

# The 2020 REDRAFT GUIDE

Welcome to the 2020 Re-Draft Guide for *FantasyGuru.com*.

Considering the landscape of this year's unique campaign, we've done our best to put together some relevant work to help you get the leg up on your competition who has been busy doing other things and not focusing on the minutia of the game of baseball. To that end, we've compiled some of the most salient pieces we've written of late so that you will have it at your fingertips as we get ready for the 2020 season to begin.



## Who Benefits from the Universal DH?

By Ray Flowers

What you are about to read is a best guess as of May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020. We are hearing that there will be a universal designated hitter, but we don't know that for sure yet. Assuming the report is accurate, and putting aside the idea of [whether or not it's a good idea](#), we have chosen to move forward by accepting the likely rule change. Therefore, we need to look at National League clubs and try to determine how they will handle the role. For the sake of this exercise we will suggest the lead option and then one (or more) backup options for each club to fill the DH role. It is obvious, but it should still be noted, that it is entirely possible that NL clubs do *not* name a full-time DH, and that they ham and egg it based on

matchups, the health of players and the desire to rest guys but still have their bat in the lineup. With that, here is a best-guess scenario for each NL club.

**BRAVES: Best Option (Nick Markakis), Darkhorse (Austin Riley)**

The obvious answer is Riley, but he still has minor league options, and he was awful after that first two weeks last season. With **Ender Inciarte** and his Gold Glove defense in the outfield, that leaves Markakis without a starting gig in the outfield. Don't forget he hit .285 with a .356 OBP last season, numbers that dwarfs those of Riley (.226 and .279). It makes sense for the Braves to give Riley a shot, all that youth and the massive power potential, but you can also make a plausible case for the veteran getting a shot.

**BREWERS: Best Option (Ryan Braun), Darkhorse (Justin Smoak)**

Braun has had issues staying healthy, so it's logical that he could see a lot of time at first/DH. Smoak, being the first base option, could play first/DH as well in a sort of rotation when Braun's body feels better. **Ben Gamel** and **Jedd Gyorko** could also get work at DH, but that would likely be in a support role with the other two guys playing the vast majority of time filling the two spots (this would allow the outfield to be **Christian Yelich**, **Lorenzo Cain** and **Avisail Garcia**).

**CARDINALS: Best Option (Matt Carpenter), Darkhorse (Tyler O'Neill)**

Carpenter's body is wearing down, and he frequently has shoulder issues. Putting him in the DH spot would allow him to conserve his energy for the offensive side of the game. That would allow **Tommy Edman** to slide over to third base full-time, clearing up the outfield for a guy like **Dylan Carlson** to make the team as a starting outfielder. The slugging **Tyler O'Neill** could also fit into the mix either in the outfield or at the DH spot.

**CUBS: Best Option (Kyle Schwarber), Darkhorse (Steve Souza)**

Schwarber will be playing daily, either in left field where he is a poor defensive player, or at DH. That would leave Souza and **Albert Almora** to handle left field, with **Ian Happ** in center. Makes a lot of sense to, that is to have Schwarber handle the DH spot.

**DIAMONDBACKS: Best Option (Kevin Cron), Darkhorse (Jake Lamb/Tim Lincecum)**

With the additions of **Starling Marte** and **Kole Calhoun**, the outfield is full. **Christian Walker** is at first base and **Eduardo Escobar** at third. Lincecum makes the roster for sure, and will run when active. It's possible the D'backs get him even more involved with the DH. Lamb could be used against righties (career .814 OPS), but he can't hit lefties, hasn't hit anyone recently and seems to continually be hurt. I think we would all love to see the 27 year old Cron get a shot. After all, in 82 games at Triple-A last season he went .31-38-105-81 with a 1.226 OPS. Holes and all, he can certainly mash.

**DODGERS: Best Option (A.J. Pollock), Darkhorse (Matt Beaty/Kike Hernandez/Chris Taylor)**

The DH will allow the Dodgers to mix and match on offense, to match what they do with their pitching. **Joc Pederson** can't hit lefties, so he's been looked at as a platoon partner with Pollock. The addition of the DH will likely allow Pollock to see more work. The Dodgers also have guys such as Beaty, Hernandez and Taylor on the bench, they do have one of the deepest in baseball, so it's not clear at this point that Pollock will get a chance to run with the job, until he's hurt of course.

### **GIANTS: Best Option (Hunter Pence), Darkhorse (Jaylin Davis/Austin Slater/Wilmer Flores)**

Pence had a massive bounce back last season, one no one predicted at 36 years of age, as he posted a career best .910 OPS. Injuries limited him to just 83 games though, and expecting him to play daily, well, never gonna happen. The DH spot would allow him to save his body a bit, he's always running at 140 mph, and allow his bat to be in the lineup. The Giants are likely to use the DH spot in the same manner as they plan on deploying their bullpen, in a shared scenario. Davis more intriguing than Slater after that .306/.397/.590 slash line with 35 homers he posted in the minors last season, but he has a long swing, has dealt with injuries, and most scouts think he's a 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> outfielder in the bigs. He won't live up to those numbers from last season.

### **MARLINS: Best Option (Garrett Cooper), Darkhorse (Jon Berti/Matt Joyce)**

Joyce destroys righties, and even at 35 years of age he had a .871 OPS last season against them. Berti will play here, there and everywhere racking up steals. The addition of **Jonathan Villar** and **Corey Dickerson** in the outfield, and **Jesus Aguilar** at first base, makes it tough to envision Cooper being the in the daily lineup without a DH. Cooper was solid last year with a .281/.344/.446 slash line, but like Joyce he's not very good against lefties (.641 OPS last year).

### **METS: Best Option (Yoenis Cespedes), Darkhorse (Matt Adams/Domonic Smith)**

We can all dream that Cespedes will stride to the plate and blast homers all over the yard. He's hit only 26 homers the last two years, thanks to 119 games played, and he didn't have a single at-bat last season while he was wrestling with pigs or whatever he was doing. The Mets have a veteran (Adams) and a youngster (Smith) who probably deserve some at-bats, and let's face it, they are gonna get them cause there is no way that Cespedes can stay healthy, is there?

### **NATIONALS: Best Option (Howie Kendrick), Darkhorse (Ryan Zimmerman/Asdrubal Cabrera)**

Kendrick had his best season last year hitting .344 with a .966 OPS. Zimmerman is still hanging around to add some thump to the lineup every once in a while. Cabrera/Starlin Castro were brought to town to basically replace **Anthony Rendon**. If **Carter Kieboom** holds down third base, then Cabrera is likely in the utility/DH mix. If Kieboom can't get it done, Cabrera will likely be using his glove at third, with Castro playing second. If that plays out the outfield spot gets a little clearer.

### **PADRES: Best Option (Wil Myers), Darkhorse (Brian Dozier, Josh Naylor)**

The outfield will be **Tommy Pham**, **Trent Grisham** and **Franchy Cordero** with **Eric Hosmer** at first. That leaves Myers as the third wheel if you will. Myers nearly went 20/15 last season, and he still has a nice power/speed skillset that we are all looking for. If he's in the lineup daily, his value will shoot through the roof. We had expected there to be a trade in order for Myers to return value this season. Sure seems like that might not be the case now.

### **PHILLIES: Best Option (Jay Bruce), Darkhorse (Neil Walker, Josh Harrison, Roman Quinn, Alec Bohm)**

Bruce hit .216 last year and has hit .220 the last two years. His skills are starting to slip, no doubt. He can still mash however. Bruce has 35 homers his last 629 at-bats, including 26 last season in just 310 at-bats. His last season of 500 at-bats, back in 2017, he socked 36 homers. The Phillies have a good place to hit,

if the games are played in Philly, and the lineup is stacked. Folks are dreaming a bit, I think, and hoping that Bohm will get a shot early in the year. However, until we know how the practice squad / minor leagues will work for certain, playing time for prospects is up in the air.

**PIRATES: Best Option (Jose Osuna), Darkhorse (Colin Moran, Guillermo Heredia)**

Osuna has a mere .719 OPS in 250 big league games over three years. He has gone 20-77-86 over 623 plate appearances so he has still helped to produce runs, but he's a very moderate option in fantasy. We're listing Moran here under the following conditions. (1) **Gregory Polanco** is healthy. (2) **Jarrod Dyson** is starting in center field. (3) **Ke'Bryan Hayes**, and his excellent glove work, grabs the spot at the hot corner and he hits enough as a rookie to stay there.

**REDS: Best Option (Nick Castellanos), Darkhorse (Aristides Aquino, Nick Senzel)**

Castellanos could stay in the outfield, but he's not great out there so why not just let him hit. He's playing daily of course. Basically, we have three guys here for two spots. I've written previously about my affection for Senzel, and I just don't see how it makes any sense for the Reds to stall his development by playing him part-time. There has been a lot of talk about Aquino being sent down to start the season, but the addition of the DH is the reprieve he needed to likely make the squad. Still, he was a HOF performer in his first month last season while the second month looked like he would be overmatched in Double-A.

**ROCKIES: Best Option (Sam Hilliard), Darkhorse (Daniel Murphy/Raimel Tapia/Garret Hampson/Ian Desmond)**

If we have **David Dahl** and **Charlie Blackmon** in the outfield, and **Ryan McMahon** and **Trevor Story** at second and shortstop, we have one open spot in the outfield for Tapia/Hampson/Hilliard. If we pencil Hilliard into the outfield that opens up the DH spot for one of the four men listed as Darkhorse options. Desmond is getting paid a lot of money this season, but perhaps the Rockies will just eat that and use him as a bench option. You would think the Rockies would love to get the speed component of Hampson in the lineup on a daily basis. Tapia has looked like just a guy in his time with the Rockies, but he is still just 26 and a lot of scouts think he has more to give. Murphy has had a tough time staying healthy, so maybe the Rox will just plant him at the DH spot moving McMahon to first base. Of course, this gets even messier when **Brendan Rodgers** is ready to contribute as his bat could force itself into the lineup taking over second base, thereby tossing McMahon into the DH/1B/OF mix as well.

