 25), he still has plenty of time to improve and enhance his production. Soto finished second to Bryce Harper in the MVP voting last season after posting a .313/.465/.534 slash line in 654 plate appearances. He led the league with 145 walks and in on-base percentage, while finishing second in runs scored (111) on the year. For good measure, Soto led the NL in WAR (wins above replacement player) with 7.1, 8th in slugging percentage, second in batting average and 10th in RBI (95) on the year. He cracked 29 homers and has 98 career long balls in 464 games. Soto earned his second consecutive Silver Slugger Award and was solid in the field, recording five outfield assists and actually recording as a +4 in defensive runs saved according to Baseball Reference.



Mar 16, 2022; West Palm Beach, FL, USA; Washington Nationals outfielder Juan Soto signs autographs after spring training at The Ballpark of the Palm Beaches.
Credit: Jim Rassol-USA TODAY Sports

Compared to the shortened 2021 season where Soto was marked as a -9 in the same category, that's a big leap. With the addition of the DH to the National League, he could see some work there as opposed to always being in the field

but at least he's not a liability like some other guys. Soto turned down a reported 13-year, \$350 million deal from the Nationals during the off-season. If he can continue to build on his numbers, the price tag for his next big deal will be astronomical.



Mar 27, 2022; Dunedin, Florida, USA; Philadelphia Phillies right fielder Bryce Harper (3) celebrates with his teammates after hitting a two-run home run in the third inning of the game against the Toronto Blue Jays during spring training at TD Ballpark.
Credit: Jonathan Dyer-USA TODAY Sports

Bryce Harper, Phillies (+1000)

Harper is the reigning NL MVP, after beating Soto last year in a crowded race. He gained 17 first-place votes and 348 points to Soto's six and 274 points, giving him his second MVP award with the first coming back in 2015. Harper put up solid numbers last season for the Phillies, posting a .309/.429/.615 slash line. He led the NL in slugging percentage, doubles (42) and OPS (1.044) on the year while drawing 100 free passes, which ranked second in the National League behind Soto. Harper hammered 35 homers while driving in 84 and scored 101 runs for a Philadelphia team that stumbled in the final week of the season, losing six of their final seven games to fall out of playoff contention.

Harper gets some much-needed protection in the lineup this season, which will make it a bit more challenging for opposing teams to pitch around him. The additions of Schwarber and Castellanos bring an additional 66 homers and 171 RBI from last season. Castellanos had a successful run in Cincinnati while Schwarber got hot mid-season with Washington before being

dealt to Boston at the trade deadline. Adding those guys to a lineup that already features Rhys Hoskins and J.T. Realmuto, among others, should help Harper get more pitches to hit. Now, whether the Phillies can pitch and field well enough to contend remains to be seen but Harper should be primed for a big year in the City of Brotherly Love.

Freddie Freeman, Dodgers (+1200)

Freeman helped the Braves win their first World Series title since 1995 and then left the only franchise he had ever played for. After 11 full seasons, 1784 hits, 271 home runs, 969 runs scored and 941 runs batted in with Atlanta, he signed a six-year deal worth \$162 million with the Dodgers as he returns close to home. Freeman will slot right into a solid lineup on a team that won 106 regular season games a season ago, sandwiched between Mookie Betts and Trea Turner more than likely at the top of the lineup.

In what proved to be his swan song in Atlanta, Freeman posted a .300/.393/.503 slash line in 159 games spanning a league-high 695 plate appearances. Freeman led the National League with 120 runs scored while adding 25 doubles, 31 home runs and 83 RBI. He recorded his sixth top-10 finish in the MVP race as he ended up ninth last season. With a loaded lineup to work with and the Dodgers considered to be a solid favorite to earn a second World Series crown in three years, Freeman will get a chance to prove that you can go home again this season. He's a career .296 hitter with six doubles, seven homers and 19 RBI in 33 career games at Dodger Stadium. Now he'll get a chance to make an impact there 81 games a season.

Ronald Acuna Jr., Braves (+700)

Acuna Jr. is another young star outfielder as he will be 24 on opening day with his 25th birthday not coming until December 18, well after the

season will have drawn to a close. It might be a bit surprising to see Acuna Jr. this high up the board given the fact that he played only half a season last year after tearing his ACL on July 10. He won't be ready when the season starts as the current expectation is for him to be in the lineup, alternating between the outfield and the DH role in order to get fully upto speed and build up the necessary strength in his leg, in the first week of May.

The Braves definitely could use Acuna Jr.'s pop and speed at the top of their lineup. He posted a .283/.394/.596 slash line in 360 plate appearances over 82 games before going down with the injury. Acuna Jr. hammered 24 homers in half a season, drove in 52 runs and stole 17 bases in that stretch. He's won two Silver Slugger Awards and likely would have won a third had he stayed healthy last season. Forty-four of his 84 hits went for extra bases and he was a +2 in defensive runs saved according to Baseball Reference. Perhaps even more importantly in the era of the luxury tax is that Acuna Jr. is cost effective: he signed an eight-year deal worth \$100 million back in 2019 that have him under contract through 2026. The Braves also have team option years for 2027 and 2028, so the potential for him being a long-term piece at Truist Park is definitely on the table.

Mookie Betts, Dodgers (+1000)

Betts is actually coming off a bit of a down season in 2021 in his first year of a mammoth 12-year, \$365 million deal that runs through 2032. He tied a career-low with a .264 batting average while posting a .367 on-base percentage and a .487 slugging percentage on the year in 122 games. Betts failed to win a Silver Slugger for the first time since 2017 and didn't earn a Gold Glove for the first time since the 2015 campaign. After four straight top-eight finishes in the MVP race, including an AL MVP back in 2018 with Boston, he wasn't able to earn even one vote last season. So why does he come in this high on the odds list?

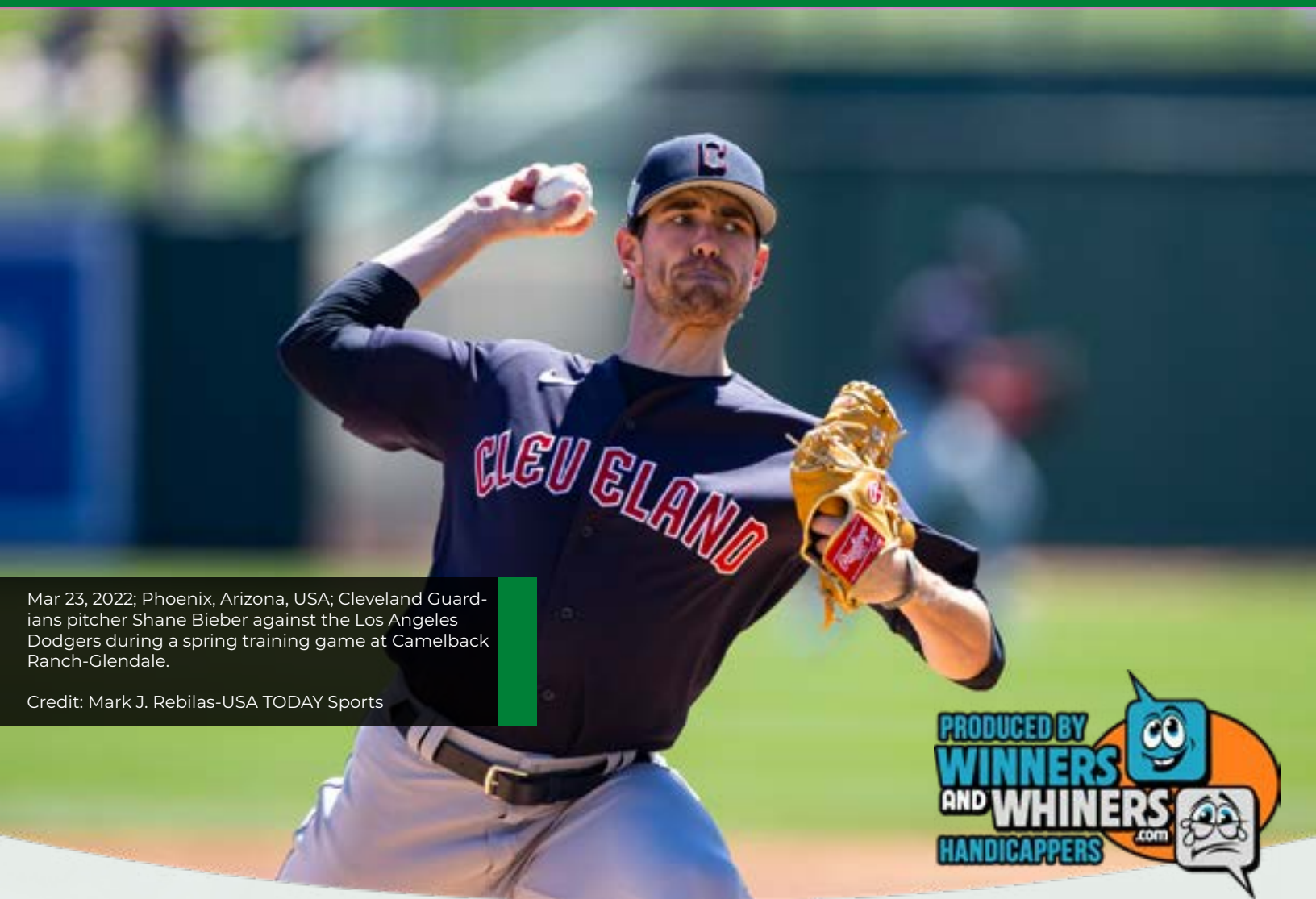


Los Angeles Dodgers Mookie Betts during a spring training game against the Arizona Diamondbacks at Salt River Fields. Baseball Los Angeles Dodgers At Arizona Diamondbacks

Credit: Rob Schumacher-USA TODAY Sports

For starters, the Dodgers went out and signed Freddie Freeman to a deal earlier this month, adding another above-average bat to the lineup. Los Angeles could slot Freeman right behind Betts at the top of the order with Trea Turner, Max Muncy and Will Smith comprising the 3, 4 and 5 hitters. With a loaded top half of the lineup, it will be tough for opposing pitchers to work through that group unscathed. Besides that, the last time Betts hit .264 in a season was 2017. In 2018, he hit a league-leading .346 with 129 runs scored, 47 doubles, five triples, 32 home runs, 80 RBI and 30 stolen bases en route to the AL MVP award. Could a repeat performance be in the cards for him in 2022? We'll have to see but don't count him out.

Will one of these five end up being crowned as the National League MVP at the end of the season? Your guess is as good as ours here before the season starts and the games mean something. If things go as expected, however, there's a good chance that you'll see one of these guys claiming the hardware come October



Mar 23, 2022; Phoenix, Arizona, USA; Cleveland Guardians pitcher Shane Bieber against the Los Angeles Dodgers during a spring training game at Camelback Ranch-Glendale.

Credit: Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports



American League Cy Young Predictions

Written by Chris King

We take a look at what should be an interesting MVP race in the American League. Here's a look at the top five candidates with their odds to win provided by BetMGM in parentheses.

Shane Bieber, Guardians (+800)

Bieber won the AL Cy Young in the shortened 2020 campaign when he went 8-1 with a

league-leading 1.63 ERA, a 0.866 WHIP, 21 walks and 122 strikeouts over 77.1 innings in 12 starts. The problem for him last season was his health. Bieber tested positive for COVID-19 during spring training but made it back to take the ball on Opening Day. However, he suffered a subscapularis strain and hit the injured list on June 14. As it turned out, he wouldn't come off the IL until September 24 with the team failing to be much of a threat in the AL Central without their ace.

In his limited work, Bieber was 7-4 with a 3.17 ERA, a 1.21 WHIP, 33 walks and 134 strikeouts over 96.2 innings of work in 16 starts. With a lack of fear-instilling hitters in their lineup, the Indians are going lean heavily on a rotation that is anchored by Bieber. He has two top-four finishers in the AL Cy Young race and a pair of All-Star appearances in the last three seasons. Can he bounce back from his injury-plagued campaign

and return to his 2020 form this season?



Mar 17, 2022; Peoria, AZ, USA; Seattle Mariners pitcher Robbie Ray during spring training workouts at Peoria Sports Complex.

Credit: Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY Sports

Robbie Ray, Mariners (+1200)

Ray is the defending AL Cy Young winner, though he earned that award pitching for the Blue Jays. Perhaps more impressively, he won it despite having three different home ballparks (TD Ballpark in Dunedin, Sahlen Field in Buffalo and Rogers Centre in Toronto) to work in last season. Ray channeled his big season into a five-year, \$115 million deal with the Mariners as Jerry DiPoto and the boys from the Pacific Northwest made a big splash in an effort to get the team from the Emerald City back into the postseason for the first time since the 2001 team won 116 games led by Ichiro Suzuki, Bret Boone and Edgar Martinez, among others. On the season, Ray made 32 starts, posting a 13-7 record with a 2.84 ERA, a 1.045 WHIP, 52 walks and 248 strikeouts over 193.1 innings of work. He paced the AL in innings pitched, games started and WHIP while leading the majors in whiffs. One thing that Ray would like to find a way to cut down on would be the long ball as he surrendered 33 of them last season. On the plus side, pitching half his games at T-Mobile Park (average of 2.37 homers per game last season) might be better than his home work for the Blue Jays (average of 3.03 homers per game in 2021) given the way things pan out.

Gerrit Cole, Yankees (+425)

Cole enters his third season in pinstripes as the favorite for the Cy Young in the American League. He finished second in the race last season to Toronto's Robbie Ray, marking the fourth straight year that he has finished in the top five of the AL Cy Young race. Cole also recorded a fourth-place showing in the NL Cy Young race with the Pirates back in 2015. He's expected to be the ace of a New York rotation that is expected to have Jordan Montgomery, Luis Severino, Nestor Cortes and Jameson Taillon behind him. In 2021, Cole made 30 starts for the Yankees and paced the American League with 16 wins as he posted a 16-8 mark with a 3.23 ERA, a 1.059 WHIP, 41 walks and 243 strikeouts over 181.1 innings. He threw a pair of complete games with one shutout. Of course, Cole struggled in the wild card game, taking the loss as he allowed three runs on four hits with two walks and three strikeouts over two innings as the Yankees were downed 6-2. The expectations are high as always in the Bronx: can Cole help deliver a title for the Bronx Bombers this season?



Mar 27, 2022; Tampa, Florida, USA; New York Yankees starting pitcher Gerrit Cole (45) leaves the game in the third inning against the Pittsburgh Pirates during spring training at George M. Steinbrenner Field.

Credit: Nathan Ray Seebeck-USA TODAY Sports

Jose Berrios, Blue Jays (+2000)

Berrios was a big acquisition by the Blue Jays last season as they tried to make a push to the postseason. While Toronto ended up falling just

short of the playoffs, he apparently liked Toronto enough (and vice versa) to ink a seven-year deal worth \$131 million to stick around with the organization. Now, with last year's AL Cy Young winner, Robbie Ray, gone to Seattle, Berrios will take over as the #1 arm in a rotation that features Kevin Gausman, Hyun Jin Ryu, Alek Manoah and former Mariners arm Yusei Kikuchi. He has experience as a front of the rotation arm with the Twins: can he deliver north of the border?



Mar 18, 2022; Sarasota, Florida, USA; Toronto Blue Jays starting pitcher Jose Berrios (17) looks on from the dugout against the Baltimore Orioles during spring training at Ed Smith Stadium.
Credit: Kim Klement-USA TODAY Sports

Last season, Berrios made 32 starts between the Twins and Blue Jays. He posted a 12-9 record with a 3.52 ERA, a 1.063 WHIP, 45 walks and 204 strikeouts over 192 innings of work. After coming to Toronto, Berrios went 5-4 with a 3.58 ERA, a 1.095 WHIP, 13 walks and 78 strikeouts over 70.1 innings in 12 starts. He finished ninth in the AL Cy Young voting last season for his first top-10 finish in the race for the award. With a loaded lineup providing support for him, it wouldn't be much of a surprise to see Berrios make a name for himself in regards to the crown this season.

Chris Sale, Red Sox (+2500)

Sale has finished in the top six of the Cy Young voting seven times in his career, with a top finish of second in 2018 with the Red Sox. That's the good news if you're banking on him as a potential option to win the trophy. The bad

news is that he's had injury issues the last three seasons: he was 6-11 with a 4.40 ERA in 25 starts back in 2019. Sale missed the 2020 campaign after undergoing Tommy John surgery and then missed the bulk of the 2021 campaign as he rehabilitated from the injury. He was strong in his work after returning to the active roster, though he had his struggles in the postseason. On the year, Sale made nine starts in the regular season, going 5-1 with a 3.16 ERA, a 1.336 WHIP, 12 walks and 52 strikeouts over 42.2 innings of work. He struggled in the postseason, posting a 0-1 record with an 8.00 ERA, a 1.778 WHIP, four walks and 11 strikeouts over nine innings in three starts. Whether it was fatigue or the lack of buildup of innings which caught up with him, that remains to be seen. Sale is 33 and has to battle through another injury. He suffered a stress fracture in his rib cage February 24 and hasn't thrown since then. On the plus side, he's feeling better and could resume throwing soon. The hope is that the worst-case scenario has him back with the big club in early May: can he deliver another vintage performance and make some noise for hardware?



Oct 20, 2021; Boston, Massachusetts, USA; Boston Red Sox starting pitcher Chris Sale (41) reacts after throwing a strikeout for the third out against the Houston Astros in the fourth inning of game five of the 2021 ALCS at Fenway Park.
Credit: Bob DeChiara-USA TODAY Sports

There is never a shortage of names bandied about as to who will end up as the AL Cy Young winner before the season starts. We broke down the top five candidates but one could easily have mentioned Sean Manaea, Justin Verlander, Dylan Cease, Shohei Ohtani and Kevin Gausman, among others. Will any of this group end up with the hardware at the end of the year? We'll have to wait to find out.

National League Cy Young Predictions

Written by Chris King

We take a look at what should be an interesting MVP race in the National League. Here's a look at the top five candidates with their odds to win provided by BetMGM in parentheses.

Max Scherzer, Mets (+600)

Scherzer split last season between the Nationals and the Dodgers after spending six-plus years in the nation's capital. He was dominant in the City of Angels, going 7-0 with a 1.98 ERA, a 0.826 WHIP, eight walks and 89 strikeouts over 68.1 innings in 11 starts during the regular season. He went 0-1 with one save, a 2.16 ERA, a 0.900 WHIP with five walks and 23 strikeouts in four appearances, three starts, in the post-season. Scherzer has finished in the top five of the Cy Young voting in eight of the last nine years. That includes wins with Detroit in 2013 and back-to-back awards with the Nationals in 2016/2017.

After the Dodgers were knocked out in the



Mar 27, 2022; Port St. Lucie, Florida, USA; New York Mets starting pitcher Max Scherzer (21) throws a pitch during the fourth inning of a spring training game against the St. Louis Cardinals at Clover Park.

Credit: Reinhold Matay-USA TODAY Sports

NLCS by the Braves, Scherzer figured that he would test the market in free agency. He signed a deal with the Mets for three years and \$130 million with the Nationals paying him \$15 million a year in deferred money through 2027. The Dodgers will make the final \$15 million deferred payment in 2028. Scherzer finished last season 15-4 with a 2.46 ERA, a 0.864 WHIP, 36 walks and 236 strikeouts over 179.1 innings in 30 starts. He turns 38 in July so it will be interesting to see if he can continue to take the ball every fifth day and deliver.



Oct 8, 2021; Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA; Milwaukee Brewers starting pitcher Corbin Burnes (39) pitches in the fourth inning against the Atlanta Braves during game one of the 2021 NLDS at American Family Field.

Credit: Benny Sieu-USA TODAY Sports

Corbin Burnes, Brewers (+800)

Burnes is the reigning NL Cy Young winner after turning in a stellar season in what is his first full season as a starter. I know he made nine starts in the shortened 2020 campaign but the workload he threw in the majors last season was more than he threw in his first three major league seasons (155.2) combined. Burnes didn't give up a ton of runs, which was good as the Brewers struggled last season when it came to putting runs on the board. He's already been tabbed as the opening day starter for Milwaukee this season so he'll get an early chance to prove that last season wasn't a fluke. Burnes turned in an 11-5 mark with a league-leading 2.43 ERA, a 0.94 WHIP, 34 walks and 234 strikeouts over 167 innings of work in 28 starts last season. He also led the majors in FIP ERA (1.63), strikeouts per nine innings (12.6)

and he gave up just seven homers last season. Burnes allowed more than three runs in just six of his starts last season. If he turns in another solid year, he could be in the mix again this season.

Jacob deGrom, Mets (+1200)

When you talk about potential frontrunners, you might as well start with deGrom, who has been a dominant pitcher in recent seasons for the Mets. He won back-to-back NL Cy Youngs in 2018 and 2019 before finishing third in the shortened 2020 campaign. Last year, deGrom finished ninth in the Cy Young race despite making only 15 starts, which is a tribute to how well he threw in those outings.



Mar 13, 2022; Port St. Lucie, FL, USA; New York Mets starting pitcher Jacob deGrom (48) reacts after working out during spring training.