Finally, here is a list of free agents that could find a home, and a role, with 15 extra spots (at least) available... *Jose Bautista, Melky Cabrera, Scooter Gennett, Yasiel Puig, Hanley Ramirez, Mark Trumbo*



## 10 Universal DH Hitters to Target

By Vlad Sedler

Universal DH content is all the rage these days and why shouldn't be? After all, our baseball news cycle is overridden with the negativity and clouds of doubt from the stalemate between players, the players union and the MLB owners. It is easy to go down this rabbit hole at a time when much of our fantasy analysis and consumption are on hold. If you are looking on the bright side though, the news of the Universal DH being accepted as part of our proposed 82-game 2020 season means that there is a reason to start making adjustments to player rankings and making strategic assumptions.

No doubt, if you've been consuming all the fantasy baseball content you can handle these last few weeks, you likely already have a good idea of which hitters we can bump up ADP because of this extra hitter in the National League. But who are the hitters who will truly move the needle? Below is a ranking of the 10 best targets for your proverbial radar.

*ADP listed from NFBC for the period of March 12 through May 17*

*\*You can find Ray Flowers take on every NL club in [Who Benefits from the Universal DH?](#)*

**1 – J.D. Davis, RH/NYM (ADP: 169.5)**

The most expensive option on our list and the one guy who was already slated for near full-time at-bats in his lineup, Davis becomes a virtual lock to be in the lineup every day. The former Astros prospect broke out in a big way last season, becoming a natural mainstay in the middle of the Mets' lineup last year, slashing .307/.369/.527 in just over 450 plate appearances. Davis hit the ball damn hard last year (91.4 mph EV, 47.7 hard-hit percentage), and most importantly, flexed a .308 XBA displaying his talents for all to see as a true power *and* contact guy whose .307 average was anything but fluky. Davis is not the best defender. He could always cover third base when **Jeff McNeil** hops over to second base. But he'll mostly man left field, and possibly take on some DH duties – if **Yoenis Cespedes** gets hurt, isn't ready or simply doesn't play every day. It may appear as though Davis does not offer much room for profit given his price tag as a 12<sup>th</sup> rounder in 15-team leagues. But the truth is, Davis could very easily slug his way into being a top-40 overall hitter and smash his current cost this half-season. The 27-year-old was already a big target for me in January/February

## 2 – **Wil Myers**, RH/SD (ADP: 275.8)

A guy who has been off my fantasy radar for a few years now, mostly because he is a major drag in batting average. Myers has posted three straight seasons with a mark between .235 and .255 though has hit double-digit homers and swipes in four consecutive seasons (including 11/13 in just 83 games in 2018). He has been in the league so long (since 2013) though; he's not even 30 years of age and perhaps there is a bit more in the tank. At least that looked to be the case this spring where he hit .300 with a team-leading three dingers in the Cactus League, implementing a simplified approach at the plate. What was most notable (albeit a super small sample size) is that Myers struck out at an 18 percent clip. A good sign considering last year's 34.3 percent mark was, by far, his worst ever. Myers is a good bet for 20-plus combined swipes and homers in this shortened season and perhaps might surprise us by not kicking us in the batting average junk. **Josh Naylor** will get some looks from the DH slot when righties are on the mound, but Myers should mix in for more starts in the lineup with the Universal DH role, spending time in the outfield, first base and as the designated hitter against lefties.

## 3 – **Nick Senzel**, RH/CIN (ADP: 217.5)

There is no hiding my warm heart for Senzel this draft season, which is a complete 180 from this time last year. He is only 24 with just 414 career big-league plate appearances (all last season) but now has the post-hype prospect feel and the misnomer of being 'injury-prone' after two straight seasons riddled with injuries. His shoulder appears to be all but healed and we can finally see him live up to his hype as the second overall pick in the 2016 Amateur Draft. Senzel hit 12 homers, scored 55 runs and stole 14 bags on 19 attempts in those 414 PA, giving us at least some glimpse of his capabilities. He was particularly impactful against southpaws posting a 51.8 percent hard-hit rate and a 128 wRC+ against them in his rookie year. Yes, this Reds offense is stacked and the outfield is crowded, but with DH implemented, Senzel is assured of being in the lineup more frequently and easily out-earning his 217.5 ADP.

## 4/5 – **Garrett Hampson**, RH/COL (ADP: 201.2) & **Sam Hilliard** LH/COL (ADP: 277.3)

Like most of you, I'm a sucker for Rockies bats in Coors Field. Hampson would be less desirable of a fantasy option were it not for the Universal DH, which should allow players from this crowded outfield



to slide over as the team's designated hitter. As it stands, **Charlie Blackmon** is locked in as the everyday right fielder and **David Dahl** (so long as he stays healthy) in center. Left field and DH would be a rotation of Hampson, **Sam Hilliard** and **Ian Desmond**. Ideally, Desmond would just DH when a lefty is on the mound and Hilliard could play against the righties. With expanded rosters, **Raimel Tapia** would be mixed in as well, but never as the DH – he's a good defender but not an overwhelming hitter. Hampson could also give second baseman **Ryan McMahon** some days off as the two opposite-handed hitters could platoon there.

Let's not get it twisted. Hampson does not hit the ball hard – at all. Last season's 30.2 percent hard-hit rate was less than stellar – and it wasn't much higher in the minors. He's no **Mallex Smith** or **Dee Gordon** either, but unlikely to crank out double-digit homers this half-season. But Hampson certainly is a base-stealing machine and is a longshot to lead the NL in swipes in 2020. He has always been proficient at not getting caught and in September and October to close out last season, Hampson put on a display, going nine-for-nine on SB attempts while hitting .318 with five homers and 16 runs. His teammate Hilliard has some major hype from those 'in the know' heading into this draft season but it still feels like a dirty little secret when you consider the ultra-cheap price tag (277 ADP). In his first Triple-A season last year, Hilliard put up massive numbers (35 HR – 101 RBI – 22 SB – 109 R) and averaged 30 stolen bases in his three minor league seasons prior to 2019. This roster is deep enough where Hilliard likely won't be in the lineup against righties, but good enough and cheap enough to do provide a hefty profit at a dirt-cheap price.

#### 6 – Jon Berti, RH/MIA (ADP: 265.2)

Berti is dirty 30 years of age and is very much a late-bloomer given the fact that it took him eight seasons to make his debut in the majors (with the Blue Jays in 2018). He burst on the season as a valuable fantasy asset last season, particularly down the stretch where he finished tied second with Hampson and **Tommy Pham** in stolen bases (nine) from September 1 on, behind **Adalberto Mondesi's** 12. Berti got the opportunity to lead off for the Marlins quite often and may get that opportunity again this year with some of the team's more powerful bats (**Jesus Aguilar**, **Garrett Cooper**) sliding over to DH. Berti has even less power than Hampson, but he's cheaper and has those bodacious wheels. Most importantly, he qualifies at three positions (1B, 3B, OF) in most formats and is yet another reason why we don't have to overpay for stolen bases earlier in our upcoming drafts.

#### 7 – Carter Kieboom, RH/WAS (ADP: 347.5)

Kieboom was one of the featured players on my [5 Late-Round Hitters](#) to Target piece last week. The defending champion Nationals are loaded with veterans like **Ryan Zimmerman**, **Howie Kendrick** and recently acquired **Asdrubal Cabrera** who all still have pop in their bats but are best utilized where they are not playing every day. With **Anthony Rendon** now on the Angels, it's a good chance for Kieboom to earn his role as the team's everyday starting third baseman – for now and the future. He is a former first-rounder who can contribute across all five standard roto categories and has a clearer path to full-time at-bats now with the Universal DH getting implemented.

#### 8 – Tyler O'Neill, RH/STL (ADP: 570.5 – FAAB)

Sometimes there are hitters you just can't quit. O'Neill is one of those guys for me. It's one thing to continually invest in a hitter at in the early rounds and they perennially disappoint. This is another scenario altogether as it's been just one year of draft day investment and the price was a 30<sup>th</sup> round one in 12-team leagues – one that is replaceable without the guilt. Granted, this is a young and talented outfield in St. Louis. An outfield highlighted by rookie **Dylan Carlson**. But opening up the National League designated hitter should help carve out a daily role for O'Neill to live up to some of the hype. There are whispers of him not being favored by management because of his lack of discipline, but it's not quite Puig-esque and certainly not national news. The fact is that O'Neill has a chance to be a 30-homer hitter in the majors because his power is top-notch, but bad plate discipline and a high strikeout rate have followed him around everywhere he goes. As an added boost, O'Neill was among the Statcast Sprint Speed leaders though it was just a 60-game, 151 plate appearance sample and he only stole one base. He's not someone you even have to worry about drafting – a 570 ADP means he's not even being taken in 30-round, 15-team drafts. But if he starts the season off looking serious at the plate and shows signs of better discipline, he is going to be one of those one-dollar difference-makers in leagues this season.

#### 9 – Kevin Cron, RH/ARI (ADP: 695.6 – FAAB)

Another deep-leaguer we won't have to worry about drafting unless it's a 50-round Draft Champions draft-and-hold. Cron is the three-years younger brother of MLB veteran C.J. who has been crushing it in the minors for several seasons. Last year was Cron's second season in Triple-A and he was one of the absolute best in the minor leagues, knocking in 105 runs with 38 homers and a massive .331/.449/.521 slash line in just 82 games. His 78 plate appearance sample and first taste of the majors was anything but sweet, as he struggled with a .211 average, though did hit six homers in 78 plate appearances. **Christian Walker** had always been the heir apparent to **Paul Goldschmidt** leaving Cron on the outside looking in. But the introduction of the designated hitter should provide Cron with the opportunity to finally make a name for himself that isn't just C.J.'s. **Jake Lamb** will get some time as DH as well but will also play some third base and basically only face right-handed pitching. Cron can hit both lefties and righties and is a true masher. Keep an eye on him early in July to see how frequently he plays and if he can handle major-league pitching.

#### 10 – Johan Camargo, SW/ATL (ADP: 637.5 – FAAB)

The least exciting guy on our list, Camargo likely won't be anything but an occasional fill-in for your 15-team squads when a gaggle of opposing southpaws are on the Braves' schedule. Camargo and young masher **Austin Riley** were in a dead-heat competition for the team's third base gig in camp but the Universal DH opens up more playing time for both of them. Camargo is way off the fantasy radar these days because he did not get consistent playing time last season, mostly hitting in the bottom-third of the lineup and used sparingly to the tune of just 248 plate appearances. What some of us forget was just how sound he was at the plate in 2018 when he did have a near-full time role. That season, Camargo displayed respectable plate discipline (9.7% BB, 20.6% K) all the while hitting 19 homers and 76 RBI in 524 PA. He is not a power hitter but did post a .213 ISO against lefties in 2018 and then .200 against them last year. Because of his stout defense, Camargo should be a fixture on the hot corner this year. Keep Camargo on your watch list in FAAB and make sure to target him on FAAB weeks when the Braves face several lefties.





## Why Avoid Starting Pitching Early?

By Ray Flowers

It is not a fool proof plan to avoid arms in the early rounds and many a team, as in a lot, do win rostering starting pitching at the beginning of the draft. I've previously argued that the reliance on arms early in a draft is risky. I will touch on those points, briefly, before pivoting to the newest reason to avoid taking pitching early in 2020 if you still have a draft to come. Hint – it's the way the season is going to play out.

- 1 – Starting pitchers only contribute in four categories (no saves). Hitters taken early can contribute in five categories, and once those first couple of rounds are gone, your odds of finding 5-category offensive players diminishes greatly.
- 2 – You can mix/match starting and relief pitchers meaning there is a good deal of maneuverability with a pitching staff in the fantasy game. You don't just need high end starting pitching arms.
- 3 - You need more starting players than pitchers in a fantasy lineup.

4 - The worst thing that can happen to a fantasy player in a game is to be a pitcher and to get blasted. You know, those 2.2 innings, seven run outings. Efforts like that are the most damaging thing that can happen to your squad (it's more harmful than a batter going 0-for-12). Why build around that potential downfall (this is a simplistic comment of course, and the worst one on the list)?

5 - Players can often play through injury more effectively than pitchers. One pitch can lead to months on the shelf, if not more. There are always at least 150 starting pitchers in baseball, meaning there are always starting pitchers that you can add off the waiver-wire to help your squad.

6 - With an increase in relief innings pitched, starting pitcher's innings volume is receding. In 2019, relievers threw 18,265.2 innings which means that **relievers threw forty-two percent of all the innings last season.**

7 - In 2020 baseball, we have to deal with *The Opener*. You know, that "starting pitcher" that goes an inning or two. This scenario can actually be a booster for some arms as the chance of picking up a "W" might actually go up because the "bulk reliever" isn't required to go five full innings to get a win (think **Ryan Yarbrough** types). By the way, Yarbrough has made a mere 20 starts over two seasons, but he has still won 27 games. *A guy who has made 20 starts in two seasons has more wins than Clevinger, Bieber, Berrios, Paxton, Corbin, Kershaw, Giolito, Bauer, Syndergaard and deGrom the last two years.* It's **not** 100 percent necessary to get an early arm in drafts to pick up victories. In fact, many of the top arms in the game don't always pile up impressive victory totals (just look at that list of names again). *Hell, Mike Leake has more wins than Jacob deGrom the last two years.*

8 - Will managers manage differently this year? I think the answer has to be yes. There will be more immediacy in the game as every single game will be more important than it would in a 162 game season. There will likely be a heightened sense that we can't give away any outs, and innings or any games. Therefore, managers are nearly certain to be more aggressive with their use of the bullpens by turning to those arms when the starting is struggling.

9 - There is slightly more volatility with pitchers than with hitters. Not only are starting pitchers only capable of competing in four categories, one of the categories they contribute in is extremely volatile – and that is the "win" column.

This last point is where I want to expand the discussion today.

*Wins are volatile to begin with.*

A starting pitcher has to allow fewer runs than the opponent and pitch five innings to qualify for a win. A starting pitcher then has to depend on his bullpen to hold on to the lead or his offense to extend that lead.

A starting pitcher can toss eight innings of shutout ball and get a no-decision or a loss.

A starting pitcher can allow six runs in five innings and get a win.

A starting pitcher could be pitching well and have a lead in the game, only to have his manager pull him from the game after 4.2 innings, thereby precluding him from getting the "W."

You get the point.

Getting a win just ain't easy.

Picking up the win might be even more difficult in 2020. Here's why.

*Early in the year, will pitchers be able to, or allowed to, throw five innings?*

Let's think about the setup in 2020.

On *Fantasy Philips* on *SiriusXM Fantasy Sports Radio* each week, Kyle Elfrink and I have the pleasure of doing a two hour show with former MLB GM Steve Phillips. During one of our recent visits, Steve commented on the fact that there is a belief among many that pitchers won't be fully stretched out once than games start. That's a completely fair position to take.

How much training have players been to undergo the last two months?

Do they have a catcher to handle their heat while at home?

Do they have access to full training facilities with a mound etc.?

Is someone in their family sick?

Has Covid-19 caused their attention to be devoted to off the field matters such as family and friends?

*The bottom line is – what kind of baseball shape are the pitchers in?*

Will the pitchers be able to throw 100 pitches in week one of the season? Will they be able to throw 90? 80? 70? It is going to be on a case by case basis, is it not?

The truth is we just don't know how many pitches these guys will be ready to throw the first **couple** of times through the rotation. Will they consistently be able to throw five innings an outing early in the season? What if that pitch count gets up? The truth is we just don't know the answer.

Will teams be reluctant to proceed all year long with a traditional 5-man pitching staff?

Will there be more experimentation this season?

Will teams use 4-man rotations? Maybe six?

Will shorter outings become the norm?

Will everyone start using Opener's?

How will the schedule play into all of this?

How will the location of games impact pitchers?

How will the rosters ultimately play out? We are hearing 30-man rosters with the potential of practice squads up to 20 players. Will teams be able to liberally use the taxi squad to bolster their pitching ranks?

As you can see, the 2020 season is going to be different than the rest. Some of the above questions will be answered once the full details are agreed to by the players and owners, but some of the questions – such as how deep into games will pitcher be able to go early in the year – will not be answered until the games start to be played. Do you really want to spend early capitol on the hope that things will proceed like they basically have in the past?



## Starting Pitchers & Roster Construction in a Shortened Season

By Vlad Sedler

An air of great uncertainty rampantly fills our world and consumes us by the minute. For some, it may even feel wrong to focus on distractions away from all the civil unrest and how we ourselves can make a positive, substantial impact. But being consumed with it 24-7 is anything but healthy for our minds or our bodies. We *need* distractions. We *need* to be able to step away for periods of time in the day to keep our heart rates and blood pressure normal and to keep from losing our minds.

The standoff between MLB players and owners feels so trivial in the grand scheme of things, but we would all still love to see a resolution in the coming days to bring some sense of normalcy back in our everyday lives. Knowing for certain that we will have major league baseball and fantasy back in July would at least give us something in the short term to look forward to, as well as a much-needed distraction. But this battle plays out like a soap opera that keeps us on edge about whether we will even have a season.

That's one hell of a segue into a strategy article about roster construction and starting pitchers in a shortened season, eh? No matter how many people in your lives or on twitter timelines are doomsdaying the MLB season as their negativity begins to seep into our brains and cause doubt,

the fact of the matter is that I'm certain that there will be some semblance of pro baseball this year. There is simply too much money and interest at stake for it all to fall apart. I'd love to see the two sides align somewhere between 50 and 114 games in the 70-80 range and I assume you are with me that even if it does end up being 50 games, we would take it in a heartbeat.

With a drastically shortened MLB season will come much unpredictability, extreme variance and a clear change in our draft strategies. Some people who will hop back in to drafting in a couple weeks might not have enough time or discipline to properly adjust and that will serve as a big advantage for those of us who will.

## WHAT TO DO WITH PITCHERS?

The biggest question on the minds of those who are already thinking about shortened season draft strategy is what to do with starting pitchers?

The initial assumption of those already preparing is that that all starting pitchers should be pushed down because they'll be making half the starts. That those pitchers would really have to perform consistently, and well, to earn early draft picks on our teams. I have heard many sharp colleagues quickly take a stand on loading up heavily on only hitters in early rounds and waiting until after seven rounds to start drafting pitchers. My colleague and friend here at Guru, Ray Flowers, wrote a brilliant piece on [why we should avoid starting pitchers early](#). Ray has had plenty of success in the last couple of decades with waiting on starting pitchers, much of it due to the fact that valuing later-round pitching has always been a strength of his.

I have also heard arguments on the other end of the spectrum (read @PhilDussault27's thread about it from June 2). The basis of Phil's argument is that those early round pitchers are about as solid and consistent of an asset that you can find in those first few rounds, barring injury of course. We basically know what we are getting out of guys like **Jacob deGrom**, **Gerrit Cole**, **Stephen Strasburg** and **Luis Castillo**. These are the elite workhorse talents who rack up strikeouts with ease, go deep into their outings and rarely, if ever, get blown up to the magnitude of five or more runs in a start. It's another notion entirely with pitchers who have had recent injury history or are less trustworthy health-wise. Investing in say a third-round **Justin Verlander** if it does not appear that he's fully healed would hurt. It is a big hit to your roster if you were to lose your SP1. In standard roto leagues, SP's make a hefty impact on 40 percent of your statistical categories.