Credit: Sam Navarro-USA TODAY Sports

The hope is that the injury woes that plagued deGrom last season regarding inflammation in his elbow, are behind him and he can turn in a full season for the Mets. In 2021, deGrom turned in a 7-2 record with a sparkling 1.08 ERA, a ridiculous 0.554 WHIP, 11 walks and 146 strikeouts over 92 innings of work. Dating back to 2018, in 91 starts, he's posted a stellar 1.94 ERA with a 0.881 WHIP, 119 walks and 774 strikeouts over 581 innings of work. There are a couple points of concern, starting with his injury history. He's also turning 34 in June so we'll have to keep an eye on his velocity but the Mets are banking on a big season from their ace.



Sep 22, 2021; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA; Philadelphia Phillies starting pitcher Zack Wheeler (45) throws a pitch against the Baltimore Orioles during the third inning at Citizens Bank Park.

Credit: Bill Streicher-USA TODAY Sports

Zack Wheeler, Phillies (+1000)

Wheeler was solid in his second year in the City of Brotherly Love and his efforts were a major reason that the Phillies were in the NL East race until the final week of the season. Of course, the Phillies cratered down the stretch and that proved to be their undoing. If Wheeler and Aaron Nola can put together solid seasons, it will help the Phillies potentially make a trip to the postseason for the first time in 2011. After all, the Phillies did bolster their lineup with the additions of Kyle Schwarber and Nick Castellanos to help support Bryce Harper. Last season, Wheeler logged 32 starts for the Phillies. He posted a 14-10 mark with a major-league leading 213.1 innings of work. Wheeler had a 2.78 ERA, a 1.008 WHIP, 46 walks and 247 strikeouts while tossing three complete games plus a pair of shutouts. He led the National League in whiffs, earned his first career All-Star nod and finished second in the NL Cy Young race, earning 12 first-place votes and 141 points, 10 points behind the Brewers' Burnes.

Walker Buehler, Dodgers (+900)

Buehler is probably the ace of the rotation at this point in time with Clayton Kershaw 34 years old and missing a stretch of time last season. Along with Julio Urias, he is looked at to be the anchors at the front of the rotation for the

next few seasons in Chavez Ravine. Buehler led the majors with 33 starts last season in the regular season and added four starts in the post-season. He didn't get to throw in the wild-card game against the Cardinals and failed to record a victory in the postseason, going 0-2 with a 4.91 ERA with nine walks and 18 strikeouts over 18.1 innings of work.

In the regular season, Buehler posted a stellar 16-4 record with a 2.47 ERA, a 0.968 WHIP, 52 walks and 212 strikeouts over 207.2 innings of work. It marked his second season with double-digit wins in his career and proved to be a bounce back from a 1-0 mark in eight starts during the shortened 2020 campaign. With a loaded lineup to provide offense, Buehler should be in good shape to put up some gaudy numbers in the win column.



Apr 3, 2022; Anaheim, California, USA; Los Angeles Dodgers starting pitcher Walker Buehler (21) pitches during the second inning against the Los Angeles Angels at Angel Stadium.

Credit: Kiyoshi Mio-USA TODAY Sports

Will one of these five end up being crowned as the National League Cy Young at the end of the season? Your guess is as good as ours here before the season starts and the games mean something. If things go as expected, however, there's a good chance that you'll see one of these guys claiming the hardware come October.

AL East Team Previews

Written by Nathaniel Reeves

1. Toronto Blue Jays

2021 Record: 91-71
 World Series Odds: +900
 AL Pennant: +450
 AL East: +180

The highly-touted young core of the Blue Jays officially arrived last season to help the team post its best record since 2015, yet that was only good for fourth place and a playoff miss in baseball's most brutal division. Toronto's lineup and starting rotation both posted utterly dominant stats, but were undone by some shaky stretches from the bullpen and a little bit of bad luck.

Replacing the AL Cy Young winner Robbie Ray and third-place MVP finisher Marcus Semien is a very tall order, and Steven Matz is also now elsewhere after an effective season as a back-end starter. Still, a few new exciting faces are in town with Toronto adding the likes of Kevin Gausman, Matt Chapman, Yusei Kikuchi and Yimi Garcia to bolster areas of need.

Starting rotation

1. R Jose Berrios
2. R Kevin Gausman
3. L Hyun Jin Ryu
4. R Alek Manoah
5. L Yusei Kikuchi

Toronto was comfortably a top 10 rotation across the board last season with a 3.79 ERA and 25% strikeout rate, and while Ray was a huge part of that, there's still all kinds of upside here. Having a full season of Berrios atop the rotation will certainly help matters as he posted

a 3.28 FIP and dominant 22.3 K-BB% in 12 starts with the Blue Jays after being acquired in a deadline blockbuster with Minnesota. Manoah will also join the rotation full-time after coming up midseason and putting up an impressive 3.22 ERA and 27.7% strikeout rate in his first 20 career starts at 24 years old. The veteran Ryu faded late to post a 4.37 ERA overall, but there's still a chance the 35-year-old could return to his strong prior form.

Gausman comes over on a five-year, \$110 million deal after a breakout season in San Francisco with a 14-6 record, 2.81 ERA and 227 strikeouts in 192 innings, a crucial move that should help offset losing Ray. The other new face in town is Kikuchi, who posted a modest 4.41 ERA in 30 starts with Seattle last season but had a dominant stretch in the first half and has always seemed so close to putting everything together.

The Blue Jays bullpen posted a 4.08 ERA to rank right around the league average a season ago, making relief pitching the team's clear weakness. Jordan Romano is a strong back-end option after putting up a 2.14 ERA, 33.6% strikeout rate and 23 saves in 62 games last season, while the Blue Jays hope Julian Merryweather can join him in the late innings after his 2021 was quickly derailed by injury. Garcia will be a steadying veteran presence who has consistently put up above average numbers over the past few years, including a 3.88 FIP and 17.7 K-BB% in 57.2 innings between Miami and Houston last season.

Lineup

1. CF George Springer
2. SS Bo Bichette
3. 1B Vladimir Guerrero Jr.
4. RF Teoscar Hernandez
5. LF Lourdes Gurriel Jr.
6. 3B Matt Chapman
7. DH Alejandro Kirk
8. 2B Cavan Biggio
9. C Danny Jansen

The offense was the strength of the Blue Jays last season, with Toronto ranking third in the Majors with 846 runs while smashing 262 homers to easily lead baseball. Guerrero Jr. would have won MVP in almost any other season after posting a .311/.401/.601 line with 48 homers, 123 runs and 111 RBI in 2021. Bichette is another young player who lived up to the hype with an .828 OPS, 29 dingers and 25 stolen bases. While they don't get the national attention of those two, Hernandez (.870 OPS, 32 homers) and Guriel Jr. (.276/.319/.466) both contribute plenty to the lineup.

One of the biggest questions is the new acquisition Chapman, who was once finishing top 5 in the MVP voting on a yearly basis but skidded to .210/.314/.403 last season as he dealt with injuries. Another oft-injured star who could be a difference maker if healthy is Springer, who went off for a .907 OPS and 22 homers in just 78 games last season.

Outlook

While Toronto lost some key players, another year of experience for a mostly young roster means this team is the favorite in the AL East with the upside of a World Series champion, and all predictive metrics such as run differential suggest it was one of the best teams in the Majors already. It's hard to think of players like Guerrero Jr., Bichette and Manoah as getting better given how good they already are, but with each only in his early 20s we might not have seen the ceiling yet. The potential question marks like Chapman and Kikuchi have plenty of upside, and all the bullpen depth pieces that held the team back last season are gone. One more crucial factor is that the Blue Jays will return full-time to the Rogers Center where they posted a 25-11 record after splitting the early season between Florida and Buffalo, which will be enough to push an ultra-talented team over the top.

2. Tampa Bay Rays

2021 record: 100-62

World Series odds: +1400

AL pennant odds: +650

AL east odds: +240

It was another terrific regular season for Tampa Bay, which recorded the most wins in the AL en route to winning baseball's most competitive division. The franchise's first World Series title remains elusive as Tampa Bay lost 3-1 to AL East rival Boston in the Divisional Series, but with a deep roster and plenty of young talent on the way, the Rays will be right in the playoff mix yet again.

There were some important offseason losses with third baseman Joey Wendle, slugger Nelson Cruz and key reliever Collin McHugh among those headed elsewhere, but that does clear the depth chart for some elite prospects. Tampa Bay's biggest move of the offseason was signing young superstar Wander Franco to a 12-year, \$223 million deal, a big step for an organization that rarely spends money, and it also added some high-upside free agent pitchers in Corey Kluber and Brooks Raley.

Starting rotation

1. L Shane Bieber
2. R Drew Rasmussen
3. R Corey Kluber
4. L Ryan Yarbrough
5. R Luis Patino

With ace Tyler Glasnow likely to miss the entire season, this rotation is all about exciting young players reaching their full potential quickly as Tampa Bay hopes to improve on a middling 4.08 starters ERA from last year. Bieber has all the makings of a frontline pitcher after posting a 3.43 ERA and 20.1 reaching their full potential quickly as Tampa Bay hopes to improve on a middling 4.08 starters ERA from last year. Bieber has all the makings of a frontline pitcher after posting a 3.43 ERA

and 20.1 K-BB% in his first 25 career starts as a 24-year-old, while fellow rookie Rasmussen emerged with a 2.84 ERA across 76 innings. Yarbrough will hope to bounce back from a down season with a 5.11 ERA, while Patino struggled to adjust to the Majors with a 4.31 ERA but is only 22 years old with an elite prospect pedigree.

The two-time Cy Young Award winner Kluber still might have something left in the tank if he can stay healthy, as he posted a solid enough 3.83 ERA and 24% strikeout rate in 80 innings with the Yankees last season but also was injured for much of the year yet again. One more name to keep an eye on is Shane Baz, who currently isn't listed as he will miss a few weeks with an elbow injury yet will certainly play a part in the rotation after putting up a 2.03 ERA and 18 strikeouts in his first 13.1 career innings.

Tampa Bay relievers continued their yearly tradition of logging the most innings in baseball while ranking fourth with a 3.67 collective ERA, and most of the big pieces will be back. It will be closer by committee as always, but Andrew Kittredge is a good bet to get the high-leverage situations after putting up a sparkling 1.88 ERA and 22 K-BB% in 57 games. Peter Fairbanks (3.59 ERA, 29.6% strikeout rate) and J.P. Feyereisen (2.73 ERA) will also help lock down the back end. While the Rays don't use the opener strategy as much as when it was first implemented, expect this group to get a handful of starts as well.

Lineup

1. 2B Brandon Lowe
2. SS Wander Franco
3. DH Austin Meadows
4. LF Randy Arozarena
5. 1B Ji-Man Choi
6. 3B Yandy Diaz
7. C Mike Zunino
8. RF Manuel Margot
9. CF Kevin Kiermaier

Offense helped carry the Rays to 100 wins last

season with the team ranking second in baseball with 857 runs, and just about every key player is back with some exciting young players knocking on the door. One of those top prospects is already here, as Franco went off for a 127 wRC+ at the age of 20 in 70 games after being called up. Lowe (.863 OPS, 39 home runs) and the AL Rookie of the Year Arozarena (128 wRC+, 20 homers, 20 steals) join Franco as young cornerstones.

One player who could help the Rays take things to the next level is Meadows, who has fallen off the last two seasons including recording a good yet unspectacular .234/.315/.458 line in 2021, but performed like a superstar as recently as 2019. Everyone else is solidly above average, and if anyone should fall off top prospects like Josh Lowe, Vidal Brujan and Taylor Walls are ready to go.

Outlook

Tampa Bay only looks slightly worse on paper this season than last, and at this point the organization has earned the benefit of the doubt as it keeps putting up gaudy win totals even with a lack of household names. No team in the Majors gets more out of every inch of its 40-man roster and beyond, with seemingly endless depth coming up no matter who gets moved or injured, particularly in the bullpen. The offense should be great again and the rotation is full of upside, with what was recently graded as baseball's best farm system ready to fill in holes as needed. A second-place projection is more about Toronto getting better than the Rays getting much worse, and they have a great chance to be the top AL Wild Card.



3. Boston Red Sox

2021 record: 92-70
 World Series odds: +1800
 AL pennant odds: +1100
 AL East odds: +600

It was a quick rebuild for the Red Sox, who went from being one of the worst teams in baseball in 2020 to earning a Wild Card spot and ALCS appearance last season before eventually falling to Houston in six games. While metrics indicated Boston overperformed some and there are definitely still some weaknesses here, there's still more than enough talent for the Red Sox to make the playoffs again, especially if a few young players develop.

The roster will be different in some important areas however, as Boston surprisingly traded outfielder Hunter Renfroe to Milwaukee after a great 2021 season for a reunion with defensive wizard Jackie Bradley Jr. while also losing key pitcher Eduardo Rodriguez and slugger Kyle Schwarber in free agency. Adding Trevor Story on a six-year, \$140 million deal will help offset that, and the Red Sox also made several tweaks to the pitching staff by bringing in a number of veterans.

Starting rotation

1. R Nathan Eovaldi
2. R Nick Pivetta
3. R Tanner Houck
4. R Michael Wacha
5. L Rich Hill

Boston's rotation was significantly better than projected in 2021 with a 4.49 ERA to rank right below the league average, and it was top 10 in park-adjusted stats such as FIP and WAR. The Red Sox will again need Eovaldi to be the anchor after the flame-throwing righty finally stayed healthy for a full season while putting up an elite 2.79 FIP and 20.9 K-BB%. Houck was crucial to Boston's run, emerging out of nowhere to post a 3.52 ERA and 30.5%

strikeout rate as a rookie. Pivetta finally somewhat tapped into his nasty raw stuff with a career-best 4.28 FIP plus 26.5% strikeout rate, although he looked significantly more dominant when used as a multi-inning reliever in the playoffs.

More questions start to pile up on the back end, as the new addition Wacha couldn't gain any traction in Tampa Bay last season with a 5.05 ERA and fellow newcomer Hill was good with a 3.86 ERA in 32 starts between the Rays and Mets but is now 42 years old. Two names to watch will be Chris Sale and free agent acquisition James Paxton, who will both be out until well into the Summer with injuries yet have the frontline upside to be difference-makers late in the season.

Boston's bullpen was slightly above average with a 3.99 ERA although the advanced numbers weren't as kind, and this looks like the biggest weakness on paper heading into 2022. Matt Barnes is slotted for a closing role again after posting a 3.79 ERA, 24 saves and a 37.8% strikeout rate in 60 appearances. Rule 5 acquisition Garrett Whitlock proved to be a massive pickup with a 1.96 ERA over 73.1 innings as a rookie. Boston added some depth with veterans Jake Diekman (3.86 ERA, 31.7% strikeout rate) and Matt Strahm (2.61 ERA in 2020), both solid pieces but not game-changers. If Boston is indeed in playoff contention, look for this to be where it makes some moves at the trade deadline.

Lineup

1. CF Enrique Hernandez
2. 3B Rafael Devers
3. SS Xander Bogaerts
4. DH J.D. Martinez
5. 2B Trevor Story
6. LF Alex Verdugo
7. 1B Bobby Dalbec
8. C Christian Vazquez
9. RF Jackie Bradley Jr.

Boston plated 829 runs with a 107 team wRC+ to rank top six in the Majors for both categories last season, and this will again be the clear strength of the team. The middle of the order gives Boston a very high floor, as Devers (.890 OPS, 38 homers), Bogaerts (5.2 WAR) and Martinez (.867 OPS) is about as productive as a trio can get. Add in Hernandez showing what he can do with a 3.9 WAR season after finally getting a fulltime role, and Boston's top of the order was outstanding.

Story will only help as a career .272/.340/.523 hitter despite a down 2021, and while there are always questions about the home/road splits of players coming from Colorado, he should be just fine in Fenway Park. If the talented Verdugo can improve further on a .289/.351/.426 line as a 25-year old, Boston could stake its claim as the AL's best offense.

Outlook

There's probably some regression due here, especially on the pitching side, but Boston is still going to score a ton of runs and be tough to beat at home. No pitching staff wants to face the top six of the Red Sox order with another good hitter in Story joining the fold, meaning Boston will at least be in the mix again. The problem is there are no sure things in the rotation with the No. 4 and 5 spots being a particularly big issue especially with holes in the bullpen behind them, and this is a division where any weakness will be exploited. Manager Alex Cora knows how to get the most out of this group so the Red Sox will be better than they might look on paper again while contending for the Wild Card, but expect a tiny drop off from 2021.



4. New York Yankees

2021 record: 92-70

World Series odds: +1100

AL pennant odds: +550

AL East odds: +230

It was an up-and-down 2021 for the Yankees, who did enough in the second half to make the playoffs but also struggled for long stretches and were thoroughly handled by the Red Sox in the AL Wild Card Game. Expectations will as always be sky high, yet a ton of questions remain after New York didn't address many of its numerous needs in a loaded free agent class.

After a mostly quiet offseason, the Yankees did make one big deal in mid-March, sending Gary Sanchez and Gio Urshela to Minnesota for third baseman Josh Donaldson, shortstop Isiah Kiner-Falefa and catcher Ben Rortvedt. Other than that, New York hopes improvement will come in-house from a number of capable players either staying healthier or enjoying bounce-back seasons.

Starting rotation

1. R Gerrit Cole
2. L Jordan Montgomery
3. R Luis Severino
4. L Nester Cortes
5. R Jameson Taillon

New York's rotation ranked in the top 10 last season with a 3.91 collective ERA plus 14.8 collective WAR, and with only Kluber now elsewhere, could post similar numbers. Having a steady ace leading the way helps matters with Cole turning in another excellent season behind a 2.92 FIP and 27.8 K-BB%. Montgomery (3.83 ERA) and Taillon (4.30 ERA) both successfully returned from injury with productive full seasons. Cortes unexpectedly became a huge factor in the Yankees making the playoffs, posting a 2.90 ERA and 20.9 K-BB% in 93 innings.

It's impossible to tell what New York might get

out of Severino, who once looked like a future ace but has tossed all of 18 innings since the start of 2019 as he deals with injuries. Domingo German (4.58 ERA) will also be back at some point when he recovers from a shoulder injury, and expect the Yankees to mix in plenty of openers or bullpen days.

The strength of the Yankees last season was a bullpen that was right near the top of the MLB leaderboard with a 3.56 ERA and 10.02 K/9 rate, and this again looks like the best part of the roster. Aroldis Chapman didn't have his most consistent season but remains dominant when he's on, finishing with a 3.36 ERA, 30 saves and 39.9% strikeout rate in 2021. Jonathan Loaisiga emerged as a key setup man with a 2.17 ERA across 70.2 innings, veteran Chad Green was as steady as ever with a 3.12 ERA in 80.2 innings, and just about everyone else was solid. If the Yankees have any big advantage over the Red Sox and Blue Jays, relief pitching would be it.

Lineup

1. 1B Anthony Rizzo
2. RF Aaron Judge
3. LF Joey Gallo
4. DH Giancarlo Stanton
5. 3B Josh Donaldson
6. 2B Gleyber Torres
7. CF Aaron Hicks
8. SS Isiah Kiner-Falefa
9. C Ben Rortvedt

New York's offense will need to better this season after plating 711 runs to rank just 19th in the Majors while only posting around league average marks in wRC+ and OPS. The good news is Judge (39 homers, 148 wRC+) and Stanton (35 homers, 135 wRC+) should mash again if healthy, but that is always been a massive if for both. A full season of a couple deadline acquisitions should help too, as Joey Gallo put up 3.5 WAR for all his flaws and Rizzo put up a solid 113 wRC+ while being a great fit for the short porch at Yankee Stadium.

Donaldson will be a welcome addition when

he's on the field after putting up an .827 OPS with 26 homers in 135 games, yet like others on this team has a lengthy injury history and is now 36 years old. Torres' mysterious continued with a .259/.331/.366 line just two years after crushing 38 homers at the age of 22, while DJ LeMahieu struggled so badly he is now a utilityman after hitting his way into MVP discussions in both 2019 and 20. Hicks will also hope to come back strong after missing most of the season with injury, and the ability of those three to bounce back might determine how good this lineup is.

Outlook

It was surprising to see the Yankees not go after any big names in the loaded free agent class despite having many areas of need. This roster is left with plenty of holes and injury concerns, which is not a good spot to be in with such an ultra-competitive division. Cole and the bullpen are terrific, but the Yankees would probably be fortunate to get the same level of performance from the Montgomery-Cortes-Tallion trio. That might not even be enough anyway, as the bottom half of the lineup looks weak and either Stanton or Judge going down could spell disaster. New York never finishes below .500 so this won't be a bad team by any means, but it will slip to a mid-80s win total.

5. Baltimore Orioles

2021 record: 52-110
 World Series odds: +25000
 AL pennant odds: +12500
 AL East odds: +15000

The massive rebuild in Baltimore continued last year with the Orioles losing at least 108 games for the third straight full season. There are a few reasons for long-term optimism with a good level of promising young talent now in the system, but the rest of the AL East remains a mile ahead, and the Orioles enter the year as the longest shot on the entire board to win the World Series as a result.