Having aces on your roster certainly does provide stability, as well as consistent production for your fantasy squad. Whereas, if you are waiting too long on starting pitchers, you might find yourself in a weekly pickle playing a game of Press Your Luck (no whammy, no whammy) with arms who could blow up your ratios. And as we should easily surmise, a seven earned run bombing has a significantly greater negative impact in an 80-game season where a pitcher may make just 15 starts, compared to the alternative of a normal season.

On the flip side of this argument are fantasy managers, like Ray, who trust their ability in finding the gem pitchers in the middle rounds and those who don't find that much of a difference between the 180-range ADP arms like **Mike Minor**, **Jake Odorizzi**, **Sean Manaea** and arms going three rounds ahead of them like **Eduardo Rodriguez**, **Max Fried** and **Dinelson Lamet**. Especially in the small 14 to 16 start sample size. Being able to still manage your rotation on a weekly basis and compete in all the pitching categories while loading up on stud hitters through your first five to eight rounds sounds enticing to many out there.

It would be similar to a stars-and-scrubs approach in auction, which is a sound strategy in 2020 if indeed rosters expand and we get a DH for National League teams. We can't predict exactly what team managers would do, but this stars-and-scrubs theory in a shortened season under these new guidelines should mean that we'll see many more lefty/righty platoons and less playing time to go around for the run-of-the-mill and nonproven offensive commodities. In turn, your early round stud hitters should find themselves in the lineup daily, racking up the plate appearances, so long as they do not get hurt and hit the Injured List.

At the end of the day, the correct strategy with starting pitchers does not have to be extreme. We will surely see league winners this year who a) waited on pitching, b) took pitchers early and c) took a balanced approach. You just have to feel comfortable with whatever strategy you implement and play to your strengths of late-round drafting of pitchers and hitters. If you already did not feel comfortable drafting **Jack Flaherty**, **Shane Bieber** and **Stephen Strasburg** at the end of the second round of 15-teamers – and feel that SP's going two rounds later like **Chris Paddack**, **Charlie Morton** and **Tyler Glasnow** will produce comparable roto numbers – you simply load up on hitters in Rounds 2 and 3 and wait for pitching. What we should primarily be looking for in our starting pitchers, no matter what rounds they fall in, is:

- **Health** (no underlying injury concerns; quick ramp up in this second spring training)
- **Steadiness with control** (looking for consistent run-preventing SP's who rarely serve up more than three runs in a start; we're going to want to avoid the landmines as a 7-ER outing will have greater negative impact in a 15-start sample)
- **Dominance** (keeping control in mind, we also want to be sure we get our fair share of high-strikeout arms to compete in that category; being careful on compiling too many **Kyle Hendricks** or **Mike Soroka** sub-8 K/9 types on our rosters)
- **Team Context** (Wins are the most frustrating of all the roto categories and are toughest to bank on; predominantly line your SP's up from teams that have good defenses, provide run support, have strong bullpens and project for a win percentage greater than 55%)
- **Ballparks/Divisions** (Given the greater frequency at which teams within divisions will face each other in a shortened season, make sure to avoid SP's on teams within divisions you expect to be strong offensively (ie AL East, NL Central))

My personal approach to starting pitchers this second draft season is as follows.

*In satellite leagues (non-NFBC) and expert leagues*, I'll comfortably wait on starting pitchers, but will be ebbing and flowing with the room. Meaning I'll grab my favorite targets if they've fallen a



round or two past their ADP or where I value them, though I won't reach for them. Non-NFBC and expert league drafters tend to wait longer on starting pitchers; and with a shortened season it is very likely that these assets fall even further, in which case I can load up on hitters early and assemble my stable of reliable SP's at better price tags. I'd have no problem pounding hitters for the first eight rounds or so and possibly even taking a scarce commodity (like a good closer) before my SP1 or SP2 in these leagues because I am comfortable enough with SP's after Round 10 to build a formidable rotation.

***In NFBC leagues with the overall component*** (like Main Event and Online Championship), I will likely focus on locking in at least one ace in the first four rounds I feel comfortable with and won't be afraid on grabbing my second or third guy by Round 12. I foresee scenarios in NFBC where fantasy managers who wait too long to start building their stable of SP's will be playing with fire (their ratios) in-season. With a lesser talented group of SP's on your roster, you have less confidence in their start-ability and create a higher likelihood of a ratio blow-up. Having an ace or two in national competitions provides you with locked-in every week starters you are confident in who provide a solid building block of stats for your roster.

***In the case of extreme 'fade pitching early' roster builds***, I am very likely to draft multiple pitchers back to back to back in those middle rounds. At that point, I've built my offensive base and probably have a top-10 closer, at which point I can then hit it hard with my mid-round SP targets such as **David Price, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Lance McCullers, Kenta Maeda, Rich Hill, Dylan Bundy, Jose Urquidy** and Minor. There needs to be some excessiveness in those middle rounds to balance out the heavy-handedness of loading up on hitters early. On the flip side, if you found yourself in a draft spot where you've taken two ace SP's in the first four rounds because they were the best option available at the time, you have to be able to shift focus and pound the draft table with a core of strong hitters to avoid finding yourself in a situation where you are drafting too many platoon players or those not expected to be in the lineup every day.

It's a delicate balance, but it starts at the draft table. Drafting pitchers early or waiting on them in this shortened season scenario depends on many factors, namely, understanding of who your targets are throughout the draft, your own comfort level in terms of valuating late-round hitting and pitching targets who can earn huge profits and finally, being able to read the (draft) room and adjust strategically on the fly if need be. The best drafters are the most agile ones who are willing to change course on a whim. Having a good feel of who your draft targets are in the back half of a draft can help steer you in the right direction on what the most suitable strategy with starting pitchers is for this wild and unpredictable shortened season.



## Is Head to Head Baseball Is Dead?

By Ray Flowers

Baseball has been mainly a season long, rotisserie game since the beginning. The grind of going from Game 1 to 162 truly does elevate the best team/manager to the top of the mountain at seasons end in most instances. There have always been pockets of those who prefer the head to head setup, choosing to be different, and if I'm being honest it's pretty damn clear that such setups have grown in popularity in fantasy baseball in recent years. H2H has grown so markedly that I felt I needed to refute it, something I discussed [in this podcast](#). To me, and it's a word that I used in the podcast multiple times, playing H2H baseball is a *sprint* whereas the game of baseball should be played in fantasy as it is in the real world – like a marathon. So, the question is – will the sprint that will be the 2020 season be better set for H2H or roto setups? I'm here to tell you...

### HEAD TO HEAD BASEBALL IS DEAD

Let's lay it out.

Baseball is a 26-week battle in a traditional year.

Most H2H leagues don't play Week 26, or they combine Weeks 25-26 into one matchup. So, the season is only 25 weeks long for the majority of H2H leagues (I'm offering an educated guess here, I don't have raw data to back it up, but I'm also fairly confident that I'm right with this postulation).

Assuming that setup, a 25-week regular season, leagues will play a regular season of 20-22 weeks, followed by a 3/4 week playoff. Here is how some of the main providers have it setup.

	Reg. Season	Playoffs
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CBS	Weeks 1-23	Weeks 24-25
ESPN	Weeks 1-21	Weeks 22-25
Yahoo	Weeks 1-22	23-25

A bit of difference, but in the end pretty similar with an average ending to the regular season coming after 22 Weeks and the playoffs ending after Week 25.

What is 2020 gonna look like?

The answer is – who knows?

I'm still assuming they are playing games this season as I think it would be catastrophic to the sport if they cannot figure it out. By that I mean, and no hyperbole here, baseball would be doing lasting damage to the game that they would likely never rebound from. With everything going on in the world today, millionaires and billionaires being unable to come to an agreement would likely crush the sport (for more, see [What Is Wrong With Fantasy Baseball?](#)). They aren't playing 114 games or more after the owners said – no. That leaves us with a season between 50-80 games, more or less.

Let's look at each level of games played with the following baseline. *Baseball is normally made up of 162 games over a 26-week period which equates to an average of 6.23 games played per week.* Using that mark, I'm going to round it to 6.2 games per week to simplify things, we would end up with the following length of weeks for games played in 2020.

Games	Games Per Wk.	Weeks to Season
50	6.2	8.1
60	6.2	9.7
70	6.2	11.3
80	6.2	12.9

In this scenario, even an 80-game season, which seems like the most we are getting at this point (plus or minus a game or two), we are going to have a 13-week regular season. That's HALF the length of the normal regular season. Even if we get aggressive, say only four teams make the playoffs instead of six and give each playoff matchup just a single week, and we play the whole regular season out (not excising the final week of the regular season), we end up with an 11-week regular season and two weeks of playoffs. Here is that same chart with a two-week playoff for each segment.

Games	Reg. Season Length.	Playoffs Wks.
50	Six	Two
60	Eight	Two
70	Nine	Two
80	Eleven	Two

Are you really going to play a regular season of six weeks and then do playoffs? Even if MLB gets up to 70 games, which is sounding like a high level for what the owners apparently want, we would end up with a seven-week regular season which would be *one-third the norm*.

Let's get more aggressive. Let's say that MLB manages to stuff some double-headers in there. In this scenario we will bump up the games played from 6.2 games per week up to 7.0, or one per calendar day.

Games	Games Per Wk.	Weeks to Season
50	7.0	7.1
60	7.0	8.6
70	7.0	10.0
80	7.0	11.4

Now, lets add the playoff component to the mix.

Games	Reg. Season Length.	Playoffs Wks.
50	Five	Two
60	Seven	Two
70	Eight	Two
80	Nine	Two

Realize, this is some very basic stuff. I know that many leagues do fantasy playoffs for three weeks, in fact from what I've seen that seems to be the majority, and in both the above scenarios laid out above I've set the playoffs at just two weeks. If you add another week for the playoffs, pushing things to three, the regular season outlook is even more bleak.

## THE FANTASY FOOTBALL COMP

Really folks, what's the point? Even in fantasy football we do 13 regular season matchups followed by three playoff weeks (everyone is soft and doesn't play Week 17). A simply set of two charts from above, with fantasy football tossed into the mix.

Here is the 6.2 games a week list.

Games	Reg. Season Length.	Playoffs Wks.
50	Six	Two
60	Eight	Two
70	Nine	Two
80	Eleven	Two
<i>NFL</i>	<i>Thirteen</i>	<i>Three</i>

Here is the seven games a week list.

Games	Reg. Season Length.	Playoffs Wks.
50	Five	Two
60	Seven	Two
70	Eight	Two
80	Nine	Two
<i>NFL</i>	<i>Thirteen</i>	<i>Three</i>

Remember, in both sets listed we have baseball playing two weeks of playoffs, or just two-thirds of

what is used in fantasy football. What we have to deal with this season in baseball is a campaign that doesn't come close to measuring up to what we do in football.

## SO WHERE DOES ALL THIS LEAVE US?

It's time to give up the ghost folks.

It's over.

Head-to-Head Baseball is out for 2020... at least in the form you are used to playing it.

'Screw you Ray, we're still doing it.'

My response – why?

Why would you want a season of 7-8 weeks, instead of 21-22, to determine the result of your regular season. As mentioned in the link above to my podcast, H2H already has issues with it. You can game the system, you can crush the waiver-wire focusing on one week, you can punt categories etc. The H2H game is as much about working the system as it is drafting the best team, and that's over 22 weeks. Dropping the regular season to one-third of that, as the powers that be seem nearly certain to do, would introduce even more white/noise and randomness to the game of fantasy baseball? Why? We need to be better than this. To that end, I've got a solution – or a couple of them.

### ***1 – Play roto this year.***

If the season is as few as 50-games, it's a full-on sprint anyway. Even the roto leagues will be tight and basically feel like a long H2H matchup.

### ***2 – Split the season into two halves, then add the playoffs.***

Such a setup as this would play out thusly, though it would be messy (we would have to split up some of the segments because of unequal games played). I would posit the start of the season will be more unclear in terms of game play than the second, so I'm going to, when in doubt, extend the second (ore third) segment the extra week. This is based on the 6.2 games per week method.

Games	Reg. Season #1	Reg. Season #2	Playoffs Wks.
50	Three Wks.	Three Wks.	Two
60	Four Wks.	Four Wks.	Two
70	Four Wks.	Five Wks.	Two
80	Five Wks.	Six Wks.	Two

### ***3 – Split the season into three sections, then add the playoffs.***

This is based on the 6.2 games per week method.

Games	Reg. Season #1	Reg. Season #2	Reg. Season #3	Playoffs Wks.
50	Two Wks.	Two Wks.	Two Wks.	Two
60	Two Wks.	Three Wks.	Three Wks.	Two
70	Three Wks.	Three Wks.	Three Wks.	Two
80	Three Wks.	Four Wks.	Four Wks.	Two

Of course, any of these H2H setups would require mental gymnastics to complete. Who are you facing each week? Gotta be more than one team, so how do you work that? How do you do it in odd week segments? Do you extend the playoffs to three weeks and shorten the season to equalize things? My head is starting to hurt. You would also fail to play each opponent in a straight up manner, with the best you could hope for being facing each team in a group scenario. Just don't, please I beg you, send me a note saying you can just go 1-on-1 each week and not even face all the teams in your league. Hell, if you're in a 12-team league, and the season is 50 games, your regular season would be a total of six weeks. You would barely face half the league that way. Seems completely lame to me. As I said, it would be a total mess.

In the end, I think it's clear what we need to do.

*We need to eliminate H2H baseball in 2020.*





## Cheap Power and Speed in 2020

By Ray Flowers

Finding power/speed players is the panacea of prospecting in the fantasy game. In 2020, it seems like power can be found under any old rock, but finding guys who will steal more than a base or two a month is more difficult than figuring out nuclear fusion. We all know the names at the top of the list, but who are some of the names that could be had at reasonable costs that could be of interest/value in the coming campaign.

Let's start by looking at the 2019 season.

*Last season 10 players hit 40 homers.*

*Last season 22 guys hit 35 homers.*

*Last season 58 guys hit 30 homers.*

*Last season 80 guys hit 25 homers.*

*Last season 128 guys hit 20 homers.*

*Last season 187 guys hit 15 homers.*

*Last season 273 guys hit 10 homers.*

Now the steals.

*Last season three men stole 40 bases.*

*Last season five men stole 35 bases.*

*Last season eight men stole 30 bases.*

*Last season 11 men stole 25 bases.*  
*Last season 21 men stole 20 bases.*  
*Last season 42 men stole 15 bases.*  
*Last season 70 men stole 10 bases.*

Putting those two components together...

There were 56 men who went 10/10 in 2019 which is about as low of a bar as we can set in order to be a power/speed performer in the fantasy game. Think of it. *In a traditional 12-team mixed league, that's 4.7 players per squad that went 10/10.* That list includes guys like **Jake Marisnick**, **Nick Senzel** and **Harrison Bader**, players that hardly get cha excited in the fantasy game, so you can tell how low we have to drop the bar to find power/speed guys these days. Best case seems that you will be able to get 4-5 of those types on your team in a 12-team mixed league.

Given that the 2020 season is only going to be half the game length, are we really looking at 5/5 players being valuable? I think that is taking things down the rabbit hole too far, even if it is a prorated level of the 10/10 thing from a full season. Therefore, I'm going to suggest we target players in two areas – assuming the 82-game season under discussion is rectified as the law of the land.

***We want players who could go 10/5 this season OR 7/7 this year.***

Let's endeavor to find some names that fit into either of those sections that *aren't going off the board in the top-250 picks according to NFBC ADP since April 1<sup>st</sup>*. Some of the names might be obvious, while others not so much.

**Jo Adell** – It's unclear when he will be on the big-league diamond this season, but he has the skills to reach either described level, though 10/5 is more likely.

**Ryan Braun** – He has gone 17/11 each of the past six years and went 22/11 last season.

**Niko Goodrum** – Qualifies all over the diamond (2B, SS, OF and 18 games at first) and has averaged 14/12 the last two seasons.

**Ian Happ** – Has power and sneaky speed. See his [Player Profile](#).

**Sam Hilliard** – How much playing time will he get this season is the open-ended question. He went 20/30 in 2017 and 30/20 last year (he went 42/24 if you combine Triple-A and the majors).

**Cesar Hernandez** – Has hit 29 homers the last two years but at 29 years of age his steal total dipped to nine last seasons, after 4-straight years of at least 15.

**Gregory Polanco** – He has gone 20/15 before but only went 6/3 last season due to injuries. For more see his [Player Profile](#).

*Here are some guys outside the top-300 in NFBC ADP.*

**Mauricio Dubon** – Should play all over the place for the Giants, and has the skills to join the power/speed club after going 20/12 in 128 combined games last season.

**Brett Gardner** – Career best 28 homers last season and still stole 10 bases, though that was a full season low for his career.

**Trent Grisham** – Last season went 26/12 in the minors in a mere 97 games. For more, see his [Player Profile](#).

**Brandon Nimmo** – Can he stay healthy for his skills to matter is the question we face in 2020.

*Here are some guys outside the top-400 in NFBC ADP.*

**Nick Ahmed** – Check out his [Player Profile](#) for more.

**Kevin Kiermaier** – He has gone at least 10/10 in 4-of-5 years and went 7/10 in 88 games in the season he missed (2018).

**Kevin Pillar** – How much playing time will he get in in Boston if **Alex Verdugo** is healthy? The last five seasons he's stolen at least 14 bases each year while averaging 14 homers and 16 steals.

**Jurickson Profar** – Playing time could be an issue after the Padres signed **Brian Dozier**, but he does have 40 homers and 19 steals the last two seasons.

**Andrelton Simmons** – He has averaged 11 homers the last three seasons and has swiped at least 10 bases the last four years including 10 in 103 games last season.

*Here are some guys outside the top-600 in NFBC ADP.*

**Harrison Bader** – Playing time is a huge concern as he seemingly has to hope that his gold glove caliber defense will keep him in the lineup.

**Lewis Brinson** – He has failed numerous times in the majors, but he was having a hot spring and he owns the skills to contribute in a significant manner (he went 16/16 last season in just 81 games at Triple-A).

**Willi Castro** – Should see a good deal of playing time. His offensive game is mediocre, but he did go 11/17 at Triple-A last season and he went 9/18 in the minors in 2018.

**Franchy Cordero** – Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Ian Desmond** – History suggest he could join the group. However, playing time is an issue as is the fact that he swiped a measly three bases, 10 less than in any previous season. Seems like an extreme longshot.

**Brian Dozier** – Might be in a battle with Father Time as well as with Profar for work with the Padres.

**Derek Fisher** – It remains to be seen if he can actually hit MLB pitching, but he does have power and speed (he has gone 16/10 in 419 plate appearances in the majors – with a .191 batting average).

**Jose Iglesias** – Went 11/6 last season, a year after going 5/15. That's an average of 8/11 the last two years. Dickey.