As expected for a team in such a full rebuild, basically the only moves the Orioles made in the offseason were low-risk flyers on veterans like Robinson Chirinos, Jordan Lyles and Rowned Odor. This season will be all about developing young talent while looking for diamonds in the rough rather than trying to compete with the top four.

Starting rotation

1. L John Means
2. R Jordan Lyles
3. R Tyler Wells
4. L Bruce Zimmermann
5. L Zac Lowther

Baltimore fielded the worst starting rotation in baseball last season, posting a 5.99 ERA to rank last in the Majors by a healthy amount. The one bright spot is Means, who put up a strong 3.62 ERA and 18.3 K-BB despite being a soft-tossing lefty in a home park that usually destroys such pitchers. Wells has some potential after posting a 4.11 ERA and 23.7 K-BB% in 44 relief appearances, earning him a shot at the rotation this spring. Zimmermann (5.04 ERA) and Lowther (6.67 ERA) both look like temporary placeholders.

Adding Lyles probably won't do much after he posted a 5.15 ERA and allowed 38 homers across 180 innings in the much more pitcher-friendly park of Texas last season. Two blue chip prospects are on the way, as D.L. Hall will be up sooner than later and Grayson Rodriguez could get a look in September.

The Orioles bullpen was also well behind the rest of the Majors in 2021 with a 5.70 ERA and doesn't figure to be any better this season. Cole Sulser will likely get first crack at closing duties after recording a 2.70 ERA with eight saves in 60 games last season. Setup man Tanner Scott was terrific in 2020 before slipping to a 5.17 ERA and 14.7% walk rate last season, so getting him back on track is crucial for the unit. As with almost all teams in a deep rebuild, expect a revolving door of relievers, and who is effective is

likely to become a trade chip.

Lineup

1. CF Cedric Mullins
2. 1B Ryan Mountcastle
3. DH Trey Mancini
4. RF Anthony Santander
5. LF Austin Hays
6. SS Ramon Urias
7. 2B Rowned Odor
8. C Robinson Chirinos
9. 3B Kelvin Gutierrez

The Orioles put up 659 runs with a 91 team wRC+ last season, which were both bottom 10 marks but not the very worst in baseball as the case was with the pitching staff. Finding an unexpected star can be one of the fun parts of a rebuild, and Mullins provided exactly that with an .878 OPS, 30 homers and 30 steals out of nowhere. Mountcastle is another key player to watch after slugging 33 homers to lead all rookies, giving the Orioles at least a productive top of the order.

An underrated player who could potentially take the next step is Hays, who hit .256/.308/.461 with 22 homers in 131 games in his first shot at extended playing time. Other than that, expect a lot of below average production, at least until elite prospect Adley Rutschman joins the fray at catcher.

Outlook

The Orioles front office at least finally has a plan with a good amount of young talent now in the organization, but even challenging for fourth place in the loaded AL East is an impossible task with this major league roster. Baltimore's rotation behind Means is going to be a disaster, and while the lineup has some fun players, there's no depth there yet. At the very least, Rutschman, Hall, Kyle Stowers and others will be up at some point which could help the Orioles be pesky later in the summer while improving the win total to around 60. Brighter days are ahead in Baltimore, just not this year.

AL Central Team Previews

Written by Trenton Pruitt

1. Chicago White Sox

2021 Record: 93-69
 World Series Odds: +1100
 A.L. Pennant Odds: +550
 A.L. Central Odds: -200

The White Sox cruised to a division title in Tony La Russa's inaugural season as the manager for the Southsiders. Chicago finished 2021 with a 93-69 record and finished 13.0 games ahead of second place Cleveland. It was their second straight season punching their ticket to the American League playoffs. Unfortunately for White Sox faithful, they were bounced in the Divisional Round by the Houston Astros in four games.

There weren't many key departures for the White Sox over the offseason. They lost Carlos Rodon in free agency while they declined a \$6 million club option on Cesar Hernandez. Billy Hamilton and Jake Lamb also departed from the Southside. As for additions to the roster, Chicago wasn't as active as you'd think a team looking to make a run at a title would be. They added utility-man Josh Harrison and reinforced the bullpen with Joe Kelly, Kendall Graveman, and Vince Velasquez. Kelly is a right-handed reliever who boasted an ERA of 2.48 in 2021 with a WHIP of just 0.98.

Starting Rotation

RHP: Lance Lynn
 RHP: Lucas Giolito
 RHP: Dylan Cease
 LHP: Dallas Keuchel
 RHP: Michael Kopech

The starting rotation looks very similar to 2021 for the Sox. The only difference is the loss of Rodon, who will be replaced from within the organization by Michael Kopech. Lance Lynn will headline the rotation and he's coming off of a strong first season with the White Sox. The burly righty was one of four all-stars for Chicago and he had an 11-6 record over 28 starts. Lynn posted a 2.69 ERA over 157.0 innings of work and had a WHIP of 1.07. He punched out 176 batters and threw one shutout. Lucas Giolito is another right-hander who will likely be slotted second in the rotation behind Lynn. Giolito had an up-and-down season in 2021 but went 11-9 with a 3.53 ERA and 1.10 WHIP while striking out 201 batters.

The middle of the starting rotation will be anchored by Dylan Cease. Cease is a 26-year-old who has been consistently trending in the right direction over the past few seasons. The right-handed hurler went 13-7 in 2021 with a 3.91 ERA and 1.25 WHIP over 165.2 innings pitched. One area that the White Sox would like to see Cease improve is with his control. He walked too many batters and had the highest BB/9 rate out of all starters for the Sox last season (3.7). After Cease, will be lefty Dallas Keuchel. Keuchel struggled in 2021, posting an ERA of 5.28 over 30 starts. Keuchel allowed 10.5 hits per nine innings and gave up 1.4 longballs per nine innings. Michael Kopech will round out the starting rotation and he'll be the x-factor for Chicago this season. Kopech had Tommy John surgery and missed the final few games of 2018 and all of 2019. Plus he sat out in 2020 for COVID-19 concerns, so White Sox fans haven't been able to see his full potential yet. The right-hander made 40 appearances out of the bullpen and four starts in 2021. He had a 3.50 ERA over 69.1 innings and fanned 103 hitters.

The bullpen for the White Sox is arguably one of the best in baseball on paper. They will return Liam Hendriks in the closer role and he recorded 38 saves out of 44 opportunities in 2021. Joe Kelly will likely move into the setup man role, while Kendall Graveman should take the role of pitching in the 7th. Graveman came over from Houston, where he pitched in 23 games and posted a 3.13 ERA and struck out 27 hitters. Graveman had 11 holds and had 10 saves in 15 opportunities with the Astros last season. The other big name for Chicago's bullpen is Craig Kimbrel. Kimbrel came over from the Cubs at the deadline and greatly underperformed in a Sox uniform. He had an ERA of 5.09 over 24 games with a WHIP of 1.22. At this point, the Sox will take whatever they can get out of Kimbrel. He's shown flashes of greatness, but with the reinforcements that Chicago added, Kimbrel doesn't have to be relied on as heavy as he's used to.

Lineup

SS: Tim Anderson
 CF: Luis Robert
 1B: Jose Abreu
 3B: Yoan Moncada
 LF: Eloy Jimenez
 C: Yasmani Grandal
 DH: Gavin Sheets
 2B: Josh Harrison
 RF: Leury Garcia

Bench: C: Seby Zavala, 1B/OF: Andrew Vaughn, OF: Micker Adolfo, OF: Adam Engel

The White Sox lineup was one of the best in the league in 2021. They scored the seventh most runs in the MLB with 796 and boasted the fifth highest team batting average at .256. Chicago had eight players reach double digit homeruns and each of them will return in 2022. Jose Abreu led the team with 30 homeruns and added a team leading 117 RBI's. Tim Anderson has been very reliable at the top of the order for the Sox. The shortstop won the A.L. Batting Title in 2019 and posted a .309 average in 2021. Luis Robert is set to take another big step forward in

2022 after he hit .338 over 68 games in 2021. He has the fourth highest A.L. MVP odds, which are currently sitting at +1200.

The bench for the White Sox is the biggest weakness heading into the new campaign. Aside from Andrew Vaughn, Chicago doesn't boast too many proven bats to come off of the bench. If any of the big guns in the starting lineup go down, the Sox will be forced to use bench guys who aren't necessarily what you'd like to roll out on a day-to-day basis. Luckily, the starting lineup is stacked so an injury to one of the stars wouldn't be the end of the world as other guys would be able to pick up the slack.

Outlook

The Chicago White Sox are a team that's ready to make a run at a World Series title in 2022. They're stacked in the areas where it matters most with a lineup full of sluggers and a bullpen lined with all-stars. The hopes are high on the south side of Chicago and this team will deliver, as long as they're able to stay healthy. Health was a bit of an issue for the Sox in 2021 with only two players competing in over 130 games. They were still able to rattle off 93 wins and win the division by 13 games, so imagine the damage they'll do if fully healthy.

From a betting perspective, my favorite bet would be taking the White Sox to win the division at -190 odds. The Tigers and Twins got better over the offseason, but not by enough to come within five games of the reigning A.L. Central champs. If you don't mind laying the juice and tying up part of your bankroll for a few months, this is a great option and my personal favorite MLB futures bet in 2022.



2. Detroit Tigers

2021 Record: 77-85
 World Series Odds: +3500
 A.L. Pennant Odds: +2000
 A.L. Central Odds: +750

The Detroit Tigers outperformed expectations in 2021 and amassed 77 wins in A.J. Hinch's first year at the helm. Their 77-85 record was good enough for third in the A.L. Central and they finished 16.0 games outside of first place. It was a developmental season for the Tigers that focused on ramping up the production of a young pitching staff. All things considered, Tigers faithful should be satisfied with the 2021 campaign and really excited about 2022.

There were a few notable departures in Detroit with Matthew Boyd being non-tendered and Niko Goodrum and Christin Stewart refusing minor league assignments. Tigers fans shouldn't miss those players too much heading into 2022, especially with some of the additions they made in the offseason. The biggest move that Detroit made was bringing in Javy Baez on a six-year, \$140 million deal to secure the middle infield. As for pitching, Eduardo Rodriguez signed a five-year, \$77 million deal and the Tigers brought in Michael Pineda via free agency. They also added catching, in Tucker Barnhart.

Starting Rotation

LHP: Eduardo Rodriguez
 RHP: Casey Mize
 LHP: Tarik Skubal
 RHP: Michael Pineda
 RHP: Matt Manning

The 77 million dollar man, Eduardo Rodriguez, will headline the starting rotation in 2022. He's a left-hander who went 13-8 in 2021 with the Red Sox. He had a 4.74 ERA and 1.39 WHIP over 31 starts. Michael Pineda was also an offseason addition, coming over from the Twins. The big righty was 9-8 with a 3.62 ERA and 1.23 WHIP last season.

The rest of the Tigers' rotation are all hurlers who they developed themselves. There are huge ambitions surrounding Casey Mize and Matt Manning heading into this season. Mize, a right-hander, made 30 starts in 2021 and posted a 3.71 ERA and struck out 118 batters over 150.1 innings of work. As for Manning, 2021 was his first year in the big leagues and he struggled. He went 4-7 with an inflated 5.80 ERA and 1.51 WHIP. There is a lot of potential for Manning and this season will be all about him developing and continuing to get comfortable in the majors.

The bullpen will be a bit of a wild card for the Tigers in 2022. There aren't many big names, but there is some potential. Gregory Soto will likely be in the closing role or they could use Michael Fulmer as well. Soto went 17/18 in save opportunities in 2021 while Fulmer was 14/18. Another addition that Detroit made was Andrew Chafin. He's a left-handed long reliever, historically used in middle relief. Chafin pitched in 71 games in 2022 with the Cubs (43) and the A's (28). He boasted an ERA of 1.83 and had 22 holds.

Lineup

LF: Akil Baddoo
 RF: Robbie Grossman
 SS: Javier Baez
 3B: Jeimer Candelario
 1B: Spencer Torkelson
 DH: Miguel Cabrera
 CF: Riley Greene
 C: Tucker Barnhart
 2B: Jonathan Schoop

Bench: UTIL: Harold Castro, C: Eric Haase, OF: Victor Reyes, IF: Isaac Paredes

Detroit's offense was the 23rd best in the majors in 2021 where they put up 697 runs. There were six different players to hit double digit homeruns, with Robbie Grossman launching 23 homers and Jonathan Schoop and Eric Haase each hitting 22. All three of those players will

return this upcoming season. Veteran Miguel Cabrera will return to handle the DH duties and he's coming off of a low year, at least by his standards. He slashed .256/.316/.386, hit 15 bombs, and drove in 75 RBI's.

The 2022 season will be all about the new additions and young talent of the Tigers. Javy Baez came over from the Mets in the offseason and we know what he is capable of. The shortstop had a slow start to the season but rebounded and finished with a slash line of .265/.319/.494. He hit 31 homeruns and added 87 RBI's. Jonathan Schoop will slide from first base to second and allow Spencer Torkelson to take over at first. Torkelson is one of the young prospects who is set to make a run at A.L. Rookie of the Year at +450 odds. His teammate, Riley Greene is right there with him at +1200 odds.

With all of the additions and young guys in the starting lineup, the Tigers will see some familiar names on their bench in 2022. Eric Haase, Victor Reyes, Harold Castro, and Isaac Paredes have all been with Detroit for some time now and made contributions in 2021. Even though you wouldn't consider these players as "big name guys," they've all proven they're more than capable at playing at this level.

Outlook

The Detroit Tigers are still at least two years away from being true contenders in the American League. But that shouldn't discourage Detroit fans as there is plenty to be excited about this upcoming season. Gone are the 95+ game losing seasons from 2017-2019 and they're finally seeing the high draft picks from that era develop into big leaguers. The newest crop in Torkelson, Greene, Mize, and Manning will hopefully be mainstays in the organization for the next decade. While the Tigers won't be making a run at the World Series in 2022, they should be able to contend for a Wild Card spot in the newly expanded playoffs.

One futures bet that I like for the Tigers this

season is simply taking the over on their 77.5 win total (-110). Aside from the White Sox, this is a pretty weak division – especially in terms of pitching. Minnesota and Kansas City aren't looking too strong from the mound, so this Tigers team should be able to do some damage and make some noise offensively. I like Detroit to win around 83 games in 2022.



3. Minnesota Twins

2021 Record: 73-89

World Series Odds: +5000

A.L. Pennant Odds: +2500

A.L. Central Odds: +500

The year 2021 was a forgettable season for Minnesota Twins fans. They finished in the cellar of the A.L. Central with a record of 73-89, which was 20 games out of first place. The main issue for the Twins in 2021 was their lack of pitching. The team allowed 5.15 runs per game, which ranked 27th in the majors. Their bullpen had an ERA of 4.39 and that was 20th in the league. All things considered, 2021 was a tough year for Minnesota, but there is some optimism heading into the new campaign.

Starting with departures, the Twins made a trade with the Yankees to send Josh Donaldson to New York for Gary Sanchez and Gio Urshela. Willians Astudillo was released back in November while Rob Refsnyder and John Gant went to free agency. Michael Pineda, Andrelton Simmons, Mitch Garver, and Alex Colome all departed as well. The biggest move for the Twins was the signing of Carlos Correa to a three-year deal worth \$105 million dollars. Correa was

expected to sign a monster deal over the off-season, but instead opted for a short term deal with an AAV of around \$35 million. There are a couple of clauses in there where he can opt out after a year and seek the massive payday that was expected. But for now, the Twins have him locked up for the season. Minnesota bolstered the rotation by adding Sonny Gray, Chris Archer, and Dylan Bundy.

Starting Rotation

RHP: Sonny Gray
 RHP: Dylan Bundy
 RHP: Bailey Ober
 RHP: Joe Ryan
 LHP: Chris Archer

Newly added Sonny Gray and Dylan Bundy will headline the starting rotation for Minnesota in 2022. Gray was with the Reds over the last three years and posted a 7-9 record in 2021. His ERA was 4.19 with a WHIP of 1.22. Over the last three seasons, Sonny Gray has seen his K/9 rise into double digits. He struck out 10.3 batters per nine innings last season. As for Dylan Bundy, he was with the Angels over the previous two seasons. The right-hander made 19 starts in 2021 with a 6.06 ERA, 1.36 WHIP, and averaged two home runs per nine innings of work. Those are some pretty tough years for the 29-year-old, but he has shown some promise over his career. In the shortened 2020 season, Bundy went 6-3 with an ERA of 3.29 for the Angels. It's kind of a coin flip for the Twins with Bundy, but it's worth the risk of a one-year, \$5 million deal.

The rest of the rotation for the Twins is a bit of a question mark. Bailey Ober will file in after Gray and Bundy and he went 3-3 over 20 starts in 2021. Ober had an ERA of 4.19, WHIP of 1.35, and allowed 2.5 homeruns per nine innings of pitching. Joe Ryan made five appearances for Minnesota last season and all of them were starts. He threw 26.2 innings and allowed 12 earned runs. And finally, Chris Archer will round out the rotation. Archer signed a \$3.5 million contract with incentives that can drive it up to \$9.5 million in 2021. Archer has missed a lot of

time over the past two seasons. He only threw for 19.1 innings in 2021 and allowed 10 runs over the span of six outings. It's tough to predict how he'll perform this upcoming season, but similar to Bundy, it's worth the risk of a \$3.5 million contract.

Just like the starting rotation, there are plenty of question marks surrounding the Twins bullpen heading into 2022. Taylor Rogers is set to take the closing responsibilities and he was 9/13 in save opportunities in 2021. He added eight holds, his ERA was 3.35, and he struck out an average of 13.2 batters over nine innings. Tyler Duffey will be his setup man, and he's coming off of a season with 22 holds and an ERA of 3.18. After those two, there isn't much to write home about for the Twins bullpen. Jorge Alcala is a right-hander who went just 1/5 in save opportunities while Griffin Jax will perform in middle relief as well. Jax had an ERA of 6.37 over 14 appearances in 2021.

Lineup

CF: Byron Buxton
 DH: Luis Arraez
 SS: Carlos Correa
 2B: Jorge Polanco
 1B: Miguel Sano
 RF: Max Kepler
 C: Gary Sanchez
 LF: Alex Kirilloff
 3B: Gio Urshela

Bench: C: Ryan Jeffers, INF: Jose Miranda, UTIL: Nick Gordon, OF/1B: Brent Rooker

Minnesota was an above average offense in 2021 where they ranked 16th in runs per game (4.5). They boasted a powerful lineup that saw eight players reach the double digit homerun mark. Two of those players are gone in Nelson Cruz and Josh Donaldson. Jorge Polanco launched 33 homers last season while Miguel Sano hit 30. Byron Buxton had injury issues in 2021 and only played in 67 games. In those 67 games he slashed .306/.358/.647 with 19 homers and 23 doubles. If Minnesota wants to find suc-

cess in 2022, they'll need that core to contribute like they did last year in addition to Correa continuing to play at a high level. The middle infielder slashed .279/.366/.485 in 148 games. He blasted 26 long balls and drove in 92 runs.

There aren't too many bright spots on the bench for manager Rocco Baldelli. Ryan Jeffers will get some action considering Gary Sanchez isn't necessarily an everyday guy behind the dish. Jeffers hit 14 bombs in 2021 and drove in 35 RBI's. Nick Gordan played in 73 games last season with .240 average and 23 RBI's.

Outlook

Personally, I'm surprised the oddsmakers have the Twins predicted to finish ahead of the Tigers in the A.L. Central. They made a couple of big moves to bring in Carlos Correa and Sonny Gray, but after that, there isn't much to be excited about for Minnesota. Byron Buxton has shown he can be a star in this league, but he has only played 100+ games in one out of eight seasons. Even in the shortened 2020 season, he only played in 39 out of 60 games. There's some upside with the lineup, but I'm not very optimistic for Minnesota heading into 2022.

From a betting perspective, I won't be locking in any futures bets for Minnesota. Maybe take a look at the under on their win total at 81.5. But the lack of pitching should be worrisome for the Twins. There are a lot of question marks with the pitching staff heading into the new year and I'll be expecting some high scoring affairs.



4. Kansas City Royals

2021 Record: 74-88

World Series Odds: +10000

A.L. Pennant Odds: +5000

A.L. Central Odds: +1600

Mike Matheny has finished in fourth place in the division in his first two seasons at the helm for the Royals. In 2021, the veteran skipper led Kansas City to a 74-88 record. That was 19.0 games out of first place and 1.0 game ahead of the Twins. The Royals were the 24th ranked offense in 2021 with 4.23 runs per game. On the flip side, they allowed the 21st most runs at 4.86 per game. Kansas City had a decent core with Salvador Perez, Whit Merrifield, and Andrew Benintendi but the rest of the team lagged in offensive production. The pitching for Kansas City last season hindered them as well. But the Royals have some young talent on their pitching staff and they're hoping they can take a leap forward in 2022.

The lineup for the Royals will look pretty similar to how it did in 2021 aside from the loss of Ryan McBroom, who left Kansas City to play in Japan. The pitching staff will be a little different as Kansas City will be without Mike Minor, Wade Davis, Kyle Zimmer, Jake Junis, and Greg Holland. The Royals signed veteran Zack Greinke to a one-year, \$13 million contract over the offseason. The loss of Mike Minor to the Reds returned relief pitcher Amir Garrett. Outfielder Jacoby Jones signed a contract with the Royals over the offseason, but it's likely that he will be in the minors to start the season.