**Monte Harrison** – Could easily join the club. Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Manuel Margot** – Has gone 12/17 twice in three years. How much will he play in Tampa?

**Cameron Maybin** – In 82 games last season he went 11/9, so there you go.

**Hernan Perez** – Doesn't have a spot in the daily lineup, but can move around and he's averaged nine homers and eight steals the last two seasons.

**Chris Taylor** – Stole 17 bases in 2017 but has swiped just 17 bases the last two years. He's averaged 15 homers the last two seasons including 12 last year in 366 at-bats.



## From the Gut – 5 Late-Round Hitters to Target

By Vlad Sedler

The road to the 2020 major league baseball season has been quite the roller coaster ride with certainly more hills to climb until we finally get that first pitch. There have been rumblings and rumors of everything from 10-team, three-division format with a universal DH to playing in neutral-site stadiums and, what seems like many moons ago, a sequestered-in-Arizona version. Despite the most recent stalemate between players and owners which will likely hover another cloud of doubt for many, this past week we received word of a framework that could very well work: an 82-game season starting in



early July with teams mostly playing within their own division as well as some interleague competition with their geographical counterparts (NL East playing NL West, and so on).

If the money aspect of this can be hashed out soon, we may be looking at players returning to ballparks for a second rendition of 2020 spring training as they prepare for a half-season of unpredictability and one wild ride of a season. This means we may soon be preparing for a second run of fantasy drafts – for many of us, some of our most important leagues. In the weeks to come and as I once again prepare player projections and rankings in this alternate universe-turned-reality, this column will serve as an important prep stop for your upcoming drafts. Despite all the pending valuation adjustments, there will certainly be some facets that remain unchanged from our first version of fantasy drafts.

One of those untouched areas are a few of my late-round draft targets. Specifically, hitters available after the top-300 overall ADP (per NFBC, March 1 – May 10) who I targeted all winter long and intend to do so again in June, mostly because the potential reward for the price tag is much too juicy. As we all know, there is very little risk in our late-round selections. They are easily replaceable in FAAB if they get hurt or don't get quite the playing time or batting order exposure we expected. In a shortened season, our discipline and diligence will be evermore required. We cannot afford to wait for players to 'turn it around' nor find consistent plate appearances in our lineups. It's very likely that with greatly expanded rosters, a larger number of hitters per team will platoon and that only the best hitters in the league will see consistent playing time, aka hitters who are weak against either left- or right-handed pitchers will be risky propositions in this shortened season. Yes, we want quality at-bats, but even more so, we want guys who will actually get the *opportunity* for quality at-bats by being in the lineup every day.

Here are five hitters consistently available **after** pick-300 overall who I'll be targeting in this next series of drafts:

**Carter Kieboom** (RH, SS, WAS) – ADP 329.4

Kieboom would have an ADP 100 spots higher had he never faced major league pitching last season. He made his MLB debut on April 26 last year, crushing a dinger off Padres' pitcher *Craig Stammen* then hit another bomb two games later. He spent the next seven games pressing at the plate, managing just two hits in his next 30 at-bats before inevitably getting shipped back down to Triple-A, never to return. That means his 11-game, 43 plate appearance sample ended with a .128 batting average and a bad taste in the mouths of fantasy players who spent decent FAAB money on him. A first-round pick of the Nats in 2016 (28<sup>th</sup> overall), Kieboom went on to damaging baseballs in Triple-A the rest of the year, finishing with a .303/.409/.493 slash, 16 HR, 79 RBI, 79 R, 5 SB in 494 PA (109 games).

Fast-forward to spring training, Kieboom predictably found himself competing for an Opening Day roster spot and a shot at locking up the third base job vacated by **Anthony Rendon** in the offseason. Prior to baseball getting shut down, he was working diligently with third base coach *Chip Hale*, re-learning a position he had previously played and displayed some great discipline in spring games, walking seven times in 37 plate appearances. The shortstop position is heavily loaded in fantasy this year and it's of course very unlikely that any of us would be drafting Kieboom as our starting shortstop anyways. The fact that he can be an everyday big-leaguer and offer two positions of eligibility (SS and 3B) should he take that third base job is roster flexibility that would come in handy for our rosters. Most sites projecting lineups have Kieboom hitting eighth – a very frightening spot for NL teams if we don't get the universal DH. But someone of Kieboom's ilk likely won't be at the bottom of a major league

lineup for very long. He could potentially work his way up to the five-spot behind **Juan Soto** which would provide him with ample opportunity hitting behind a guy with a .400 OBP over the past two seasons. The luster on Kieboom's stock has fallen dramatically after last season's cup of coffee and it provides us with a good shot at earning a profit.

**Brandon Nimmo** (LH, OF, NYM) – ADP 362.5

Not sure why folks are sleeping here as Nimmo is one of the sneakier late-round hitters in the player pool this year. There are virtually no leadoff hitters in baseball available this late in drafts. Granted, Nimmo, a left-handed bat, will probably only leadoff against righties. But that's quite alright considering a big chunk of these proposed 82 games would occur against fellow NL East teams, of which there are only four left-handed starters (Corbin – WAS, C.Smith – FLA, Hamels/Fried – ATL). And if you're curious, Nimmo *can* handle his own against LHP. His career wOBA against them (.344) doesn't differ much from his wOBA against righties (.366) and the same with power (.161 ISO vs. LHP, .194 vs RHP).

The biggest concern with Nimmo is a neck injury that cause him to miss a huge chunk of last season (132 days in total). He collided with an outfield wall in an April 14 game last year and was out until September with a bulging disc in the old neck. Nimmo did finish the season strong, hitting .261 with five homers and 15 RBI in 26 games, most importantly, flashing a strong 21.6 percent walk rate. And that walk rate is a big reason why Nimmo needs to be on our late-round radars. Nimmo is actually the only member of the New York Mets with a walk rate greater than 15 percent since 2016 among players with at least 1,000 plate appearances. That .387 on-base percentage is flashy and a good indicator of fantasy profit hitting atop this lineup. Yes, there is always a risk of injury with him as he has amassed 300 or more plate appearances just once in his four-year career. But the upside is tremendous for someone who will likely spend a good chunk of the season leading off for a strong offensive lineup and the opportunity to contribute across all five standard roto categories.

**Travis Shaw** (LH, 3B, TOR) – ADP 370.5

Most of the fantasy world believe Shaw's best days are long behind them, and they are probably right. But it certainly isn't the end of days for him as a major leaguer. Shaw is just 30-years-old and signed a one-year, \$4M deal with the Blue Jays in the offseason. Shaw is third base-eligible but will likely earn first base eligibility rather early on in the season as he will face all the right-handed pitching he can handle as the team's first baseman. Shaw is currently projected to hit in the all-valuable fifth spot in the Jays' lineup behind **Vladimir Guerrero Jr.** when a righty is on the mound.

Last year was all but a lost season for Shaw as he missed a month for the Brewers with a strained right wrist. Upon return, the wrist did not appear to hamper him, but we're all aware of how wrist injuries tend to linger and affect power. He may have been overcompensating by trying to launch the ball too high as he yearned for those power-hitting days of yesteryear, as evidenced by a career-high 24 percent launch angle last season (career mark is 16 percent). Note that he did not lose any of his power (exit velocity around 88 mph just as in previous seasons) though he did not receive consistent playing time and became a non-factor for the organization. Shaw is a guy who had consecutive 30-plus home run season prior to his lost 2019 and his Jays will frequently face below-average pitchers within their division, specifically on the Orioles and Red Sox. The best plan here is to toss last year out of the



window and concentrate on what a half-season of a dirt-cheap Shaw can provide as a member of the Blue Jays.

#### **Shed Long** (LH, 2B, SEA) – ADP 545.9

This ADP is virtually free though it is worth noting that his price tag rose considerably once it became clear that Long was likely to start the season as the Mariners' leadoff hitter. In the wave of NFBC drafts in April, his ADP typically fell between 310 and 360 overall. With Long, the upside clearly lies in stolen base opportunities atop the lineup and the fact that the Mariners are in the midst of a youth movement that will allow him a long leash even through any potential slumps. Despite some physical similarities to fellow teammate and speedster **Dee Gordon** (Long is 15 pounds heavier but three inches shorter), their skillset is anything but. Long has much more power in his bat (87.6 mph EV, 36 percent hard-hit last season) though he projects as a single-digit homer guy in a full-season scenario. Most importantly, he was a post-Covid shutdown (the three weeks starting March 12) roommate of infamous rabbit **Billy Hamilton** and worked extensively with him on base-running strategies. Between Gordon and Hamilton, Long is in good company for base-swiping tips and techniques. All in all, he is a much wiser bet for late-round speed than guys like Gordon and **Jarrod Dyson** because of the sheer volume of expected plate appearances and a lesser likelihood in hurting you in the other categories.

#### **Mauricio Dubon** (RH, 2B, SF) – ADP 405

Dubon is a bright spot on a Giants' offense mired in mediocrity. A Honduran prospect of the Red Sox drafted in 2013, Dubon took six years to take his first major-league at-bat. His primary strength is his defense, and that is what will likely keep him in new manager Gabe Kapler's lineup consistently. Fitting the theme of this article, he is another guy likely to gain a second position of fantasy eligibility early in the season as he had been playing centerfield and could spend some time there. Kapler could also use him at shortstop though that is not something likely to happen in 2020. Dubon does offer a bit of speed (38 SB in 2017 in the minors) but a 72 percent success rate over his minor league years have kept the opportunities down over the past two seasons. Moreover, Dubon doesn't take free passes at a double-digit clip and is below-average power wise. Despite his lack of upside, he is likely to be afforded an opportunity to play every day, whether that be at second base or in centerfield. Dubon is tough to strike out (13 percent over six seasons) and can spray it all over the field and contribute in batting average. I won't go as far as to project Dubon taking over as the team's leadoff hitter, but truth be told, it's possible given the alternatives (**Brandon Crawford**, **Mike Yastrzemski**). Dubon is the least appealing of our quintet here but boring does help win fantasy leagues and pay the bills.



## Should We Be Using Team Bullpens in 2020?

By Ray Flowers

The 2020 MLB season is going to be different. I think we've all accepted that as our truth, and therefore running fantasy baseball leagues like we always have might be a mistake. As such, there has never been a more applicable time for us to consider stepping out of our comfort zone to try new directions/plans as we consider what that fantasy season will look like. Even me, old Ray Flowers, Mr. I Don't Ever Want the Rules to Change realizes... we need to make some changes this season.

Today, we explore the role of bullpens and, more specifically, if we should move on from individual players to team bullpen?

### RECENT CLOSER HISTORY

A chart taken from [Saves: Let's Move On](#).

	30 Saves	20 Saves	10 Saves
2015	21	28	37
2016	16	22	42
2017	11	23	40
2018	11	20	43
2019	11	22	37

To sum things up...

1 – Only one man has 30-saves each of the three years (**Kenley Jansen**).

2 – Only four men have 30-saves each of the last two years (Jansen, **Aroldis Chapman**, **Brad Hand**, **Raisel Iglesias**).

3 – Only nine men had 20-saves each of the last three years (Chapman, **Edwin Diaz**, **Sean Doolittle**, **Ken Giles**, Hand, Iglesias, Jansen, **Roberto Ozuna**, **Felipe Vazquez**).

There just aren't many "bankable" closers to begin with. There are injuries, in-season changes based on performance and mixing/matching that goes on rather frequently each season. We all know this game and we try to walk the fine line of success year after year.

## THE 2020 SEASON

Bullpens are traditionally uneven with roles often changing.

We have injuries.

We have role changes based on performance.

We have shared scenarios based on matchups.

There's a lot of volatility with pens.

How will 2020 change that?

It's completely uncertain.

Will teams push their bullpens, more specifically their closers, since the season is only half as long?

Will teams show patience with their closers? A guy struggles a bit mid-season, a team usually rides with the guy if he has a track record of 9<sup>th</sup> inning success. What if a guy goes all apocalyptic like **Edwin Diaz** last year? Would a team stick with a guy who offers that level of struggle if the season is truncated to half the allowed games? Would have to think that a struggling closer will have a really short leash in 2020.

Will the "bad" teams push their closers harder? With an expansion of teams eligible for the playoffs, and only half the games to be played, "bad" teams might have a shot at the playoffs in '20 that otherwise

wouldn't have without the changes. Given that "bad" teams often have a poor level of talent in their bullpens, will those "bad" teams continually turn to the arm they can trust whenever the game is on the line leading to move saves consolidated in just one arm?

Will teams mix and match a ton based on matchups given that there are only half as many games? In essence, there is no time to coast since every game will take on a magnified level of importance, so will managers be more focused on the "percentage plays" than ever before?

Will there be more save options, especially earn on, when starters will likely toss less innings leaving more innings to be filled by bullpens? Perhaps, 2-3 inning saves could happen more frequently than the traditional three out efforts we are used to?

There are even more reasons to question the stability of bullpens this season. That's just a fact.

### **TEAM BULLPENS – A SOLUTION?**

Do I want to draft team bullpens?

No.

So why suggest it here?

Did you read the above?

In a best-case scenario, there is uncertainty in the 9<sup>th</sup> inning (why I keep championing going to Solds). This year, it's easy to see that level being ratcheted up a good deal. I can't really see a way around that. Therefore, we have to at least consider going with team bullpens.

The drawback.

It's hard enough to draft one guy and expect him to hold on to the 9<sup>th</sup> inning all season long. When we are moving on to an entire team, the situation is obviously magnified.

What if relievers 1-2-3 are ace but the rest of the pen stinks?

Do you really know who reliever 5-6-7 are on a club?

Will some teams give a varied group of arms work out of the bullpen this season? Will it be a mixing and matching of veteran arms not really good enough to start with youngster with great stuff but little polish? Some teams could benefit or be damaged by bullpen arms. This seems obvious, but the point I'm reference here has to do with the Opener and [the Bulk Reliever](#). Teams using bulk relievers will benefit if they turn to arms like **Ryan Yarbrough** and **Yonny Chirinos**. However, what if teams turn to guys like **Tommy Milone** or **Nick Ramirez** for extended outings... what will that do to "bullpen" numbers? A scenario such as this could hurt your ratio numbers – if the teams use moderate arms to eat more innings on a consistent basis.

Will teams use the traditional 5-man rotations? Might some, especially later in the year, turn to 4-man rotations? Will teams, other than the Angels, move to 6-man rotations? Whatever size the rotations might be, the question of how teams will manage their starters is relevant to the current discussion (see [Why Avoid Pitching Early?](#)).

## 2020 TEAM BULLPEN RANKINGS

*\*Based on expected rosters as of this writing.*

1 – Yankees

2 – Brewers

3 – Padres

4 – Astros

5 – Rays

6 – Braves

7 – Twins

8 – Dodgers

9 – Athletics

10 – Reds

11 – Mets

12 – Cardinals

## IF YOU DON'T WANT TO USE TEAM BULLPENS...

Here are some potential options if you don't want to make the move all the way to Team Bullpens.

*1 – Every league should go to Solds.*

In this scenario, at least we wouldn't be directly focused on who is picking up the save in these random times. Been arguing for it for years.

*2 – All leagues should remove saves completely.*

We just don't know how teams are gonna handle the ending of games.

*3 – Draft relievers per normal and accumulate their four categories (sans saves). Then use Team Bullpens for the saves component.*

In order to get saves for the 2020 season we draft/roster an extra spot for Team Saves. You could run this setup as a supplemental draft to your already drafted league. This isn't ideal of course, [redrafting](#) is a better play, because you wouldn't be drafting guys like **Jose Leclerc** as early as you did with his ratio wildness. Still, adding team saves seems pretty equitable I think, and it would help to use each piece – pitcher and team – in conjunction.

## CONCLUSION

Is there a firm answer on how to answer the question of how we should use bullpens in 2020? I don't think so. I believe arguments can be made on either side of this debate. My initial thought was – just use relievers per normal. At the other end of the spectrum we have the team only angle. I think that moving completely to team bullpens might be taking it too far, though of course we've used Team Defense in



fantasy football for as long as there has been such a thing so there is certainly precedent for using a team in the context of fantasy scoring. I kinda prefer the hybrid model – using relievers for ERA/WHIP/K/Wins while using the “team” for the saves total – but some might view that as more trouble than it’s worth or be against adding another level of uncertainty which I do understand. Perhaps in the end we just go with the same old broken system we’ve been using for years... though of course I would more heavily than ever before, at least argue for the use of solds over saves.



## Using Bulk Relievers in 2020

By Ray Flowers

In article written a few days back, I listed the reasons why one should strongly consider avoiding taking starting pitchers early in a fantasy draft ([Why Avoid Starting Pitching Early?](#)). I get it, you’ve already drafted and you don’t care or cannot take advantage of the advice so it doesn’t matter. Even if that is the group you are in, and I’ve been [advocating for re-drafting](#) previously drafted teams, there are still



likely to be steps that you can take on the waiver-wire, or through the trade market in deep leagues to bolster your squad. Getting out ahead of this, here is the main point of this piece – many teams are likely to use “bulk relievers” this season, and those men are likely to produce more value than most folks assign to them.

## WHAT IS A BULK RELIEVER?

Usually, this term has been enacted to describe the guys who follow an Opener, you know, the **Ryan Yarbrough's** of the world who come in and throw 4-5 innings in relief (Yarbrough has made just 20 starts the last two years but he has thrown 289 innings for the Rays). However, for the sake of this report, I'm going to broaden the definition of the term to include guys that thrown a lot of innings per outing out of the bullpen. Basically, any reliever that throws more than an inning an outing could be noted. Realize that relievers, in general, post excellent strikeout marks per inning pitched, can pick up cheap wins and also own the skills to have solid to dominant ratios (ERA/WHIP). An inning here or there doesn't have a huge impact on a fantasy squad, but two innings of dominant work, a couple of times of week, can compete with a moderate five inning effort by a starting pitcher.

## WHO WERE/ARE THE BULK RELIEVERS?

Here are the relievers who threw at least 70-innings last season. Note the G (Games) column as well.