Starting Rotation

RHP: Zack Greinke

RHP: Brad Keller

LHP: Kris Bubic

RHP: Brady Singer

LHP: Daniel Lynch

The duo of Zack Greinke and Brad Keller will headline the rotation for the Royals in 2022.

Greinke spent the first seven years of his career ('04 - '10) with Kansas City and this could potentially be the final stop of his career. Greinke is coming off of a season with the Astros where he went 11-6 with a 4.16 ERA and 1.17 WHIP. The six-time all-star struck out 120 hitters over 171.0 innings of work. Behind Greinke, will be Brad Keller. Keller is one of the cornerstones of the Royals starting rotation moving forward. Keller is a big right-hander entering his fifth year in the big leagues. He had a great 2020 season, going 5-3 with a 2.47 ERA and 1.02 WHIP. He regressed in 2021 to an 8-12 season, 5.39 ERA, and 1.66 WHIP. Keller was clearly having location issues as he walked 4.3 batters per nine innings. That's an increase from 2.8 in 2020.

The rest of the rotation is filled with youngsters that the Royals coaching staff will look to continue developing. Kris Bubic is a 24-year-old lefty and he's started 30 games over two seasons with Kansas City. He posted a 4.43 ERA over 20 starts in 2021 with a WHIP of 1.39. Similar to Keller, he struggled with location as he walked 4.1 hitters over a nine inning average. Brady Singer will slide into the rotation after Bubic. Singer's a 25-year-old righty and he's on the same timetable as Bubic, coming up in 2020 as well. Singer has made 39 starts in his two-year career with an ERA of 4.62. He gave up 10.2 hits per nine innings in 2021 to go along with 3.7 BB/9. Finally, Daniel Lynch will round out the starters and he went 4-6 in 2021 with a 5.69 ERA and 1.63 WHIP. He made his debut in 2021 and is 25-years-old.

Scott Barlow will enter the 2022 season as the closer and he's coming off of a year where he converted 16 saves on 22 opportunities. He had a 2.42 ERA and added 14 holds as well. Josh Staumont and Amir Garrett will be in setup roles heading into the new season. Staumont went 5/5 in save opportunities and had an ERA of 2.88 last season. Garrett had a rough season in 2021 where he only had seven saves in 63 appearances. His ERA was 6.04 over 47.2 innings of work.

Lineup

RF: Whit Merrifield
 3B: Bobby Witt Jr.
 C: Salvador Perez
 LF: Andrew Benintendi
 1B: Carlos Santana
 SS: Adalberto Mondesi
 DH: Hunter Dozier
 CF: Michael A. Taylor
 2B: Nick Lopez

Bench: C: Cam Gallagher, OF: Edward Olivares,
 3B: Ryan O'Hearn, OF: Kyle Isbel

Salvador Perez did a lot of the heavy lifting for the Royals last season. The veteran backstop mashed 48 homeruns and batted in 121 RBI's. He slashed .273/.316/.544 and hit 24 doubles as well. Whit Merrifield had a little bit of a down year by his standards, slashing .277/.317/.395 over 162 games. Usually he'll like to his average up around .300, or at least in the high .280's. He still swiped 40 bases and batted in 74 RBI's.

After those two stars, Kansas City will rely on Andrew Benintendi and hope that Carlos Santana can bounce back after a tough year. Santana only hit 19 homers last season over 158 games. Management brought him in to be side-by-side with Perez, hitting 25-35 bombs a season. But of all the players in the lineup Royals fans are most excited about, it's Bobby Witt Jr.! He's the favorite in terms of betting odds to win A.L. Rookie of the Year at +275. Witt Jr. slashed .290/.361/.576 in the minors last season and added 33 homers, 35 doubles, and 97 RBI's over 124 games. Kansas City has every right to be thrilled about him coming to the big leagues.

The bench has a few familiar faces in Cam Gallagher and Ryan O'Hearn. This duo combined for ten homeruns and 36 RBI's last season in minimal playing time. They're decent bench guys and O'Hearn can provide a left-handed power bat. Another bat that the Royals are excited to have on the Opening Day roster is Edward Olivares. The 26-year-old outfielder is

on a tear in spring training with a .609 batting average over 25 plate appearances. He's added three homers, a triple, and four doubles.

Outlook

The Kansas City Royals are in an interesting spot as they enter the 2022 campaign. They didn't really make any notable moves over the offseason so they're banking on Bobby Witt Jr. to come in and play elite baseball. They also only received 35 games out of Adalberto Mondesi, who will reclaim his spot at shortstop in 2022. There's a relatively high ceiling for the Royals, but it all depends on how the younger players perform. You know what you're going to get out of veterans like Merrifield, Perez, and Benintendi, so if Witt Jr., Mondesi, and Olivares play at an above average level, this team can win some games.

The same applies with the pitching staff. If the rotation all has ERA's over 4.00 again, then the team is in trouble. But if Matheny and his coaching staff developed their young starters over the offseason, the sky's the limit for this staff. Being that there was a lockout and players weren't able to work out much with the team, it's tough to see the rotation take a big step forward in 2022. From a betting perspective, I wouldn't consider any futures on winning the division or making the playoffs. In regards to the win total, the under on 74.5 wins is likely the best bet. But it's tough to say, because Kansas City has potential to make some noise this year.



5. Cleveland Guardians

2021 Record: 80-82

World Series Odds: 100-1

A.L. Pennant Odds: +4000

A.L. Central Odds: +900

Cleveland finished in second place in the A.L. Central last season with a record of 80-82. That was 13.0 games outside of first place and 3.0 games ahead of the Tigers for third. 2021 was a rough season for Cleveland as they were no-hit four times over the 162-game season. That was the first time a team has ever been no-hit at least three times. So they set the bar high. Terry Francona also ran into some injury issues, mainly with former Cy Young winner Shane Bieber only making 16 starts. All in all, it was a forgettable season for Cleveland.

There were no notable departures for Cleveland after the 2021 season. They traded Eddie Rosario to Atlanta last season and sent Cesar Hernandez to Chicago (AL). Cleveland parted ways with several relievers including Harold Ramirez, J.C. Mejia, Scott Moss, Kyle Nelson, and Justin Garza. As for additions, there also isn't anything of note aside from catcher Sandy Leon.

Starting Rotation

RHP: Shane Bieber

RHP: Aaron Civale

RHP: Zach Plesac

RHP: Cal Quantrill

RHP: Triston McKenzie

The strength for the Guardians moving forward is their starting rotation. It will be headlined by Shane Bieber, who won the Cy Young in 2020 with an 8-1 record and 1.63 ERA. As I mentioned, he wasn't very serviceable in 2021 due to injury issues. But in the 16 games he started, he still managed to post a 3.17 ERA with a WHIP of 1.21. He struck out 134 batters over 96.2 innings of work. It's the third straight season that Bie-

ber has averaged over 10 punchouts per nine innings. After Bieber, it'll be Aaron Civale taking the ball. Civale made 21 starts in 2021 and had an ERA of 3.84. He was a bit of a liability in terms of giving up the longball, where he allowed 1.7 homeruns every nine innings on the mound.

Zach Plesac, Cal Quantrill, and Triston McKenzie will all fall in some type of order following Bieber and Civale. All five of these starters boasted WHIP's under 1.21. When Shane Bieber has the highest WHIP on your rotation, you should be feeling confident about your starters. Plesac was 10-6 in 25 starts with a 4.67 ERA while Quantrill was 8-3 over 22 starts with a 2.89 ERA. Quantrill made 40 appearances on the year, but has worked his way into the starting rotation moving forward.

Emmanuel Clase will handle the closing responsibilities in 2022. He converted 24 saves in 29 opportunities and added six holds. His setup man, James Karinchak also made 11 saves last season with 13 holds. Bryan Shaw is a right-hander that's available for Terry Francona out of the bullpen. Shaw had 20 holds last season with an ERA of 3.49.

Lineup

CF: Myles Straw
 SS: Amed Rosario
 3B: Jose Ramirez
 DH: Franmil Reyes
 1B: Bobby Bradley
 LF: Josh Naylor
 RF: Bradley Zimmer
 C: Austin Hedges
 2B: Andres Gimenez

Bench: C: Sandy Leon, UTIL: Yu Chang, OF: Oscar Mercado, INF: Owen Miller

A major weak spot for Cleveland last season was their offense. They were 18th in runs per game at 4.43 and ranked 21st in team batting average (.238). Jose Ramirez and Franmil Reyes supplied most of the power as they combined

for 66 home runs. Ramirez drove in 103 RBI's while Reyes knocked in 85. Bobby Bradley will likely be the everyday first baseman for the Guardians moving forward and he slashed .208/.294/.445 in 2021. He added 16 homers to go along with 41 RBI's.

The bench for the Guardians in 2022 has a few reliable names. Yu Chang will likely get some action in the infield if Bobby Bradley or Andres Gimenez are not producing. Chang played in 89 games last season, slashing .228/.267/.426 and hitting nine homeruns. Sandy Leon was added and is a reliable option behind the plate for Cleveland.

Outlook

Cleveland management didn't really make any moves over the offseason which is a little bit surprising to me. They have one of the better rotations in the big leagues so I'm unsure why they didn't go out and add some hitting. Obviously they aren't a team that will spend a lot of money (i.e. letting Francisco Lindor walk). But there were some options out there that Cleveland could have looked at to improve the offensive production.

It's a shame that the Guardians are going to waste a strong rotation when they could've spent a little cash and supplemented the offense. Instead, they'll look to play in low scoring games and hope Franmil Reyes and Jose Ramirez can supply the necessary offense. From a betting standpoint, the under on the Guardians win total at 76.5 would be my best offering. Every other team in the division made transactions over the offseason to improve while Cleveland stood pat and basically did nothing. It'll be hard for them to reach the 77 win mark when they have minimal offense and their opponents all got better.

AL West Team Previews

Written by Kevin Vallejo

1. Houston Astros

2021 Record: 95-67
World Series Odds: +1000
AL Pennant Odds: +475
AL West Odds: -145

Houston lost starting shortstop Carlos Correa during the off-season but has six hitters that are All Star quality and should not miss a beat without Correa at the plate or in the field. Jose Altuve, Alex Bregman, Michael Brantley, Yuli Gurriel, Yordan Alvarez and Kyle Tucker create a difficult lineup for opposing pitchers to contain much less shutdown. Tucker is coming off a breakout season in 2021 in which he batted .294 and had an OPS of .914. Tucker hit .294 with 30 home runs and 92 RBIs last season while collecting 37 doubles, three triples and led the Astros with a .557 slugging percentage. Houston has three of its top six hitters over 30 years of age, but have one of the best young sluggers in the MLB in Alvarez, who is just 25 years old. Last season, Alvarez led Houston in home runs with 33 and RBIs with 104. Altuve started the 2021 season slowly but recovered to bat .277 with 31 home runs and 83 RBIs. Taking Correa out of the equation, Houston had three hitters with 30 or more home runs and two that knocked in 92 or more runs. Bregman played only 91 games last season due to injuries but is expected to bounce back with a strong 2022 campaign. Chas McCormick enjoyed a strong rookie season with the Astros last year with 14 home runs and 50 RBIs while batting .257

Starting Lineup:

2B Jose Altuve
LF Michael Brantley
3B Alex Bregman
DH Yordan Alvarez
1B Yuli Gurriel
RF Kyle Tucker
CF Chas McCormick
SS Jeremy Peña
C Martin Maldonado

Houston's rotation is expected to include Justin Verlander, Framber Valdez, Luis Garcia, Jose Urquidy, Jake Odorizzi and Lance McCullers Jr. (McCullers Jr. will start the season on the injured list). Verlander returns after missing most of the 2020 season and all of 2021 following Tommy John surgery and will be the ace on the staff. Luis Garcia was 11-8 with a 3.30 ERA and Framber Valdez was 11-6 last season with a 3.14 ERA, while Jose Urquidy finished 8-3 with a 3.62 ERA.

Three of Houston's top arms in the bullpen were lost prior to the lockout but the Astros have Phil Maton and Ryne Stanek as their setup hurlers for closer Ryan Pressley who ended last season with a 2.25 ERA with 26 saves. Houston's long reliever Christian Javier pitched well in the postseason in 2021 with an ERA of 3.38 in 10.2 innings while holding opponents to a .179 batting average. Javier may see action as Houston's fourth or fifth starter in the rotation.

Starting Rotation

Justin Verlander RHP
Framber Valdez LHP
Luis Garcia RHP
Jose Urquidy RHP
Jake Odorizzi/Cristian Javier RHPs

Outlook

Houston will battle its way to an American League West title in 2022. Although the Astros lost talented shortstop Carlos Correa, Houston

has plenty of hitters to make up for that loss and on the field the Astros will be fine without Correa filling the No. 6 spot. Veteran ace Justin Verlander returns for the Astros following Tommy John surgery and will be the Astros' ace. Houston is a mix of veterans with several over the age of 30 but also has a strong core of young talent led by slugger Yordan Alvarez at the plate and pitchers such as Framber Valdez.

2. Los Angeles Angels

2021 Record: 77-85
 World Series Odds: +2500
 AL Pennant Odds: +1400
 AL West Odds: +400

The Los Angeles Angels went through another losing season in 2021 at 77-85 but added pitching during the offseason, which should help the Angels finish at least third and possibly second in the AL West. The Angels added pitchers Noah Syndergaard, Mike Lorenzen, Aaron Loup and Raisel Iglesias as well as shortstop Andrew Velazquez. Alex Cobb and Dylan Bundy, two starting pitchers from last season, are no longer with the Angels.

Starting Lineup

DH Shohei Ohtani
 CF Mike Trout
 3B Anthony Rendon
 1B Jared Walsh
 C Max Stassi
 LF Brandon Marsh
 RF Jo Adell
 SS Andrew Velazquez
 2B David Fletcher

Los Angeles has missed the postseason each of the last 6 years but with star Mike Trout, a healthy Anthony Rendon returning for his second season with Angels and two-way star Shohei Ohtani back, expect Los Angeles to be very competitive in the West. Ohtani was spectacular during 2021. On the mound. Ohtani (9-2)

became the Angels' ace with 23 starts and a 3.18 ERA. plate, Ohtani earned a silver-sluggger award, his first in the majors and was the MVP of the American League.

Trout returns for the Angels but the slugger has yet to play in a postseason game at the MLB level. This season the Angels must receive excellent production at the plate from Trout, Rendon, Ohtani and Jared Walsh. Los Angeles will have a pair of young outfielders in Brandon March and Jo Adell who will see their first full seasons in the majors while Juston Upton will look to bounce back with a strong season. David Fletcher and Tyler Wade create a solid middle infield for the Angels. Wade, who was a Yankees prospect, is expected to have a solid season both at the plate and in the field for the Angels. The middle of the LA lineup consisting of Trout, Ohtani, Rendon, Walsh and Upton could become one of the most feared in the AL.

Starting Rotation

Noah Syndergaard RHP
 Shohei Ohtani RHP
 Michael Lorenzen RHP
 Patrick Sandoval LHP
 Jaime Barria RHP

On the mound, the Angels are expected to have a starting rotation of Ohtani, Syndergaard, Patrick Sandoval, Lorenzen, Jose Suarez and Jaime Barria. Syndergaard was just 0-1 with a 9.00 ERA in 2021, but for his career is 47-31 with a 3.32 ERA, 777 strikeouts and 166 walks. In three seasons with the Angels Ohtani is 13-5 with a 3.53 ERA, 222 strikeouts and 74 walks but last season was 9-2 with a 3.18 ERA. Patrick Sandoval is coming off a 3-6 season with a 3.62 ERA. These three will be the Angels' strength in the starting rotation.

Raisel Iglesias will be the Los Angeles closer. Last season the right-hander from Cuba had 34 saves and a 2.57 ERA with 103 strikeouts in 70.0 innings pitched. No other pitcher for Los Angeles last season had more than two saves. Mike

Mayers will play a big role once again in the LA bullpen. Last season Mayers had two saves with a 3.84 ERA and 90 strikeouts. The remainder of the Angels bullpen will include Aaron Loup, Ryan Tepera, Austin Warren and Jose Quijada.

Outlook

Los Angeles has likely the best all-around player in baseball in Mike Trout and a two-way phenom in Shohei Ohtani. However, the Angels have had problems because of injuries. This season Anthony Rendon is once again healthy and behind the play of Trout, Ohtani, Rendon and Jared Walsh amongst others, the Angels could give both the Astros and Mariners a run for their money. Los Angeles signed Noah Syndergaard during the offseason and he and Ohtani will be a great one-two punch on the mound for the Angels. Los Angeles also improved its bullpen with the addition of Aaron Loup, Archie Bradley and Ryan Tepera. Injuries will determine the outcome of the season for Los Angeles.



3. Seattle Mariners

2021 Record: 90-72
 World Series Odds: +2500
 AL Pennant Odds: +1400
 AL West Odds: +450

The Seattle Mariners 2021 season ended in disappointment as the Mariners missed the postseason for the 20th consecutive year. However, the Mariners were 18-8 during the month of September and had a shot at a playoff berth but lost two out of three to the Angels in the final series of the season. Seattle will battle with Houston throughout the season in 2022 and is

likely to break their 20-year drought for post-season play.

Starting Lineup:

2B Adam Frazier
 1B Ty France
 LF Jesse Winker
 RF Mitch Haniger
 CF Jarred Kelenic
 3B Eugenio Suarez
 DH Abraham Toro
 C Tom Murphy
 SS J.P. Crawford

Seattle lost very few players during the off-season, but parted ways with starting pitcher Yusei Kikuchi who joined the Toronto Blue Jays and third baseman Kyle Seager who retired after playing 11 seasons with the Mariners. The offseason acquisitions by Seattle are what make the Mariners a legitimate contender in the AL West. Seattle added strength to its batting order with Adam Frazier, Eugenio Suarez and Jesse Winker while acquiring a talented left-hander in Robbie Ray. Suarez has hit the most home runs in baseball since 2018 while Ray was the AL Cy Young Award winner in 2021 and will become the Mariners ace. Frazier, Winker and Suarez will join a young and talented lineup that includes Ty France and Mitch Haniger amongst others. Seattle will have a deep batting order with Frazier expected to lead off, followed by France, Winker and Haniger in the first four. Suarez, J.P. Crawford, Abraham Toro, Jarred Kelenic and Tom Murphy round out the batting order. France led all Mariners' in 2021 with a .291 batting average, but it was Haniger that carried the Mariners with 39 home runs. Seattle will miss the 35 home runs and 101 RBIs that the now-retired Kyle Seager had in 2021. However, offseason acquisition Suarez had 31 home runs and 79 RBIs in just 145 games last season with Cincinnati. Winker battled injuries in 2021 and appeared in just 110 games for the Reds but hit 24 home runs with 71 RBIs. Crawford produced very well at the plate for Seattle in 2021 with 169 hits which led the Mariners, including 37 doubles.

Starting Rotation

Robbie Ray LHP
 Marco Gonzales LHP
 Logan Gilbert RHP
 Chris Flexen RHP
 Matt Brash RHP

Seattle's starting rotation is expected to include Ray, Marco Gonzales, Chris Flexen, Logan Gilbert and Matt Brash. AL Cy Young Award winner Ray will be the ace of the pitching staff after posting a 2.84 ERA in 2021 with 284 strikeouts over 193.1 innings. Gonzales finished 2021 at 10-6 with an ERA of 3.96, while Chris Flexen was the most consistent pitcher last season at 14-6 with a 3.61 ERA, 125 strikeouts and 40 walks. Flexen pitched a team-high 179.2 Innings.

The Mariners will have a deep bullpen. Kendall Graveman, Paul Sewald, Drew Steckenrider and Casey Sadler each had outstanding seasons in 2021 in the Mariners' bullpen. Graveman is no longer with the Mariners but the other three return. Kenny Giles and Andres Munoz spent most of last season rehabbing following surgeries but both have lots of velocity and strong arms. The job as closer could come from several different players, but Steckenrider returns after posting 15 saves in 2021 and will receive the first shot at stopper for the Mariners.

Outlook

Seattle will give Houston a big challenge in the AL West this season. Although the Mariners have the longest playoff drought in Major League Baseball at 20 years, Seattle has added key pieces to the puzzle during the offseason by signing reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Robbie Ray. The additions of Eugenio Suarez and Jesse Winker give the Mariners much more firepower at the plate. The Mariners bullpen will also be stronger as Ken Giles returns from injury. Seattle came together as a team late in the season after the Mariners were 18-8 in September and just missed the playoffs in the last game of the season.



4. Texas Rangers

2021 Record: 60-102
 World Series Odds: +10000
 AL Pennant: +4000
 AL West Odds: +1600

The Texas Rangers made several improvements to their roster during the offseason after finishing last in the AL West at 60-102 in 2021. The additions to the rosters are not likely to be enough to put Texas over the top into playoff contention. Texas acquired Marcus Semien and Corey Seager during the off-season. Semien and Seager are two of baseball's best young stars and create one of the best middle infields in baseball. The Rangers also added pitcher Jon Gray and catcher Mitch Garver. At the same time, the Rangers lost Isiah Kiner-Falefa.

Lineup

2B Martin Semien
 SS Corey Seager
 C Mitch Garver
 CF Adolis Garcia
 1B Nathaniel Lowe
 LF Brad Miller
 RF Kole Calhoun
 DH Willie Calhoun
 3B Andy Ibanez

Shortstop Seager has been an All-Star twice, has won two Silver Slugger Awards and was the MVP of the World Series in 2020. Semien (2021 - 45 HRs, 102 RBIs), who is the new second baseman for Texas, was third in the voting for AL MVP in two of the last three seasons. Returning for Texas is young blossoming star Adolis Garcia, who last season led the Rangers in home runs with 31 and RBIs with 90.

Nathaniel Lowe was a big contributor for Texas last season with 18 home runs and 72 runs batted in. Lowe will start at first base for the Rangers and Andy Ibanez will be the starting third baseman to complete the infield, while Garcia will be the starter in center field with Brad Miller and Kole Calhoun in left and right field respectively. Offseason acquisition Garver will start behind the plate.

Starting Rotation

Jon Gray RHP
 Marlon Perez RHP
 Dan Dunning RHP
 Taylor Hearn LHP
 Spencer Howard RHP

On the mound, Texas is expected to have as a starting rotation Gray, Martin Perez, Dane Dunning, Taylor Hearn and Spencer Howard. Last season with Colorado, Gray was 8-12 with a 4.59 ERA, 157 strikeouts and 58 walks across 149.0 innings pitched. Perez was 7-8 with a 4.74 ERA in 36 appearances for the Boston Red Sox last season. Perez had 97 strikeouts and 36 walks. Dunning was 5-10 with a 4.51 ERA, 114 strikeouts and 43 walks in 2021.

The Rangers bullpen will be led by closer Joe Barlow, who last season finished with 11 saves for the Rangers but the offseason acquisition of Greg Holland will make a huge impact in the Rangers' pen. Ian Kennedy led Texas in saves last season with 16 but is now with the Arizona Diamondbacks. Other members of the bullpen will include Brett Martin, Spencer Patton, John King, Nick Snyder and Josh Sborz. Barlow had a 1.55 ERA last season and had saves in 11 of 12 appearances. Barlow will likely share the closer role with Holland.

Outlook

Texas made two of the biggest acquisitions in baseball during the offseason by signing short-stop Corey Seager and Marcus Seimen, who will move to second base, which gives the Rangers one of the best middle infields in baseball. The

additions of Seager and Seimen is not likely enough to push the Rangers over the top in the AL West but Texas will be more competitive. Jon Gray was acquired over the offseason and will be the ace of the Rangers starting rotation while Greg Holland is a big addition to the Rangers bullpen. However, Seager, Semien and Adolis Garcia will not be able to produce enough runs to compensate for a below-average pitching staff.



5. Oakland Athletics

2021 record: 86-76
 World Series Odds: +7500
 AL Pennant: +5000
 AL West Odds: +2500

Oakland is in a complete rebuild mode after trading away All-Stars Matt Olson, Matt Chapman and Chris Bassett while Mark Canha left via free agency. Talented players such as Sean Manaea, Frankie Montas, Elvis Aldrus and others remain but the A's will not compete at a high level this season against a loaded AL West.

Lineup

2B Tony Kemp
 SS Elvis Aldrus
 C Sean Murphy
 LF Seth Brown
 RF Chad Pinder
 1B Billy McKinney
 3B Kevin Smith
 DH Sheldon Neuse
 CF Christian Pache

Oakland did receive prospects in its three big trades during the offseason. Montas, Manaea

and Ramon Laureano have also been subject to trade rumors during spring training, which could bring in even more prospects. Christian Pache, who was once a top prospect for Atlanta, joined the A's in the Olson trade and is expected to start in the outfield. Oakland recently signed infielder Jed Lowrie and catcher Stephen Vogt. Starting center fielder Laureano will continue his 80-game suspension for PEDs and is unavailable to Oakland for the first month. The loss of Olson, Chapman and Canha eliminated a total of 83 home runs and 244 RBIs for Oakland and the Athletics will have a hard time finding players to produce those numbers in 2021. Catcher Sean Murphy hit 17 home runs in 2021 with 59 RBIs but averaged only .216.

Starting Rotation

Frankie Montas RHP
 Sean Manaea LHP
 Brent Honeywell Jr. RHP
 Cole Irvin LHP
 Daulton Jefferies RHP

On the mound, Oakland will have a starting rotation of Manaea, Montas, Cole Irvin, Brent Honeywell Jr. and Daulton Jeffries. Manaea was 11-10 with an ERA of 3.91, 194 strikeouts and 41 walks, while Montas was 13-9 with a 3.37 ERA, 207 strikeouts and 57 walks. Manaea had a 9.7 K/9 ratio while Montas had a 10.0 K/9. Cole Irvin finished 10-15 with an ERA of 4.24, 125 strikeouts and 42 walks. Oakland did not add any pitchers of significance to its roster during the offseason. Lou Trivino (4-4, 3.97 ERA), who last season posted 22 saves for the Athletics, will be the closer in 2022. A.J. Puk threw 71 innings out of the bullpen and was 4-4 with an ERA of 3.80.

Outlook

Oakland has entered a complete rebuild mode, which will take longer than just this season to complete. The Athletics have traded All-Stars Matt Olson, Matt Chapman and Chris Bassitt while rumors abound that Oakland will also offload pitchers Frankie Montas and Sean Manaea. Of course, Oakland received several

prospects for Chapman, Olson and Bassitt, but those players are not ready to play at this level yet. Oakland also starts the season without Ramon Laureano, as the outfielder is serving the remainder of his 80-game suspension and will not be available for the first month. Oakland lost Mark Canha to free agency. Last place is a likely position the Athletics will hold all season.



NL East Team Previews

Written by Blake Von Hagen

1. Atlanta Braves

2021 Record: 88-73
World Series Odds: +1200
NL Pennant Odds: +600
NL East Odds: +120

Atlanta overcame injuries to star outfielder Ronald Acuna Jr. (ACL) and star pitcher Mike Soroka (Achilles) last season, despite sitting at 44-44 on the day Acuna went down. The Braves were sitting below the .500 mark for most of the season prior to the All-Star break, sitting well outside the playoff picture. General Manager Alex Anthopoulos added Adam Duvall, Joc Pederson, Eddie Rosario and Jorge Soler to the outfield, helping the Braves turn their season around. They won the NL East for yet another year, but they were still viewed as a long shot entering the postseason.

Atlanta opened the playoffs with a sweep of Milwaukee in the NLDS and then beat the 106-win Dodgers in six games in the NLCS. They eventually won the World Series in six games against Houston, with Soler earning World Series MVP honors after hitting the go-ahead home run in the third inning of Game 6. The Braves were involved in one of the biggest changes that any team made during the off-season, as they parted ways with franchise first baseman Freddie Freeman. The 2020 MVP was replaced by Matt Olson, who signed a long-term contract with Atlanta. He is going to be with the franchise for eight years on a \$168 million deal. The Braves also added veteran closer Kenley Jansen along with right-hander Collin McHugh to an already solid bullpen. They also retained Rosario on a 2-year, \$18 million deal.

Starting Rotation

LHP Max Fried
RHP Charlie Morton
RHP Ian Anderson
RHP Huascar Ynoa
LHP Tucker Davidson

The first three spots of the rotation have been solidified, as Fried, Morton and Anderson will be the top-shelf starters. Atlanta ranked seventh in ERA last season, with the five pitchers above combining for 106 starts. Morton is expected to be fully healthy after breaking his leg in the World Series. Mike Soroka is going to remain sidelined due to an Achilles injury for now, but he should return sometime in the middle of the season. Soroka has now thrown a pitch in a regular season game since tearing his Achilles in August 2020. He posted a 2.86 ERA and a 3.11 strikeout-to-walk ratio in his 37 starts before that injury.

Atlanta's bullpen is as deep as any in the MLB after adding Jansen and McHugh in free agency. Jansen is a three-time All-Star, while McHugh had a 1.55 ERA across 64 innings for Tampa Bay last season. The Braves should have nine bullpen arms available when the season begins, but six of those spots seem set in stone.

Lineup

2B Ozzie Albies
1B Matt Olson
3B Austin Riley
RF Marcell Ozuna
LF Eddie Rosario
CF Adam Duvall
DH Alex Dickerson
SS Dansby Swanson
C Travis d'Arnaud

The obvious question will be how Atlanta replaces Freeman in the lineup, but the Braves seem to have done that...on paper. Olson actually out-hit Freeman last season, batting .271 with 39 home runs and 88 walks. He also reduced his strikeout rate from 31.4% to 16.8%,

giving himself something to build on moving forward. The Braves should have Acuna back in the lineup several weeks into the season, but he will not be on the field for Opening Day. Marcell Ozuna is returning after serving a suspension for violating the MLB's domestic abuse policy, which gives Atlanta another big bat in its lineup.

Outside of Olson, Alex Dickerson is the only addition to last year's lineup, as Soler is no longer on the team. The Braves still have speedy base-stealer Ozzie Albies at the top of the order, along with some power and consistency in Austin Riley behind him. Rosario and Duvall both worked out last season, so they will be back in the lineup this year. Dansby Swanson is entering the final year of his contract—Atlanta will have a decision to make regarding Swanson at the end of the season, but he provides speed and a decent level of consistency for now.

Outlook

Atlanta has gone out and won the NL East four straight times, yet oddsmakers are still pricing New York ahead of the Braves. Freeman is an obvious loss, but this year's roster is probably better than the one that won the World Series last season. Olson is going to be an excellent replacement for Freeman in the heart of the order. The Braves won the World Series without arguably their two best players, but Acuna and Soroka are both expected to return at different times this season. Ozuna is also back after serving his suspension, so there is no reason this team can't (or shouldn't) extend their NL East reign to half-a-decade.



2. New York Mets

2021 Record: 77-85

World Series Odds: +1000

NL Pennant Odds: +475

NL East Odds: +200

New York was seemingly in control of the NL East for most of last season, spending 103 days at the top of the standings. The Mets collapsed down the stretch though, finishing with a losing record and setting the record for most days in first place for a sub-.500 team. They were hampered by an injury that limited franchise pitcher Jacob deGrom to just 15 starts. Their big addition heading into last season was shortstop Francisco Lindor, who signed a \$10-year deal worth \$341 million, but he had a down year by his standards.

The Mets have gone out and made a splash in free agency again this year, bringing in star pitcher Max Scherzer to join deGrom atop the starting rotation. Owner Steven Cohen committed \$285.5 million to payroll, according to FanGraphs. He spent a combined \$254.4 million on four key signings prior to the lockout, leading to a new competitive balance tax threshold in the collective bargaining agreement. Scherzer became the highest-paid pitcher of all time based on AAV. The Mets also signed outfielder Starling Marte to a four-year, \$78 million contract. They made some changes within the front office as well, hiring GM Billy Eppler, manager Buck Showalter and a new coaching staff.

Starting Rotation

RHP Jacob deGrom

RHP Max Scherzer

RHP Chris Bassitt

RHP Taijuan Walker

RHP Carlos Carrasco

New York arguably has the best rotation in the NL East following its offseason moves. The Mets not only snagged Scherzer, but they also added right-handed pitcher Chris Bassitt. deGrom has been the best starting pitcher in baseball over

the last few years—now he has several high-level starters alongside him. The biggest question for the Mets' rotation will be their ability to stay healthy. Scherzer is now 37 years old, deGrom did not pitch in the second half of the season because of injuries and Carrasco was limited to 12 starts by injuries as well. Walker struggled down the stretch, but he showed plenty of promise prior to the slow finish. Scherzer and deGrom rank one and two in pitching WAR since 2017, so there is certainly huge potential for New York.

The bullpen is going to be a much bigger question mark in 2022. New York does not have a reliever to deal with some of the big left-handed bats within the division, such as Bryce Harper, Matt Olson and Juan Soto. The Mets are expected to roll with right-handed pitcher Edwin Diaz as their closer again this season, while Trevor May and Adam Ottavino are going to be the setup men. Miguel Castro, Seth Lugo, Chasen Shreve and Drew Smith are the middle relievers. New York will certainly be hoping for long outings from deGrom, Scherzer, Bassitt and the other starters.

Lineup

RF Brandon Nimmo
 CF Starling Marte
 SS Francisco Lindor
 1B Pete Alonso
 DH Robinson Cano
 LF Mark Canha
 3B Eduardo Escobar
 2B Jeff McNeil
 C James McCann

The Mets should have a much stronger lineup this season, as they are not going to be giving a ton of plate appearances to guys like Billy McKinney, Jose Peraza and Kevin Pillar as they did last year. They added outfielder Mark Canha and infielder Eduardo Escobar in the offseason. Canha and Escobar combined for 45 home runs last season, so they are going to provide a ton of power to the lineup. Marte was the highlight addition, though, as he got on base at a 38%

clip last season. He also provides a base-stealing threat, swiping a league-leading 47 bases in 2021. Cano is back after serving a year-long suspension due to performance-enhancing drugs. He is owed more than \$40 million over the next two years, so the Mets do not have much choice but to throw him in the lineup. Cano hit .316 during the shortened 2020 campaign, but he is now 39 years old. If he shows up hitting anything like he did in 2020, the Mets will have a ton of power in the middle of their lineup. They will also be hoping Lindor lives up to his eye-popping potential that he failed to reach last year.

Outlook

Well, the Mets certainly have the potential to run away with the division this year. They spent more money than any other team in the offseason and were leading the NL East for more than three months last season. Scherzer and deGrom have been the best pitchers in the MLB over the past five years, so having them on the same team is mind-blowing. The Mets also strengthened their lineup with the addition of Canha, Marte and Escobar. However, there are injury questions at most key positions for this team. I am not confident in their ability to get through this season without those injuries popping up, so I am stuck picking New York to finish behind Atlanta in what should be a competitive race between two World Series contenders.



3. Philadelphia Phillies

2021 Record: 82-80
 World Series Odds: +3000
 NL Pennant Odds: +1600
 NL East Odds: +350

Philadelphia is coming off its first winning record in a decade, but that is just about the only positive thing to say about how the Phillies finished in 2021. They went just two games above .500, which is a one-game improvement from a disappointing 2019 season. Their rebuild has led to four straight seasons of mediocre baseball—not what the fan base expects from their team. Philadelphia made the playoffs five straight years from 2007-11, but it is going to need take a huge step forward to snap the playoff drought this year.

The Phillies are another NL East team that made some moves during the offseason. They are going to have a very powerful lineup after signing Nick Castellanos and Kyle Schwarber. Castellanos and Schwarber are a pair of big bats to go alongside an already dangerous lineup. Philadelphia also made some changes to its bullpen, snagging Corey Knebel from the Dodgers. He dealt with injuries for several years, but he looked closer to his 2017-self last season. The Phillies also signed left-hander Brad Hand, who has been around the league for a long time. Right-hander Jeurys Familia was also added to the mix, while Johan Camargo was signed for infield depth.

Starting Rotation

RHP Zach Wheeler
 RHP Aaron Nola
 RHP Kyle Gibson
 LHP Ranger Suarez
 RHP Zach Eflin

Wheeler has been flat-out deadly since joining the rotation, posting a 2.82 ERA across 284.1 in-

nings. He had a 2.78 ERA in 32 starts last season, so it will be tough for him to duplicate those numbers. Wheeler dealt with some shoulder soreness during the offseason, so that will be something to monitor moving forward. Nola is expected to get the Opening Day start due to Wheeler's sore shoulder. He is coming off a disappointing season, finishing with a 4.63 ERA in 32 starts. Eflin had knee surgery last September, so he might miss his first start through the rotation, but he is going to play a key role this year.

Philadelphia needs to show drastic improvement out of the bullpen in 2022. The Phillies blew more saves than any team in the MLB last year and had one of the worst ERAs of any group of relievers. They need Knebel to be a calming presence late in games. He missed the 2019 season after Tommy John surgery, but he struck out 30 batters and finished with a 2.45 ERA in 27 appearances for the Dodgers last season. Hand made the All-Star team three straight years from 2017-19, but he has struggled since then. Philadelphia will not complain if Hand bounces back in a fresh uniform this season.

Lineup

LF Kyle Schwarber
 DH Nick Castellanos
 RF Bryce Harper
 C J.T. Realmuto
 1B Rhys Hoskins
 2B Jean Segura
 SS Didi Gregorius
 3B Alec Bohm
 CF Odubel Herrera

Philadelphia has one of the most explosive lineups in baseball—it certainly has the potential to lead the MLB in home runs. Harper is coming off his second MVP award, hitting 42 doubles and 35 home runs last season. Castellanos and Schwarber combined for 66 homers last season, so their addition to the top of the lineup is going to make this group tough to handle. Hoskins was limited to just 107 games last sea-

son, but he hit 29 doubles and 27 home runs. Realmuto added 25 doubles and 17 home runs for a lineup that finished seventh in the National League in runs and sixth in homers. The Phillies will also be hoping for a breakout season from Bohm, otherwise there could be some struggles at the bottom of the lineup. Speaking of struggles, Philadelphia was one of the worst defensive teams in baseball last season. The Phillies were sixth-worst in defensive efficiency and were ninth-worst in total errors. Schwarber and Castellanos are going to provide a ton of power, but they do not improve the defense. The former has made the playoffs in six of his seven seasons in the majors, so Schwarber will provide some valuable experience in the locker room.

Outlook

Philadelphia has arguably improved in the offseason as well, but have the Phillies improved enough to compete with Atlanta and New York? I think the answer to that question has to be “no,” at least for now. Philadelphia is still likely going to struggle with errors and pitching meltdowns. The Phillies are probably going to score 15 runs on multiple occasions, but they are a boom-or-bust lineup as well. They might have more power than any team in baseball, but that will not mask their deficiencies. I can’t justify putting them ahead of Atlanta or New York, both of which have higher ceilings. Philadelphia could certainly contend for a Wild Card berth, though.



4. Miami Marlins

2021 Record: 67-95
World Series Odds: +6600
NL Pennant Odds: +3000
NL East Odds: +1400

Miami will be looking to put a disappointing 2021 campaign behind itself this year. The Marlins made the 2020 postseason by virtue of the expanded field, leading to Don Mattingly taking home National League Manager of the Year honors. They faced Chicago in the Wild Card series, but they were nowhere close to sniffing the postseason last year. It was the first year for GM Kim Ng, who became the first female GM in the history of the four major American pro sports. The Marlins dealt with some injury issues, as right-hander Pablo Lopez missed most of the second half of the season. Jesus Aguilar, Jon Berti and Brian Anderson all dealt with injury issues as well.

Miami made some moves in the offseason as it tries to build towards a promising future. The Marlins gave ace Sandy Alcantara a pre-lockout extension, which is good news for the fan base. They also added NL Gold Glove winner Jacob Stallings at catcher, sending a group of players to Pittsburgh. Miami landed All-Star Joey Wendle in a deal with the Rays, while also signing outfielders Avisail Garcia and Jorge Soler. The latter was named the World Series MVP after crushing multiple clutch home runs for Atlanta. CEO Derek Jeter stepped down from his position and sold his stake in the franchise in late February.

Starting Rotation

RHP Sandy Alcantara
RHP Pablo Lopez
LHP Trevor Rogers
LHP Jesus Luzardo
RHP Elieser Hernandez

Miami has a very promising group of starting pitchers, highlighted by Alcantara. He could

wind up being one of the best pitchers in the MLB down the road, as he throws 101 mph fastballs and 93 mph changeups. Alcantara is joined by Pablo Lopez and Trevor Rogers at the top of a dangerous rotation. Rogers nearly won the Rookie of the Year award. They also have some prospects that could be making key starts this season, including the filthy Sixto Sanchez. His only problem thus far has been an inability to stay healthy due to elbow and shoulder issues. Sanchez is listed as the sixth starting option in most projections.

The bullpen is highlighted by closer Dylan Floro. This could wind up being the weak link for the Marlins, as there is nothing special about their collection of bullpen arms. Their setup men are Anthony Bender and Anthony Bass, while their middle relievers include Richard Bleier, Zach Pop and Steven Okert. There is no one in this bunch that is going to strike fear into some of the big bats that they are going to face in the National League, which is certainly a concern. Miami will need this unit to out-perform expectations if they want to make a run at a playoff spot.

Lineup

SS Miguel Rojas
2B Jazz Chisholm Jr.
1B Jesus Aguilar
CF Avisail Garcia
RF Jesus Sanchez
DH Jorge Soler
3B Brian Anderson
LF Joey Wendle
C Jacob Stallings

Miami made several additions to its lineup in the offseason, while not losing much. The Marlins added a pair of nice bats in Jorge Soler and Joey Wendle. Soler is coming off one of the most impressive power stretches that any player has had over the past few years, so his confidence will be sky-high heading into the season. Wendle has been a consistent professional who is going to provide some power to the lineup as well. The Marlins tried to add Nick Castella-

nos to the lineup, but they were not willing to spend the kind of money it took in the end. Stallings is not going to light up the stat sheet, but he will provide some offense along with his defensive stability behind the dish. The Marlins still have Garrett Cooper, Jesus Aguilar and Brian Anderson in their lineup as well. Jazz Chisholm Jr. could wind up leading the MLB in stolen bases, so he is a nice piece to have either at the top or bottom of the card. Shortstop Miguel Rojas should reach double figures as far as steals go as well. Garcia hit 29 home runs and drove in 86 runs for Milwaukee last year—he might wind up being the most important addition to the lineup.

Outlook

Miami has added some exciting pieces to go along with a young nucleus that could make noise down the road in this division. The key phrase there is “down the road.” The Marlins do not have the consistency or top tier talent to compete with New York and Atlanta. They could make a run at third place, but I would not expect much more than that from them this season. I do like their top three starters and the quiet, productive moves they made in the offseason, though. Miami is setting itself up for success in 2023 and beyond, but it is still several key additions away from that point.



5. Washington Nationals

2021 Record: 65-97
 World Series Odds: +10000
 NL Pennant Odds: +8000
 NL East Odds: +4000

Washington is only three years removed from its first World Series title, but the roster already looks completely different. The Nationals traded most of their championship team last season, parting ways with Max Scherzer and Trea Turner, among many others. They were not able to remain competitive without those stars, finishing with 97 losses in a disastrous season. Washington has now landed at the bottom of the NL East in two straight seasons following its World Series victory. The Nationals were left at a crossroads heading into this season.

They made a few moves in the offseason, adding Ehire Adrianza and Steve Cishek. Their other moves included signing Gerardo Parra and Maikel Franco to minor league deals. Washington's most significant move was the addition of 41-year-old Nelson Cruz, who is going to serve as the team's designated hitter. Star outfielder Juan Soto reportedly turned down a 13-year, \$350 million contract extension before the lockout and did not make a counteroffer. He is three years away from free agency, so that will be a key storyline to follow as the season(s) unfolds.

Starting Rotation

LHP Patrick Corbin
 RHP Josiah Gray
 RHP Paolo Espino
 RHP Erick Fedde
 RHP Anibal Sanchez

Washington's starting rotation was the key to its World Series championship team in 2019, but this group of starters does not come anywhere close to resembling that squad. Scherzer, the

ace, was dealt last summer. Stephen Strasburg has been unable to get healthy, throwing under 30 total innings since the start of the 2020 season. This leaves Patrick Corbin, who has posted a 5.50 ERA over the last two years, as the ace. Josiah Gray was acquired in the Turner/Scherzer deal and is hoping to improve upon his 5.48 ERA from last season. Nothing about Washington's rotation is set in stone, so you could see a lot of different faces making starts for the Nationals.

They have an underwhelming bullpen as well, but there are several players who could be used as trade pieces for contenders this season. Will Harris has been a quality arm out of the pen for several years—he was limited to just eight appearances last season, though. Tanner Rainey was dominant in 2019-20, but he walked 25 batters in 31.2 innings last year. Washington is going to need immediate help from offseason acquisitions Steve Cishek and Sean Doolittle. Both veterans have had success in their respective careers, but they are also seemingly on the back-end of their professional journey.

Lineup

2B Cesar Hernandez
 RF Juan Soto
 DH Nelson Cruz
 1B Josh Bell
 C Keibert Ruiz
 LF Lane Thomas
 SS Alcides Escobar
 3B Maikel Franco
 CF Victor Robles

The roster has been severely depleted over the past year, as evidenced by the projected starters. Outside of superstar Juan Soto, it's looking like a rough time for Washington faithful. Soto is probably the best hitter on the planet, but he is going to need some help. The Nationals are hoping that Cruz can serve as some protection in the middle of the lineup. They also added Cesar Hernandez on a one-year deal. Washington bolstered its infield with Dee Strange-Gordon, Maikel Franco and Ehire Adrianza, but none of

those guys are expected to provide the same level of production that Nationals fans have grown used to.

Outlook

There is no clear strength to this team, which is never a good sign. Washington is down to Soto as its only real superstar, particularly at the plate. He could wind up being traded before the deadline this summer, which might snowball into a historically bad season for the Nationals. They are coming off back-to-back last place finishes in the division and are going to be even worse this season. Their rotation is a mess, their bullpen is shaky at best and they are relying on a 41-year-old to be their key addition at the plate. They are also going to be playing against division opponents who mainly upgraded during the offseason, so I do not have high hopes for the Nationals.



NL Central Team Previews

Written by Mason Folz

1. Milwaukee Brewers

2021 Record: 95-67
World Series Odds: +1600
NL Pennant Odds: +700
NL Central Odds: -175

The Milwaukee Brewers got closer to their goal of reaching the World Series in the 2021 season, but fell just short. The Brewers have had pitching issues for quite some time now but might have finally changed the narrative. The Brewers have one of the best pitching rotations in the league and will try to contend in the NL Central, along with the NL Pennant. They made a few additions in the offseason and let a few guys go. The biggest addition was outfielder Hunter Renfroe, who was huge for the Red Sox in 2021.

The Brewers have now made it to the post-season for four straight years and they will be attempting to make it five this season. They are on their way to repeating as the NL Central champs with their offensive firepower and pitching rotation that could compete with anyone. Once they go to their bullpen, opposing teams are also in big trouble. They might have the best pitching duos in the MLB. Devin Williams and Josh Hader can shut down offenses near the end of the game. They now have starters that can get them there and batters that know how to produce runs. This will be a very tough team to beat throughout this entire 2022 season. However, they will need Christian Yelich to start performing like we know he can, and the rest of the batting order will need to step up and knock in runs to win games.

Starting Rotation

RHP Corbin Burnes
RHP Brandon Woodruff
RHP Freddy Peralta
RHP Adrian Houser
RHP Eric Lauer
LHP Aaron Ashby

The Brewers have one of the most dominant pitching rotations in the entire league. They also started using this 6-man rotation during the COVID 2020 season and it worked out well for them. I wouldn't be surprised if they continued using this strategy in 2022. It cut down on injuries and allowed their pitchers a day or two of extra rest in between starts. Corbin Burnes will be the ace for the Brewers, as he went 11-5 last year in 28 appearances. He is extremely tough to hit and opposing teams have found that out. He tallied up 234 strikeouts last year and finished with a 2.43 ERA. Burnes completed 167 innings, the second-most on the team, and will be looking to attack batters to start this season. Brandon Woodruff appeared in 30 games and ended the season with a 2.56 ERA. These two guys have a nasty fastball and off-speed pitch and usually don't surrender many hits to the opposing team. Woodruff threw for 179.1 innings, which was the most on the team. He allowed 84 hits throughout the entire season and struck out 211 batters.

This team has some serious strikeout ability, as all their pitchers bring velocity and accuracy to the table. Freddy Peralta will be the next man off the bench, as he finished 10-5 last season. He only allowed 2.81 runs per game and continued to put batters down game after game. Peralta struck out just 105 batters, but he usually gets most of his outs in the field. He allows the batter to make contact, but they can't put good enough wood on the ball to get a hit. Adrian Houser and Eric Lauer will also be a part of this crew if they run this 6-man rotation. Houser went 10-6 last season and Lauer finished 7-5. They also both combined for 222 strikeouts. They aren't as strong as their aces, but they can

get the Brewers a few wins during the regular season that will separate them from everyone else in the division. Aaron Ashby will round out the starting pitcher's rotation. He was able to go 3-2 last season and even tallied up a save. He finished the season with a 4.55 ERA and gave up 16 earned runs in the 31.2 innings that he pitched. He didn't get many chances last year and it will be interesting to see how much progress he has made since last year. He finished with 39 strikeouts and made the Brewers believe that they could trust him for another year.

Milwaukee will also have one of the better bullpen and closers in the MLB. They will send in Devin Williams whenever their starter gets into a sticky situation and southpaw Josh Hader will then come in and close the game. Williams went 8-2 last season and finished with a 2.50 ERA. He gave up 15 runs in 54 innings and struck out 87 batters. He is the glue guy for the Brewers, and they will need him to continue playing at a high level if they want to take control of this division early. Hader finished the year 4-2 with a 1.23 ERA. He appeared in 60 games and pitched 58.2 innings, as he shut down offense after offense to win each game. Hader ended the 2022 season with 34 saves on 35 attempts. This is extremely impressive and very difficult to overcome for other teams playing the Brewers.

Lineup

2B Kolten Wong (L)
 SS Willy Adames (R)
 LF Christian Yelich (L)
 RF Hunter Renfroe (R)
 1B Rowdy Tellez (L)
 DH Andrew McCutchen (R)
 3B Luis Urías (R)
 C Omar Narváez (L)
 CF Lorenzo Cain (R)

The Brewers have some killers in their pitching rotation, but they also have some offensive firepower that could give this team a serious boost. To win games, they are going to have to hit, and score runs. They still have Kolten Wong,

as he was a surprising stand-out last season. He was able to rack up 121 hits and 50 RBIs. He will be leading off for the Brewers, as he was able to keep a .272 batting average. The biggest and most important problem that the Brewers had last season was the fact that Christian Yelich wasn't hitting well. He finished the season with a .248 average and 99 hits. His numbers were way down from the season before, and he didn't produce as many big hits as Milwaukee would have liked. Yelich finished the year with 9 home runs and 51 RBIs. He is a big hitter and will need to start going yard again if he wants to give his team the momentum that they need to make the playoffs.

In the middle of the order, the Brewers made a giant addition to their team. Renfroe has an incredible arm and ability to create offense in a blink of an eye. He hits the ball all over the zone and forces the pitcher to be on the top of their game with each pitch. Last season, he hit .259 and tallied up 137 hits. He puts the ball in play and makes the defense work. He also had 96 RBIs and 31 home runs. He will give this offense the boost that they needed in the playoffs and their pitching will appreciate that.

Luis Urias will also play a huge role in the Brewers playing well this season. If they can get production from the bottom half of their lineup, I see this being a very difficult team to beat. He will be hitting seventh or eighth in the lineup and will look to have a season like he did last year. He ended with 122 hits and a .269 batting average. He also added in 23 home runs and 75 RBIs. They've got talent down their entire roster and their pitching rotation is insane!

Outlook

I have the Brewers as my favorite team to come out of the NL Central. They have one of the best rotations in the league and they know exactly what it feels like to come up just short in the postseason. The Brewers have a top 5 pitching rotation in the MLB, and they have the hitting ability to score plenty of runs to win enough games to win this Division and make it to the

playoffs. Christian Yelich will be able to turn it around on the offensive side of the field and he will be the “star” that they need to make a run at the Pennant. I also love the Brewers bullpen and closer. Devin Williams and Josh Hader will dominate opposing teams this entire season. Hader went 34/35 on save opportunities last season and I wouldn’t be surprised if he had, even more, this year. The Brewers will have the lead in most of their games and Hader will secure them the win. They are solid on all parts of the field and will take care of business against the lesser opponents in the league this season. Watch for the Brewers to make a run in the playoffs if they stay healthy this year.



2. St. Louis Cardinals

2021 Record: 90-72
 World Series Odds: +2000
 NL Pennant Odds: +1000
 NL Central Odds: +230

The St. Louis Cardinals had one of the craziest seasons in their team’s history to end the 2021 year. They went on a 17-game winning streak and found multiple players that they can now use as building blocks in their organization. The most shocking move that the Cardinals ended up making was letting go of longtime manager Mike Shildt. He had brought the Cardinals to three consecutive playoff appearances, but the front office didn’t believe that he had what takes to win the Pennant. The Cardinals brought in Oliver Marmol as the team’s new manager.

He will be stepping into an ideal spot, as the Cardinals are already built to contend. They

have Adam Wainwright can still move them down and Yadier Molina is still one of the best behind the dish. St. Louis also added some offensive firepower, as they have one of the best hitting duos in the MLB. Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan Arenado provide the Cardinals with some serious offense. These are two of the better overall hitters in the MLB and they will now have a full season to see what kind of numbers they can put up together. Albert Pujols was a late addition and makes some sense considering there is now a DH in the National League.

The Cardinals have some younger talent to build around aside from Molina and Wainwright. Tyler O’Neill decided to become one of the better hitters in the National League, as he will continue to grow this year. Jack Flaherty and Steven Matz will be ready to come in and produce when their ace isn’t available. Giovanny Gallegos will continue to close out games for the Cards this season, as he was one of the most used closers in the league. He appeared in 73 games and allowed just 51 total hits in 2021.

Starting Rotation

RHP Adam Wainwright
 RHP Jack Flaherty
 LHP Steven Matz
 RHP Miles Mikolas
 RHP Dakota Hudson

This is one of the strongest pitching rotations in the National League this season. Adam Wainwright is one of the best pitchers in the league, as he went 17-7 and finished with a 3.05 ERA in 2021. He pitched in 206.1 innings and only allowed 70 earned runs. Opposing teams have a difficult time hitting Wainwright when he is throwing to his long-time teammate, Yadier Molina. Flaherty will be the second man up and he could possibly get his name thrown into the CY Young conversation if he performs like he did last season. He pitched in 17 games and finished the season 9-2 with a 3.22 ERA and really impressed me during their winning streak in 2021. This is a mean duo, and they should be able to rack a ton of wins for the Cards.

Steven Matz will be the next man up as he showed that he was very trustworthy in the 2021. He won't put up Flaherty or Wainwright numbers, but he will be able to bridge this rotation and get them through some very tough games in the middle of the season. He went 14-7 last year and ended with a 3.83 ERA. Having three guys that had an ERA below 4.00 is extremely impressive and allows the Cardinals to rack up wins when they get to the top of the rotation. Matz, the former New York Mets' hurler, also struck out 144 batters last season, as he showed his velocity and pitch placement was next level. He appeared in 29 games and will most likely see more playing time in 2022. Watch for Miles Mikolas to be the fourth guy off the bench. He went 2-3 last season and struggled with injuries. He only appeared in nine games and struggled to keep men off the basepaths, allowing 21 earned runs in 44.2 innings.

To round out the rotation the Cardinals will use Dakota Hudson. He was able to appear in two games last season and only pitched 8.2 innings. Hudson ended up going 1-0 and ended up dealing with more injuries than playing time as he was coming off Tommy John surgery. He will have his opportunity to show that he belongs in this rotation and can really make this pitching rotation scary to deal with. Giovanny Gallegos appeared in 73 games last season and went 6-5 with 11 saves in September. He finished the year with a 3.02 ERA and 95 strikeouts and has mid-90s fastball with a mid-80s slider.

Lineup

2B Tommy Edman (S)
 1B Paul Goldschmidt (R)
 LF Tyler O'Neill (R)
 3B Nolan Arenado (R)
 RF Dylan Carlson (S)
 SS Paul DeJong (R)
 DH Nolan Gorman (L)
 C Yadier Molina (R)
 CF Harrison Bader (R)

This is simply one of the best lineups in the National League this 2022 season. They have pow-

er all throughout their lineup and there are few holes if any. They can hit nukes and this offense could possibly tally up more runs than any other team in the MLB this up incoming season.

The first name that pops out at me first, has to be Nolan Arenado. He was one of the biggest stories last year and turned out to be one of the best additions that the Cardinals made. He ended up hitting .255 and racking up 151 hits. Arenado mashed 34 home runs and knocked in 105 RBIs proving that he could hit outside of Coors' Field. He is one of the best hitters in the league and having him in the lineup gives them a chance to score every time he steps up to the plate. The fact that he is paired with Paul Goldschmidt isn't fair. These two guys produce runs out of thin air and can put the ball in play whenever they have men in scoring position. Goldschmidt had 31 home runs and 99 RBIs in 2021. He will be looking to improve on those numbers and provide the Cardinals with even more offense in 2022. He also struck out 136 times and will need to cut that number down.

Tyler O'Neill was one of the biggest surprises that the St. Louis Cardinals had last season. His emergence during their 17-game winning streak showed that he belonged on this team. He finished the year hitting .286 and racked up 136 hits. He also had 34 home runs and 80 RBIs. Every guy on this team can clutch up when they have men in scoring position. Each batter can put the ball in play and opposing pitchers better be on top of their game when they are facing this lineup. The Cardinals also still have Yadier Molina hitting at the bottom of their order. He is a very stable hitter and can provide the bottom of the lineup with some juice. Last season, he finished with 111 hits, 11 home runs, and 66 RBIs.

At the bottom of the lineup, right fielder Dylan Carlson is an athletic switch hitter, who his .266 with 18 homers and 65 RBIs with a 3.2 WAR in 2021. Nolan Gorman is a youngster and former first-round pick, who played sparingly last season. But he showed a lot of power in the minors and at just 21, he might be given a longer shot.

With Pujols still around, Gorman can move around from outfield to DH.

Outlook

The St. Louis Cardinals are going to be one of the better teams in the NL Central this upcoming season. I love their pitching rotation and believe that opposing teams are going to have a very difficult time hitting the first half of this rotation. Between Wainwright, Flaherty, and Matz, I don't see this team losing many games when any of them are on the mound. The firing of their manager was shocking to me, but I believe that they wouldn't have done it if it wasn't completely necessary. Bringing in 35-year old Oliver Marmol could give this team a breath of fresh air and allow the Cardinals to make a run at the Pennant this season. I believe that they have eliminated all the possible distractions and are now ready to compete for the NL Central title. I see it being between the Brewers and the Cardinals and it will come down to the last few games of the season. St. Louis got hot last season and will be looking to do that again. Hopefully, they carried some of that momentum over into the 2022 season. The Cardinals have one of the best pitching rotations in the league and even better batting order. They have men with power littered throughout their lineup and they will be able to generate enough offense to stay competitive in the National League Central.



3. Chicago Cubs

2021 Record: 71-91

World Series Odds: +10,000

NL Pennant Odds: +6600

NL Central Odds: +1100

The Chicago Cubs decided that it was the best idea to unload their entire team around the trade deadline this past season. They sent Anthony Rizzo to the Yankees, Javier Baez to the Mets, and Kris Bryant to the Giants. Their long-time play-by-play announcer, Len Kasper also decided it was time to step away from the team and joined the Chicago White Sox play-by-play team. The Chicago Cubs will now look to rebuild their team this year. I still believe that they will be rebuilding, even after their two big signings in free agency this summer. They were able to pick up some pitching and an outfielder so that they still compete this season. The Cubs didn't end up making the playoffs last season and will hope that they play better this upcoming year.

The Chicago Cubs added Frank Schwindel on waivers after the Cubs traded Anthony Rizzo last season. He is very young and one of the brightest spots on the field for the Cubs. He went on to win the NL Rookie of the Month for both August and September. They also did some shuffling in the front office, as they hired the Cleveland Guardians GM Carter Hawkins and the assistant GM from Houston. Chicago also thought it was a good idea to add a new hitting coach, after struggling to put the ball into play all last season. They hired Greg Brown and will be trying to develop this young team throughout the season.

Starting Rotation

RHP	Kyle Hendricks
RHP	Marcus Stroman
LHP	Wade Miley
RHP	Alec Mills
LHP	Drew Smyly

The Chicago Cubs' rotation was one of their

biggest problems in the 2021 season. They struggled to throw heat and opposing hitters were sending shots all over the yard against the Cubs. They threw the slowest four-seam fastballs, two-seam fastballs, and changeups in the league. Opposing teams had a field day against the Cubs. This eventually led to them having a 5.27 starter ERA and a tired bullpen. They were forced to pull their starters early in a ton of their games last season. In June, Davies and three relievers threw a no-hitter against the Dodgers. After this point, they went 29-58, which was the second-worst record in the Major Leagues. The Cubs rotation will look slightly different this year, as Kyle Hendricks will be throwing out the first pitch of the season. He was very strong this past season and will be the anchor for the Cubs all year. He went 14-7 and owned a 4.77 ERA with 200 hits in 181 innings. However, hitters pounded him for a .278 clip last season. Marcus Stroman will be the Cub's number two this season, as he went 10-13 last year and posted a 3.02 ERA. He can miss bats and he should be able to compliment Hendricks nicely. Stroman threw for 179 innings and struck out 158 batters. Veteran lefty Wade Miley will be third in line after coming over from the Reds. He went 12-7 last season and had a lot of success when he was on the mound due to a strong cut fastball. He threw for 163 innings and had a 3.37 ERA and allowed 166 hits and struck out 125 batters.

Right-hander Alec Mills will still be fourth in line in this Chicago Cub's rotation. He went 6-7 last season and finished with a 5.07 ERA. He also came out of the bullpen 12 times last year, as he didn't always have to start the game. Mills went on to strike out 117 batters, as he will need to focus on his pitch placement to avoid another season like the last. To round out the rotation the Cubs will have Drew Smyly step onto the mound. The veteran southpaw went 11-4 with a 4.48 ERA and pitched for 126.2 innings with 118 Ks. struck out 117 batters. For this rotation to find the success they will need to find some speed and attempt to make more outs in the field.

David Robertson will also be another pitcher

that the Cubs will use a lot this season. He had four saves for Tampa Bay last season, while batters hit just .239 against him. He's another pitcher coming off Tommy John surgery, who should be 100% this season. From 2018-16, Robertson had 110 saves with the Yankees and White Sox.

Lineup

CF Rafael Ortega (L)
 1B Frank Schwindel (R)
 LF Ian Happ (S)
 C Willson Contreras (R)
 3B Patrick Wisdom (R)
 DH Seiya Suzuki (R)
 RF Jason Heyward (L)
 SS Andrelton Simmons (R)
 2B Nick Madrigal (R)

The lineup for the Cubs is slightly different from last year but will still struggle while they are at the plate. Last season the Cubs team batting average was a paltry .237. This team had a very difficult time making contact with the ball, as they struck out 1,596 times throughout the 2021 season. To win more games, they will need to put the ball in play and rely on the middle of their order. Their 672 runs batted in were not enough to allow them to compete in the tough NL Central Division. They also hit 210 home runs, which was the 11th most home runs hit in the league.

They will allow their new batting order to try and generate more offense. Leading off the order, Rafael Ortega will be ready for the Cubs. He was able to rack up 86 hits last season and kept his batting average at .291 with 11 homers and 12 steals. He will be the spark plug for this Cub's team all season. He finished the year with 40 RBIs and will be able to drive in runs along with starting off the order with a bang. Ian Happ was one of the brightest spots for the Cubs in the 2021 regular season. He will be hitting third for the Cubs and will be looking to drive in a ton of runs this year. He ended the year with a .226 batting average and 66 RBIs. He also added 25

home runs and will be attempting to provide a ton of offense for the Cubs this season, but has dealt with an elbow injury in the spring. Jason Heyward is still in the mix and will also look to have a better season than last year. He struggled with a .214 average in 323 at-bats and is nearing the end of the line.

Wilson Contreras will be in the center of the lineup and will try to bridge together the front half of this lineup with the back end. He was not at the top of his game last season, and he will be attempting to turn that around. He finished the year with a .237 batting average and 21 home runs with 57 RBI. He also led the team in walks, with 62. He consistently got on base and that allowed the Cubs to hit while he moved into scoring position. Patrick Wisdom will be at third base for the Cubs after trading Kris Bryant last season. He led the team in home runs with 28 to set a rookie record. For the Cubs to compete this 2022 season, they will need to hit more bombs and generate more runs.

Outlook

It is safe to say that the Chicago Cubs are directly in the middle of a rebuild right now. They were able to reach their goal of winning a World Series, but now they must deal with the problems of building such a powerful team. Their World Series-winning team is gone, and they will now try to build up from the bottom. Their first two pitchers of their rotation are strong and will be able to provide this team with some defense. I believe they will struggle to find pitching after Kyle Hendricks and Marcus Stroman throw. Their bullpen worries me after David Robertson and they will have a hard time slowing teams down once their starter leaves the game. Their offensive lineup has some juice, but they will struggle to produce enough runs to win enough games to win this division. I don't believe they have the "star" that they are looking for to compete in this division. Rafael Ortega, Ian Happ, and Willson Contreras will need to lead this team on the offensive

side of the field, as they were the only three players that could generate any offense in the second half of the regular season last year. Their new management and lineups should provide this team with a spark, but I don't see it lasting throughout the entire regular season. The Cubs will look good early and fall off towards the end of the year.



4. Cincinnati Reds

2021 Record: 83-79
 World Series Odds: +10000
 NL Pennant Odds: +5000
 NL Central Odds: +1600

The Cincinnati Reds had put themselves in playoff contention in August this past season. They then went on to go 12-20 to end the season. Everybody thought that they had the team to compete, but management disagreed. Once the season came to an end, they ended up trading catcher Tucker Barnhart to the Tigers. They didn't want to pay him in 2022, despite the season that he had last year. They also lost out on Nick Castellanos, as he decided to hit the Free Agency market instead of opting back into his contract. Finally, they bought out Wade Miley's contract and allowed him to find a new team. Even though, he was the team's best pitcher last season.

General Manager Nick Krall went on to say, "Going into 2022, we must align our payroll to our resources." This sounds like a team this doesn't want to win right now. They have dumped all their good layers and looked to start this 2022 season fresh. They knew that they didn't have the talent to win it all, so they decided it was a better idea to start over. He kept his word as the Cincinnati Reds' manager also traded All-Star outfielder Jesse Winker and third baseman Eugenio Suarez to Seattle. This team will look completely different this upcoming season. They have the longest championship drought and don't seem to be trying to snap that streak this season. The front office is confusing and doesn't seem to have a championship plan.

Starting Rotation

RHP Luis Castillo
 RHP Tyler Mahle
 LHP Mike Minor
 RHP Vladimir Gutiérrez
 RHP Reiver Sanmartin

The Reds pitching rotation has slightly changed since last year. They got rid of their best pitcher, and they will now rely on Luis Castillo, even though rumors are flying around that the Reds might trade him too. He is one of the brighter spots on this team. He was able to go 8-16 this past season with a 3.98 ERA. He struck out 192 batters and continued to assert his dominance each time he got the opposing batter on their heels. Castillo threw for 187.2 innings, which was the most on the team. Tyler Mahle will be second in line, as he has been with the Reds since 2017. He appeared in 33 games and went 13-6. He pitched 180 innings and finished the season with a 3.75 ERA with 210 strikeouts to lead the team. When the Reds need a win this season, Mahle will likely be the man that they turn to.

Mike Minor will be right in the middle of this rotation, as he came over from the Kansas City Royals and will try to bridge together this pitching rotation. He went 8-12 with a 5.05 ERA with 149 strikeouts in 158.2 innings last season and will try to do the same again in Cincinnati.

Vladimir Gutierrez will be the fourth man to start games for the Reds. He was a rookie last year and turned some heads. He ended up going 9-6 in 22 appearances. Gutierrez finished the year with a 4.74 ERA and was able to pitch in 114 innings his rookie season. He can grow this year as his change up continues to improve.

Reliever Sanmartin will round out the rotation. He pitched most of his games in the minors last season, but was able to go 2-0 for the Reds near the end of the year. He had a 1.54 ERA in 11.2 innings for Cincinnati after they called him up. He's more of a groundball pitcher and he doesn't have great stuff. When his command and control are on, he can be very effective.

Lineup

2B Jonathan India (R)
 RF Tyler Naquin (L)
 C Tyler Stephenson (R)
 1B Joey Votto (L)
 3B Mike Moustakas (L)
 DH Tommy Pham (R)
 CF Nick Senzel (R)
 LF Jake Fraley (L)
 SS Kyle Farmer (R)

After all the trades and contract issues, the Reds lineup looks slightly different from last season. They still have a few recognizable names, but this team will hope to perform better than they did to end last year. This team is in a serious drought and their management seems to not care. Jonathan India will continue to lead off for the Reds. He hit .269 and tallied up 143 hits last season in his rookie campaign. India also had 21 home runs and 69 RBIs. The only issue that he has is striking out, as he struck out 141 times last season.

Joey Votto is the heart and soul of the Reds and will continue to be the focal point of the Reds for this upcoming year. He was able to switch his battle style and is now trying to hit more home runs. Last season he hit .266 and hits 36 bombs with 99 RBI last season. Another familiar face for the Reds would be shortstop, Kyle

Farmer. He ended up with 127 hits and 63 RBIs last season and will continue to try and build off that performance. Farmer also had 10 home runs and hit .263. He will be most likely hitting towards the bottom of the order as he provides offense throughout the entire lineup.

Tommy Pham will most likely be the Red's DH this year, as that has now been added to this season. He has a lot of power and could provide the Reds with a ton of runs in the middle of that lineup. Especially with Votto and Moustakas hitting right before him. Tyler Stephenson is also back on the Reds this season, as he led the team with a .366 batting average last year. He also had 100 hits and 45 RBIs. He is extremely efficient at the plate and only swings when he likes the pitch. He had 150 at-bats and showed that he could get on base early and often. This offense has some serious juice, and they should be able to hang in this division.

Outlook

Cincinnati's management has shipped away a few big puzzle pieces from the Reds and they don't seem to have their eyes on the big prize. I don't know why, because they would've been a great time if they didn't utterly collapse at the end of the season last season. They will now finally have all their fans back at the stadium after the COVID restrictions are being lifted. I am predicting that the Cincinnati Reds will finish fourth in the NL Central this year. They have a decent lineup and will be able to put up some runs, but their defense and pitching will continue to hinder them all year. I also feel as if their pitching rotation falls off after the first two guys. Castillo also scared me at times last season, and I don't know if he can truly be a team's number one guy. I like Mahle being the number two, but after him, their rotation falls off. Gutierrez and Sanmartin are both extremely young and it will be interesting to see if they can hang in the big leagues. This team has talent and offensive firepower, they just need to perform better than they did to end last season. In a division as tough as the NL Central, they won't have any time to mess around.



5. Pittsburgh Pirates

2021 Record: 61-101
 World Series Odds: +25000
 NL Pennant Odds: +12500
 NL Central Odds: +5000

The Pirates will begin their second year of this major rebuild, as they struggled on both sides of the field in 2021. They will be looking to find more young talent and continue developing the young studs that they already have. The Pirates finished dead last in runs scored, home runs, and slugging percentage in 2021. They needed some offensive firepower and better arms to get them through this season. They started this offseason by trading their stud third basemen, Jacob Stallings to the Marlins and obtained Zach Thompson and some minor league talent.

They also decided that it was time to move on from their former hitting coach and hired Andy Haines. He was with the Brewers the last few seasons and helped them get over their hitting slump. Milwaukee is now one of the better hitting teams in the league now. Pittsburgh also acquired Roberto Perez, in hopes that he can provide a spark at the plate and in the field. The Pirates aren't expecting to win a ton of games this season, as they understand that they still have some work to do.

Luckily, they still have their All-Star center fielder, Bryan Reynolds. He was the best player on this team last season and is hoping to help this club turn it around. He will be the centerpiece of this team and they will try to build around

him. They also held on to David Bednar, as he was the best pitcher on the team last season. He held opponents to a low number of hits each game and barely ever allowed a run.

Starting Rotation

LHP José Quintana
RHP JT Brubaker
RHP Zach Thompson
RHP Bryse Wilson
RHP Wil Crowe

The Pittsburgh Pirates attempted to make some adjustments on the mound over the offseason. They will allow Jose Quintana to throw out the first pitch of the season in 2022. He pitched for the San Francisco Giants and Los Angeles Angels last season. He finished the year after pitching 63 innings and had a 6.43 ERA. Quintana only allowed 45 runs in the small number of innings that he pitched in 2021 with 85 strikeouts. JT Brubaker should be second in line after he finished last season with a 5.36 ERA. He threw for 124.1 innings and struck out 128 batters. He only allowed 171 hits and went 5-13 on the year.

Zach Thompson will be the third man off the bench for the Pirates this upcoming season. He was obtained from the Miami Marlins in the middle of last year. He appeared in 26 games and went 3-7. He finished the year with a 3.24 ERA and struck out 66 batters. Bryse Wilson will be fourth in line, after the Pirates traded for him in 2021. He was originally on the Braves, but the Pirates saw something special in him. He finished the year with a 5.35 ERA and the former Atlanta prospect is at best a fifth starter with mediocre stuff.

Wil Crowe will round out this rotation for the Pirates. He went 4-8 last season with a 5.48 ERA and will need to be better if the Pirates have any hope of being better than they were last season. The Pirates have multiple young arms that are waiting patiently to be called up. If any of these guys struggle, I wouldn't be surprised to see them make changes quickly. To round

out this rotation, the Pirates held on to David Bednar. He appeared in 61 games last season and threw for 60.2 innings. He struck out 77 guys and only allowed 5 earned runs. Bednar finished the year 3-1 and will try to carry that momentum into this upcoming year.

Lineup

3B Ke'Bryan Hayes (R)
DH Yoshi Tsutsugo (L)
CF Bryan Reynolds (S)
1B Daniel Vogelbach (L)
RF Ben Gamel (L)
LF Anthony Alford (R)
SS Oneil Cruz (L)
C Roberto Pérez (R)
2B Cole Tucker (R)

The Pittsburgh Pirates will still have Bryan Reynolds hitting third in this upcoming season. He was the best player on the Pirate's team last season and will be looking to play even better in 2022. He ended the year with 169 hits and 24 home runs and a .302 batting average. He starts each game or inning out with a bang, as he gets on base more than anyone else on his team. He will need to focus on putting the ball in play, as he had 119 strikeouts last season. 3B Ke'Bryan Hayes will be back for Pittsburgh, as he was their leadoff hitter last season. He was able to rack up 93 hits and only struck out 87 times. Hayes is extremely fast and has a great eye but needs to focus on swinging at pitches inside the zone. In 2021, he had 6 home runs and 38 RBIs, as well.

The Pirates also brought back Yoshi Tsutsugo as their DH and 1B this season. He was one of the only players on the team that could hit the high fastball last year. He provided some power and showed that he could put the ball in play. He finished the season with a .217 batting average and 8 home runs. Yoshi will be ready to give this lineup some juice in the second spot. He and Ben Gamel will be crucial in the middle of this order if the Pirates want to improve on their struggling offense from last year. Gamel finished last season with a .247 batting average

and tallied up 84 hits. He will be looking to provide the Pirates with some RBIs and home runs this season, as he had 8 bombs and 26 RBIs last year.

Cole Tucker will be hitting in the ninth spot this season, as he can bridge the entire lineup together. He finished the season last year hitting .222, with 26 hits. He only had 117 at-bats and even hit two home runs. He is very young and will have an opportunity to show the Pirate's organization that he belongs in the big leagues. Watch for shortstop, Oneil Cruz as well. He is one of the brightest spots on this team, as he has been playing great in the minors and for the Pirates to end the year in 2021. Before he was called up, the 6-7 shortstop was hitting .310 in the minors with 17 home runs and 47 RBIs. He has what it takes to become a starter in the league, we just must see if the Pirates develop him correctly.

Outlook

This will be a very up-and-down team throughout the 2022 season. The Pirates were one of the worst offensive teams in the league last year and not much has changed. They added Roberto Perez and hired a new hitting coach. They will need to hope that their young talent continues to progress and get better. Luckily, the Pittsburgh fans will still have something to cheer for, as Reynolds will still be in center field for the Pirates. He will generate most of their offense and give the opposing pitchers a run for their money each time they throw him a pitch. The Pittsburgh rotation does look better than last year, as they added Zach Thompson and Bryce Wilson over the last year. The Pirates also found a way to hang to their best pitcher, David Bednar. He will be able to shut down opposing offenses in the middle and at the end of games. The Pirates will also hope that Jose Quintana will be ready to step up and act like a true number one pitcher in the big leagues. He went 0-3 last year in 29 appearances and can't have another season like that if he wants to continue playing in the MLB. I don't see the Pirates playing better than anyone in their division and

they will struggle against the top teams in the league. The Brewers and the Cardinals will also dominate them again this season, as they both have better all-around ball clubs. The Pirates will struggle as they continue to try and rebuild.



NL West Team Previews

Written by Travis Lord

1. Los Angeles Dodgers

2021 Record: 106-56
 World Series Odds: +500
 NL Pennant Odds: +250
 NL West Division Odds: -225

The Dodgers are an absolute powerhouse, and while they underwent more roster churn than usual during the offseason, their current group of players looks incredibly strong. The 2021 Dodgers won 106 games. While that huge win total was only good for a spot in the Wild Card game due to the Giants and their 107 wins, it did set an all time MLB record for wins accrued by a Wild Card team. The Dodgers won their Wild Card game over the Cardinals, and beat their arch-rival Giants in a thrilling NLDS that went the full five games. Once they beat the Giants they looked like a lock to go all the way, but with Max Scherzer unable to bring his best to the NLCS, the Braves ultimately snuck past them and took the NL Pennant as well as the World Series championship.

A number of key contributors from the 2021 team will be playing elsewhere in 2022. Corey Seager has taken his skills to Texas, and while Seager struggled to stay on the field, when he was able to go, he played at an elite level. It is impossible for his +147 wRC+ to not be missed in the lineup, and his .915 OPS and .215 ISO combined with his low K rate (16.1%) are the reason he was able to compile 3.7 WAR in just 95 games. Kenley Jansen will be dominating the ninth inning in Atlanta, leaving an opening at

the top of the bullpen hierarchy. The departure of Joe Kelly further depleted the relief corps. The Dodgers did maintain the services of free agents Clayton Kershaw and Chris Taylor, keeping two well-loved stars in the fold. The big addition of course was signing heavy hitting Freddie Freeman to a six-year deal. Freeman is one of the few MLB players capable of outproducing Corey Seager, and unlike Seager, Freeman is a model of consistency - he has only missed seven games in the last four MLB seasons.

Starting Rotation

1. Walker Buehler
2. Clayton Kershaw
3. Julio Urias
4. Andrew Heaney
5. Tony Gonsolin

The front end of this rotation is loaded, but the back end holds some question marks. Walker Buehler has taken hold of the ace role, and is one of the best pitchers in all of baseball. Buehler threw more than 200 innings for the first time in his career in 2021, and racked up his biggest WAR total as well with 5.5. His K/9 rate dipped slightly compared to his past, but he showed improved control with just 2.25 BB/9. His .357 xFIP shows that he may have been a little bit lucky, but there is certainly nothing wrong with posting career-low .247 ERA while posting a career-high innings total. Kershaw is not the Kershaw of old, but he remains in Dodger blue and his nasty curveball and outstanding control give him the potential to shut down any lineup any time he takes the mound. His FIP (3.00) and xFIP (2.87) as well as his 10.65 K/9 rate were actually better than Buehler last season, and his 14.7% HR/FB rate that is nearly a third higher than his career average also indicates he may have been a little unlucky last season in spite of putting up a very respectable traditional stat sheet.

Julio Urias slots third, but he would be #1 on a lot of other teams. He was sparkling all around in 2021, and looks to just be hitting his prime. He piled up 5 WAR to go with elite control (1.84

BB/9), and while his strikeout numbers aren't eye-popping he does get more than one per inning. His .313 FIP indicates that his results were more or less in line with the quality of his stuff. Urias, Kershaw, and Buehler make up one of the most formidable trios in the game.

Andrew Heaney and Tony Gonsolin round out the rotation, and while they both possess plenty of raw skills, they both come with question marks. When he is on his game, Heaney can be a strikeout machine. He has twice topped 11 K/9 for a season. He struggles with control and consistency however, and is prone to allowing home runs - his career 15.9% HR/FB rate probably isn't all just bad luck. Gonsolin has flashed tons of promise, but hasn't been able to put it all together and stick in the majors. Dave Roberts announced that he will get a chance to be part of the rotation this season, but there are a variety of potential depth options.

Trevor Bauer hangs over the team like a dark cloud, but the possibility exists that he could retake the mound at some point in 2022. If the Dodgers added Bauer to their current top trio, they could probably pull a fan out of the stands to be the 5th starter and still win the division. Dustin May is expected to provide a boost down the stretch. Danny Duffy, Jimmy Nelson, Tyler Anderson, and David Price could all end up starting games should Heaney or Gonsolin underperform.

Starting Lineup

1. Mookie Betts RF
2. Trea Turner SS
3. Freddie Freeman 1B
4. Justin Turner 3B
5. Max Muncy DH
6. Will Smith C
7. Cody Bellinger CF
8. Chris Taylor 2B
9. AJ Pollock LF

The Dodgers' lineup is absolutely ridiculous. Even without Seager, they will terrify pitchers everywhere and they have already earned com-

parisons to the all time great lineups in MLB history. You can make a strong argument that each of the top six batters in their order are among the top three players in MLB at their respective positions. Fangraphs projects this group as a whole to put up an amazing .837 OPS in 2022. They project every member of the starting nine for more than 20 HRs, which would certainly be an impressive feat if they can make good.

It all starts at the top with Mookie Betts. Betts had injury issues in 2021, and had a "down year" by his standards. Of course by any normal standards a season with an .854 OPS, a 131 wRC+, 23 HRs and 3.9 WAR in just 122 games is all-star caliber and a career year for a mere mortal. Betts appears to be at full health, and if he can stay that way he is a strong threat to return to his previous heights - projection systems have him as high as 6.2 WAR for the 2022 season.

Freeman makes up for the loss of Seager and then some. He was consistently outstanding in 2021, posting a .896 OPS, 135 wRC+, and 4.5 WAR while smashing 31 bombs and getting into 159 games for the Braves. His eye has improved over time, with 2020 and 2021 showing the lowest K rates of his career. He will be an anchor at the top of the Dodgers lineup and his addition deepens the group as a whole and makes everyone else better, in the way that a hitter like AJ Pollock is already good, but compares even better when you put him side-by-side with the other #9 hitters around the league.

Cody Bellinger is the biggest question mark, as he has fallen off from his 2019 MVP performance. He has struggled mightily this spring, and while that wouldn't be a concern under normal circumstances, coming off a campaign that saw him be a negative WAR player with a 48 wRC+ that struck out in just a hair under 27% of his ABs, it is cause for concern that he will be unable to rediscover his superstar form. While the Dodgers' bullpen lost two key pieces in Kenley Jansen and Joe Kelly, they have made a number of under-the-radar additions

in hopes that some of them will take on high leverage innings. Blake Treinen appears poised to take over the closer role. Treinen was dominant in a setup role in 2021, posting a microscopic 1.99 ERA while fanning 10.58 batters per nine. He allowed just 0.62 HR/9 as well. Roberts hasn't officially named him as the closer and may go with more of a committee strategy, but regardless of his exact role Treinen will be deployed in high leverage spots to be sure. Free agent signing Daniel Hudson will be a key contributor as well. Alex Vesia, Brusdar Graterol, and Victor Gonzalez are all young, have tons of raw potential, and will be given the opportunity to prove they can take a step forward and consistently produce in leverage spots.

Outlook

The Dodgers will take the NL West, and it won't be as close as it was last season. While there are areas of weakness in both the bullpen and the back of their rotation, neither are significant enough to have a large impact on this overall incredibly talented club. Additionally, in the event of any injury or underperformance on the pitching staff, the Dodgers boast a plethora of depth options as well as the resources to acquire a quality player to fill the hole. With the Giants unlikely to repeat their 2021 miracle season and the Padres without their best player for at least three months, the Dodgers will retake their place at the top of the NL West.

2. San Francisco Giants

2021 Record: 107-55
 World Series Odds: +2500
 NL Pennant Odds: +1200
 NL West Division Title Odds: +550

The Giants came out of nowhere in 2021 to be the best team in the sport. They finished the season with an MLB-best 107 victories, beating out the Dodgers by one game after an incredible division race. They ultimately fell to LA in a

thrilling five game NLDS, but there is certainly no shame in losing a short series to the Dodgers and I think Wilmer Flores is still wondering why his series-ending at bat is over. Much of the Giants' impressive season was the result of throwback superstar performances from veterans like Buster Posey, Brandon Crawford, and Evan Longoria, and the books don't have much confidence in them to repeat their success. They are behind the Padres in division odds, and Vegas even likes teams with many question marks like the Phillies, Red Sox, and Padres more than the Giants to win the World Series.

The Giants did lose some of their most important 2021 contributors. Buster Posey announced his retirement after the season, in spite of putting up an outstanding year with an .889 OPS, 140 wRC+, and a huge 4.9 WAR that was his best since 2016. At the age of just 35, many fans thought Posey would have another year or three left in the tank, but he has hung up the spikes, paving the way for the Joey Bart era in San Francisco to begin in earnest.

Kevin Gausman had an outstanding 2021, piling up Ks and shutting down offenses with his 2.81 ERA. He was good enough to earn himself a large free agent contract from the Blue Jays. Kris Bryant was a deadline pickup, but many fans hoped he would stick around after his strong play down the stretch.

The Giants picked up Carlos Rodon and Alex Cobb to help round out the rotation, and retained Anthony DeSclafani after his solid season. On the offensive side Joc Pederson was the only significant free agent pickup.

Starting Rotation

1. Logan Webb
2. Carlos Rodon
3. Anthony DeSclafani
4. Alex Wood
5. Alex Cobb

Logan Webb had a breakout season in 2021, emerging as the team's ace amongst a very

talented group of pitchers. Webb's 3.03 ERA looks good, but he was actually unlucky as his FIP (2.72) and xFIP (2.79) indicate that he could have gotten even better results. He is entering his prime, and could be a dark horse Cy Young contender. Carlos Rodon has struggled with injury and inconsistency throughout his career, but he put it all together in 2021 with the White Sox to hang up some amazing numbers. His 12.55 K/9 was off the charts, and his 2.65 FIP showed that his tiny 2.37 ERA was no fluke. The Giants would surely like him to throw more than the 132 innings he compiled in 2021, but assuming he can make 30+ starts he will form a terrific one-two punch with Webb.

DeSclafani, Wood, and Cobb all possess plenty of skills but have lacked consistency over their careers. The Giants are hoping that they can work their magic with Cobb, and are hoping that their magic sticks with DeSclafani and Wood who both made significant steps forward after joining the Giants. If all can stay healthy and perform to the higher end of their potential, the Giants rotation, while not as star-studded as some other teams, could be among the strongest top-to-bottom.

Starting Lineup

1. Mike Yastrzemski RF
2. Tommy LaStella 2B
3. Brandon Crawford SS
4. Brandon Belt 1B
5. Darrin Ruf DH
6. Joc Pederson LF
7. Wilmer Flores 3B
8. Steven Duggar CF
9. Joey Bart C

The Giants lineup certainly lacks star power, but there is plenty of quality there. FanGraphs projects 24 home runs for Yastrzemski, Belt, and Pederson. Projections are not as strong for a 35-year-old Brandon Crawford to repeat a stellar 2021 performance that saw him post a careerbest 5.5 WAR to go with a 139 wRC+ and .895 OPS. He wasn't well projected last season either, so if he can continue to defy father time

the Giants will be in great shape if Crawford comes in somewhere between his projections and his 2021 performance.

Evan Longoria and LaMonte Wade will both start the season on the IL, but they both should provide a solid boost and lengthen the lineup when they return. Both were key contributors in 2021 and the Giants will be counting on them to get back on the field. This is a lineup that relies on depth and matchups, with Gabe Kapler an expert on getting the most out of each player's unique talents. As such, the bench depth that features Austin Slater, Mauricio Dubon, and Jason Vosler will need to produce whenever Kapler finds them the right matchup.

The Giants bullpen projects to be a major strength. While Kapler has declined to commit to a full time closer, Camilo Doval turned heads in a big way towards the end of 2021. FanGraphs projects him for 82 Ks in 67 2022 innings, which would be right in line with his 2021 12.33 K/9. Doval's xFIP and xERA show that he was unlucky with his 2021 3.00 ERA, and with an extra year of experience under his belt he has the potential to be one of the most dominant relievers in the league. Jake McGee, Tyler Rogers, and Dominic Leon round out the group that will get the most high leverage looks, but the rest of the 'pen is as deep as it gets and their "mop up" guys like Zack Littell and Jose Alvarez could be high leverage guys on other teams.

Outlook

While the Giants probably don't have enough firepower to outgun the Dodgers and pull off a second consecutive divisional upset, they will again outperform projections and expectations and have themselves second in the NL West and in the thick of the playoff hunt, likely to secure a Wild Card berth in the newly expanded playoffs. While the books are more bearish on the Giants than I am, they still give them -130 odds of taking one of the six NL playoff slots. The potential for an elite one-two punch at the top of their rotation and a savvy skipper ready to squeeze every bit of production possible

against an underrated group of hitters makes the Giants underrated by the books and a formidable opponent on the field.



3. San Diego Padres

2021 Record: 79-83
 World Series Odds: +1600
 NL Pennant Odds: +700
 NL West Odds: +325

San Diego had high expectations going into 2021, and between injury and underperformance, they did not live up to them. The NL West was expected to be a two-horse race between the Dodgers and Padres, but the Padres couldn't hold up their end and were blown out of the water by the upstart Giants. The bookies like them to rebound in 2022, as their lineup is mostly intact and they are getting some key players back from extended injury absences. The Padres didn't lose much during the off-season, Tommy Pham was the closest to a key offensive contributor who won't be returning. The starting rotation remains intact as well. The loss of Mark Melancon from their bullpen was probably the most significant, and they lost Daniel Hudson, Matt Strahm, and Keone Kela from their relief corps as well who all saw high leverage 2021 innings.

There were not many additions for the Padres during the offseason, but getting Mike Clevenger back from injury is sort of like acquir-

ing a new top-end starter. They did add some thump to their lineup by acquiring Luke Voit, and shored up their depth without depleting the major league roster by picking up back-up catcher Jorge Alfaro and 5th starter Nick Martinez.

Starting Rotation

1. Yu Darvish
2. Joe Musgrove
3. Blake Snell
4. Mike Clevenger
5. Nick Martinez

This is a powerful group. Any of the Padres' top three starters could be their ace, and would be the ace if they played on many other teams. Darvish gets the "ace" nod from me based on his solid control (2.38 BB/9), strong 10.77 K/9 rate, and underlying FIP (3.90) and xFIP (3.75) that show his 4.22 ERA didn't accurately portray how good he was on the mound. His 14.6% HR/FB rate that almost doubled his 2020 rate shows he was victimized by some bad luck there as well.

Musgrove has a solid claim to the ace title as well, tossing a no hitter last season while hanging up 3.3 WAR overall. Musgroves ERA of 3.18 looks a lot better than Darvish's, but the FIP (3.70) and xFIP (3.65) were in line with Darvish's numbers and indicate that you can't go wrong either way, call them 1A and 1B if you want to. Snell is about as good as a #3 starter gets, although he did have some durability issues only making 27 starts. He also continues to rack up high pitch counts, averaging less than five innings per start. His K rate of 11.89/R is elite, although his control is shaky (4.83 BB/9). His FIP (3.82) and xFIP (3.74) are right in line with Darvish and Musgrove, and he clearly has ace-quality stuff and will form another strong top three. It is less clear what the Padres can expect from Mike Clevenger, but if gets anywhere near his 2019 numbers with Cleveland where he racked up a blazing 12.07 K/9 rate to go with a stingy 2.71 ERA backed up by an even-stingier 2.49 FIP, the Padres will boast one of the deepest rotations in the majors.

Starting Lineup

1. Trent Grisham CF
2. Manny Machado 3B
3. Jake Cronenworth 2B
4. Luke Voit DH
5. Eric Hosmer 1B
6. Wil Myers RF
7. Austin Nola C
8. Jurickson Profar LF
9. Ha-Seong Kim SS

The announcement that Fernando Tatis Jr will miss the first three months of the season was devastating for Padres fans. Tatis was among the favorites to win the NL MVP award, and there is no way that the Padres are going to be able to replace the 6.1 WAR he compiled in 2021. Tatis smashed 42 home runs in just 130 games last season, sporting an elite .975 OPS and 156 wRC+. There isn't a shortstop in the league that could step in and offer that kind of production, but the Padres are forced to give the position to Ha-Seong Kim, who struggled in his first major league season. He mustered just a .70 wRC+ a .622 OPS, while whiffing in almost 24% of his ABs and hitting only .202 while posting a pedestrian .150 ISO.

While the lineup would certainly look a lot better with Tatis in there instead of Kim, the top still packs some punch. FanGraphs projections like Trent Grisham to take another step forward, and Manny Machado has been consistently great since joining San Diego. Machado seems like the kind of guy you can just pencil in to be right around his 2021 marks that saw him bash 28 homers and drive in 106 runs while posting a 122 wRC+ and an .839 OPS.

The addition of Voit fills the new NL DH role nicely for the Padres, and if Hosmer and Myers can avoid continued decline, they have the potential to be decent contributors in spite of their inflated salaries. The Padres are one of the deepest teams in MLB at the catching position, with Austin Nola taking the starting role backed up by Jorge Alfaro, who hits well enough to

start for most teams. Should either get injured or underperform, Victor Caratini is a decent backup option as well and prospect Luis Campusano has loads of potential. The Padres' bullpen will need to recover from the losses of Melancon, Kela, and Strahm, but they have tons of depth. They have a potential new weapon as well, with Dinelson Lamet healthy but projected for a bullpen role to ensure he stays on the field. Lamet's unbelievable arsenal and elite strikeout stuff could make a huge impact at the back end of games. Robert Suarez, Emilio Pagan, and Pierce Johnson will also compete for high leverage looks, with Drew Pomeranz hoping to return from injury to contribute at some point during the season.

Outlook

San Diego won't win the NL West, but they have a competitive team and should be right there in the mix for a spot in the newly-expanded playoffs. Much of their potential success depends upon some key players bouncing back from injuries, specifically Mike Clevenger and Dinelson Lamet. Clevenger could transform the rotation into a deep group, while Lamet could provide the solution to all the questions about the Padres bullpen. The Padres lineup is potent enough elsewhere to hold on until Tatis comes back, and if Fernando misses the minimum amount of time and is able to continue with 2021-style production when he returns, the Padres will likely make it so three NL West teams are represented in the playoffs.



4. Colorado Rockies

2021 Record: 74-87
 World Series Odds: +20000
 NL Pennant Odds: + 8000
 NL West Division: +8000

The Rockies had a tough season in 2021, but given the quality of their division it certainly could have been worse. They ended up only a handful of games behind the Padres, but they were never competitive at any point and are looked upon as an afterthought by the book-makers heading into 2022.

The Rockies lost star players in Trevor Story and Jon Gray, two key members of their 2021 club. While most people expected Colorado to go into the tank and avoid any big expenditures this off season, they made a huge splash by signing Kris Bryant to a massive deal. Bryant should really take advantage of the thin air to boost his stats, and he projects to be a significant force in the lineup. The Rockies made some other savvy moves, picking up a resurgent Jose Iglesias off the scrap heap and giving up some speed in exchange for thump by swapping Ramiel Tapia for Randall Grichuk.

Pitching is always an issue for Colorado, and losing Jon Gray certainly did not help. While Gray's numbers were not outstanding (4.59 ERA, 4.04 xFIP, 9.48 K/9), they are more impressive considering the Coors Field environment. The Rockies replacement, Chad Kuhl, doesn't possess the same quality stuff.

Starting Rotation

1. German Marquez
2. Kyle Freeland
3. Antonio Senzatela
4. Austin Gomber
5. Chad Kuhl

German Marquez had an excellent 2021 campaign. His 4.40 ERA doesn't look hot on paper, but his 3.64 xFIP is a better indicator of his skills,

especially given how much he pitches in Coors Field. His strikeout totals were a little low for an ace (8.80 K/9), but his 1.27 WHIP was solid for a Colorado pitcher and coming into his age 27 season he could potentially take another step forward. Freeland is a few years removed from being a Cy Young contender, and FanGraphs doesn't like him much, projecting him for a 2022 ERA over 5.00. Freeland posted a pedestrian 7.83 K/9 rate to go with a 4.33 ERA that lined right up with his 4.26 xFIP, showing that he is a mid-rotation starter at best at this stage of his career.

The back-end trio of Antonio Senzatela, Austin Gomber, and Chad Kuhl project to be mostly inning-eaters without too much upside. Gomber possesses the most potential of the three, and coming into his age-28 season it will be interesting to see if he can turn some of the skills he's flashed in the past into consistent quality performances. If he can improve his control (3.2 BB/9) and improve on his 8.82 K/9 rate a little bit he could turn himself into a solid mid-rotation guy instead of a back-end one.

Starting Lineup

1. Charlie Blackmon DH
2. Kris Bryant LF
3. Ryan McMahon 3B
4. CJ Cron 1B
5. Brendan Rodgers 2B
6. Randal Grichuk CF
7. Jose Iglesias SS
8. Sam Hilliard RF
9. Elias Diaz C

There is plenty of firepower at the top of the Rockies order, highlighted by the impressive top three of Blackmon, Bryant, and McMahon. Blackmon has been a model of consistency throughout his career, although his 2021 stats show a decent dip from his prime. He put up a respectable 1.5 WAR in 2021 to go with a .762 OPS and 13 homers. His .270 batting average was his lowest since his rookie season, but his BABIP was also his lowest since 2011 and shows that the low average was likely an anomaly

rather than a trend. Kris Bryant was the team's marquee addition, and his power will play well in Coors. He put up a 123 wRC+, an .834 OPS, and 25 homers while splitting time between two pitcher-friendly home parks in 2021. By moving to Coors Field we'll see the raw numbers get a boost for sure. Ryan McMahon just inked an extension, and it's clear the Rockies feel that he has more potential than his 95 wRC+ and .780 OPS showed last season. CJ Cron should continue to strike out a lot while hitting home runs, and the under-the-radar additions of Grichuk and Iglesias should help the Rockies not be a total pushover.

The bullpen has plenty of holes, but there is enough talent there that they won't be completely giving away runs. The addition of Alex Colome gives the Rockies a talented arm with plenty of high leverage experience. While he struggled last season with a 4.44 FIP and under eight Ks per nine, the potential is there for him to regain his form. Both Daniel Bard and Robert Stephenson posted a K/9 rate over 10 in spite of some inconsistencies, and Tyler Kinley showed flashes of skill as well.

Outlook

The Rockies will end 2022 under .500 and will not be in contention even for the expanded playoff field. Between having to play against the Dodgers, Giants, and Padres so many times as well as their pitching staff that is among the weakest in MLB, they will have a difficult time picking up victories. Their offense will put some runs on the board at Coors and they could play a spoiler role down the stretch if the division or Wild Card races are close, but that is about the highest aspiration possible for this year's Rockies.



5. Arizona Diamondbacks

2021 Record: 52-110

World Series Odds: +25000

NL Pennant Odds: +12500

NL West Odds: +10000

The Diamondbacks were one of the worst teams in baseball in 2021, partially due to lack of effort on the ownership side, and partially from underperformance. They lost an abysmal 110 games, and the oddsmakers hate their 2021 chances, making them one of the game's biggest longshots to achieve any success.

Arizona didn't lose any key contributors from last year, but that is because they didn't really have anyone to lose. As a collective group, the DBacks had just a .692 OPS for the season, and hit just 144 home runs. Their 87 combined OPS+ means the average hitter on the Diamondbacks was 13% worse than the average MLB hitter, never a good look.

There isn't much optimism for a quick turnaround, but the Diamondbacks did improve their team during the offseason. They added significantly to their bullpen by signing free agents Mark Melancon and Ian Kennedy, both of whom closed games for better teams in 2021. Zach Davies won't be mistaken for a Cy Young candidate any time soon, but he provides solid rotation depth and the potential to rediscover his 2020 form that saw him post a 2.73 ERA and strike out a career-high 8.18 batters per nine.

Starting Rotation

1. Madison Bumgarner
2. Merrill Kelly
3. Luke Weaver
4. Zach Davies
5. Zac Gallen

Madison Bumgarner's days as an ace may be over, but he at least had a better 2021 than

2020. He cut two full runs off his ERA to get it back down to a more reasonable 4.67, and his 4.63 FIP shows that it wasn't just luck that caused the improvement. His elite strikeout stuff is gone, as he posted just a 7.63 K/9 rate, but he is gaining some craftiness, as he allowed just a 7.5% barrel rate in 2021, his best since his heyday with the Giants.

Merrill Kelly looked like an emerging star in 2020, but regressed significantly in 2021. His K/9 rate dropped by nearly a full strikeout to 7.41, and while his 2020 2.59 ERA was always unsustainable (3.99 FIP), his 4.44 2021 ERA was probably a little inflated based on his 4.11 FIP. Luke Weaver and Zach Davies are both similar pitchers who don't have elite stuff but do have the ability to eat innings and keep their teams in a game. Zac Gallen slots in fifth there, but he could have the most upside of the bunch. He sports a career K/9 rate of 10.44, and while his 2021 4.30 ERA doesn't look so great, his xFIP of 3.96 was actually better than the 4.15 xFIP he posted in 2019 when he had a 2.81 ERA. The potential is clearly there for the 26 year old, it's just a matter of him putting it all together.

Starting Lineup

1. Daulton Varsho CF
2. Ketel Marte 2B
3. David Peralta LF
4. Christian Walker 1B
5. Josh Rojas 3B
6. Carson Kelly C
7. Seth Beer
8. Pavin Smith RF
9. Geraldo Perdomo SS

This lineup doesn't have much pop. FanGraphs projects the group for just 133 home runs combined. Ketel Marte is the clear standout, and will provide a spark at the top of the order. The D-backs made a great move locking him up for the long term. He still has yet to replicate his 2019 success when he hung up an amazing 7 WAR, but the 2.9 he had in 2021 was the second highest total of his career. His 139 wRC+ was very strong, and while a high .352 BABIP prob-

ably helped him out some, you can't go wrong with a .318 batting average, .909 OPS, and .215 ISO to go with 14 bombs and solid defensive play.

David Peralta and Christian Walker will be relied on to provide firepower to the weakest team in the division, but they don't have enough to keep Arizona out of the basement. Peralta mustered just eight homers in 150 games last year, and a .727 OPS. He struck out in more than 17% of his plate appearances, and while some of his struggles could possibly have been bad luck with a BABIP 29 points below his career average, a poor ISO of just .144 and a 93 wRC+ indicate that it is more likely due to decline.

Walker took a major step backwards in 2021. After putting together a great 2019 campaign that saw him post 2.2 WAR to go with a .217 ISO and .824 OPS to help Arizona fans get over Paul Goldschmidt, he has not lived up to those numbers since. He had just 0.3 WAR in 2021, and a career worst .137 ISO. A .686 OPS is not what you want to see from your cleanup hitter.

The Diamondbacks' bullpen has significantly improved, and should help them at least to not lose 100 games again. The addition of Mark Melancon and Ian Kennedy give them a formidable one-two punch at the end of games, and should they happen to find themselves in a high leverage spot, they should be able to get the job done. Adding those two to take over the most prominent position allows their other relievers to find more suitable roles, as guys like Noe Ramirez and JB Wendleken look a lot better as middle relievers than set-up men or closers.

Outlook

The Diamondbacks probably won't be as bad in 2022 as they were in 2021, but they will still finish in the basement and won't find themselves in the hunt for even a Wild Card spot. D-backs fans do have some stuff to look forward to in the future, but 2022 doesn't offer much in terms of potential success. With the Rockies improv-

ing their roster more than Arizona did they will not be able to overtake them in the near future, and unlike Colorado rather than spoiler they will most likely find themselves playing the pat-sy come late September when the playoff races get close.