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	ERA	FIP	xFIP
Sam Gaviglio	Blue Jays	4	2	0	52	0	95.2	8.28	2.07	1.69	4.61	4.64	4.31
Jalen Beeks	Rays	6	1	1	30	0	92	7.53	3.33	0.78	3.42	4.07	4.76
Wade LeBlanc	Mariners	4	3	0	18	0	84.2	6.59	2.34	1.7	4.57	5.02	4.98
Junior Guerra	Brewers	9	5	3	72	0	83.2	8.28	3.87	1.18	3.55	4.52	4.83
Michael Lorenzen	Reds	1	4	7	73	0	83.1	9.18	3.02	0.97	2.92	3.66	3.97
Liam Hendriks	Athletics	4	4	25	73	0	83	13.23	2.06	0.54	1.63	1.82	3.14
Yusmeiro Petit	Athletics	5	3	0	80	0	83	7.7	1.08	1.19	2.71	3.59	4.48
Craig Stammen	Padres	8	7	4	76	0	82	8.01	1.65	1.43	3.29	4.12	3.85
Luis Cessa	Yankees	2	1	1	43	0	81	8.33	3.44	1.56	4.11	4.87	4.51
Tommy Milone	Mariners	3	7	0	17	0	80.2	6.69	1.67	2.01	4.8	5.26	5.1
Seth Lugo	Mets	7	4	6	61	0	80	11.7	1.8	0.9	2.7	2.7	3.24
Nick Ramirez	Tigers	5	4	0	46	0	79.2	8.36	3.95	1.24	4.07	4.51	4.68
Marcus Walden	Red Sox	9	2	2	70	0	78	8.77	3.69	0.69	3.81	3.69	4.17
Josh Tomlin	Braves	2	1	2	50	0	76.1	5.66	0.83	1.65	3.77	4.62	4.99
Josh Hader	Brewers	3	5	37	61	0	75.2	16.41	2.38	1.78	2.62	3.1	2.36
Giovanny Gallegos	Cardinals	3	2	1	66	0	74	11.31	1.95	1.09	2.31	3.05	3.59
Miguel Castro	Orioles	1	3	2	65	0	73.1	8.71	5.03	1.23	4.66	4.73	4.85
John Brebbia	Cardinals	3	4	0	66	0	72.2	10.78	3.34	0.74	3.59	3.13	4.63
Luke Jackson	Braves	9	2	18	70	0	72.2	13.13	3.22	1.24	3.84	3.24	2.52
Ty Buttrey	Angels	6	7	2	72	0	72.1	10.45	2.86	1	3.98	3.49	3.9
Daniel Hudson	---	9	3	8	68	0	72	8.75	3.38	1	2.38	4.01	5.1
Carlos Estevez	Rockies	2	2	0	71	0	72	10.13	2.88	1.5	3.75	4.13	4.31
Bryan Shaw	Rockies	3	2	1	70	0	72	7.25	3.63	1.5	5.38	5.19	4.87
Brandon Workman	Red Sox	10	1	16	73	0	71.2	13.06	5.65	0.13	1.88	2.46	3.33
Hansel Robles	Angels	5	1	23	70	0	71.2	9.29	2.01	0.75	2.51	2.91	3.93
Wander Suero	Nationals	6	9	1	78	0	71.1	10.22	3.28	0.63	4.54	3.07	3.81
Jared Hughes	---	5	5	1	72	0	71.1	6.81	3.41	1.64	4.04	5.29	4.17
Matt Andriese	Diamondbacks	5	5	1	54	0	70.2	10.06	3.44	1.02	4.71	3.72	3.88
Scott Barlow	Royals	3	3	1	61	0	70.1	11.77	4.73	0.77	4.22	3.41	4.11
Archie Bradley	Diamondbacks	4	4	18	65	0	70.1	10.88	4.35	0.64	3.07	3.38	4.02

The next step is to look at the relievers who average 1.67 or more innings an outing. The number is listed in the IP/G column at the right. These are hurlers that threw at least 40-innings last season.

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	IP/G
Tommy Milone	Mariners	3	7	0	17	0	80.2	4.72
Wade LeBlanc	Mariners	4	3	0	18	0	84.2	4.68
Felix Pena	Angels	8	1	0	15	0	67.2	4.48
Ryan Yarbrough	Rays	8	1	0	14	0	56	4
Jalen Beeks	Rays	6	1	1	30	0	92	3.07
Adrian Sampson	Rangers	3	1	0	20	0	46.2	2.31
Zack Godley	- - -	3	0	2	24	0	53	2.21
Gabriel Ynoa	Orioles	1	1	0	23	0	46.1	2
Nestor Cortes	Yankees	5	1	0	32	0	64.1	2
Nick Kingham	- - -	4	1	1	21	0	40	1.9
Trevor Cahill	Angels	2	4	0	26	0	49	1.88
Luis Cessa	Yankees	2	1	1	43	0	81	1.88
Sam Gaviglio	Blue Jays	4	2	0	52	0	95.2	1.83
Chris Stratton	- - -	1	1	0	30	0	53	1.77
Touki Toussaint	Braves	4	0	0	23	0	40.1	1.74
Nick Ramirez	Tigers	5	4	0	46	0	79.2	1.72
Julio Urias	Dodgers	3	2	4	29	0	49.1	1.69

We've discussed Yarbrough who should be drafted as a starting pitcher.

**Trevor Cahill** could start for the Giants, but he will likely work out of the bullpen.

**Julio Urias** will hurl his pitches from the Dodgers' starting rotation.

So, let's discuss some of the options that will likely throw more than an inning per outing, guys that could have a bigger impact than some thing in the fantasy game.

#### **Jalen Beeks/Trevor Richards, Rays**

You never know what this team from Florida will do with their staff, so it's unclear if Beeks/Richards even make the squad initially.

Beeks owns a 4.70 ERA over his 155 big league innings with a 1.49 WHIP. Those numbers are worse than the league average as are his 7.61 K/9 and 3.72 BB/9 rates. He's only made four starts out of 51 big league outings, but he's been completely *just a guy*, even with that 11-4 record.

Richards is 10-21 in his career and has made 48 starts in 55 outings in the majors. He's not making the roster as a starter, but he could fill a bulk role. He sure seemed to like life in Tampa as he went 3-0 with a 1.93 ERA, 1.20 WHIP, 9.26 K/9 and 4.80 in the K/BB column (albeit in just 23.1 innings with three starts and four relief appearances). He's highly dependent on a killer change up, so if he follows a hard thrower it might cause enough of a change to induce some weaker swings. There have also been concerns about him being a two-pitch guy who batters eventually figure out, so precluding him from facing a lineup a third time around seems like the best way to use his skills, and it's likely he won't even have to face the entire lineup twice.

#### **Corbin Burnes/Freddy Peralta, Brewers**

As I write this, I'm expecting one of the men to make the rotation with the other going into long relief. That said, there is certainly another way to read the situation, that is with both men ending up in the

pen with the rotation looking like this: **Brandon Woodruff, Adrian Houser, Brett Anderson, Josh Lindblom** and **Eric Lauer**. So, there is uncertainty with both Burnes and Peralta in terms of their roles. Let's look at the skills.

Burnes made four starts last season but took the ball 28 times out of the bullpen. A full-time starter as recent at the 2017 season, he made just 13 starts in 2018 as he was transitioned into more of a bullpen role, a trend that continued last season in Milwaukee, though he did make seven starts during his eight minor league appearances last season. In 49 innings last season, Burnes punched out 70 fools leading to a 12.86 K/9 and absurdly strong 17.2 percent swinging strike rate (his career mark is now 16.4 percent). He struggled to limit the free pass last year, he walked 3.67 per nine, but given his overall stuff, and his 61.3 percent first pitch strike rate, his BABIP .414 is patently absurd. The mark should drop .100 points. Burnes also posted a 38.6 percent HR/FB ratio last season, another absurd mark. I mean, come on, that's just sick stuff. He can dominate any opponent.

Peralta is just 23 years of age, but the questions still persist. Would he be better off working out of the bullpen or the rotation? The issue with him starting is that he really only has two pitches. In two years, he's thrown his heater 78 percent of the time and his curveball 20 percent with the Brewers, and that makes him fairly predictable. It's extremely difficult to be a successful starter throwing just two pitches, especially when you have an issue with location as well. In order to change this, he's bringing back [his slider](#). "It was led by Freddy, as much as anything, by wanting to add something else to his arsenal," said manager Craig Counsell. "Then we probably helped with what should the pitch look like." If he can indeed hone that slider, he could be rotation bound. If not, he could dominate out of the pen (he owns an 11.63 K/9 rate in 163.1 innings). I mean, think of it. Two innings from Peralta, 1.2 innings from Burnes and 1.1 innings from Hader. Who the hell would want to bat in those five innings in a game?

Have you heard of Otto, [the skateboarding dog](#)?

### **Luis Cessa/Jonathan Loaisiga, Yankees**

The Yankees' pen is terrific (Chapman/Britton/Ottavino/Green/Kahnle are dynamic). The Yanks also have two potentially dynamic long relievers as well. At least one. Maybe 1.5. OK, just one.

Cessa is a 28 year old with 232 innings of work over four seasons. He's made 19 starts out of his 86 appearances, and that included all 43 outings last season out of the bullpen. Those 43 outings covered 81 innings by the righty. His 8.33 K/9 and 3.44 BB/9 rates are league average stuff. Ditto the 1.31 WHIP, 4.30 SIERA and 4.51 xFIP. Pretty much just a guy.

Loaisiga is intriguing. It's unclear what his role will be this season. He's not going to break camp in the rotation, but he could be shifted there if an injury arises. Speaking about injury, he's been saddled with plenty of physical concerns that have limited his innings pitched totals significantly (since 2016: 2.1, 32.2, 80.2 and 49.1 innings). It seems likely that with the minors caput, Jonathan will be used out of the pen. Given the depth that exists there for the Yankees, and the hope that Jonathan will still be able to start at the big leagues, he could easily assume the role of long reliever from Cessa. He owns hellacious stuff and has posted an 11.18 K/9 rate in 56.1 big-league innings. He could dominate in any role. Let's hope that he works multi-innings.

### **Sam Gaviglio/Wilmer Font, Blue Jays**

The Jays added depth to the rotation this offseason, and also in the pen. Still, Sam is the type of guy who teams value, that is if they are generating outs. Gaviglio doesn't always do that however. He transitioned from starting to reliever well, but with barely 8.2 K/9 and a continue propensity give up the homer (1.69 per nine last year, an exact match for his three-year mark), he's a spotty option to be counting on. Here's merely listed here cause of his role last season.

One of the guys the Jays added was Font. Used as an Opener 17 times last season, Font worked out of the bullpen 31 times. He threw 49.2 innings in those 31 outings with 9.97 strikeouts per nine and a 3.93 BB/KJ ratio with a 1.21 WHIP. He's a better option than Gaviglio and is very likely to throw higher quality innings this season.

### **Wade LeBlanc/Tommy Milone, Orioles**

LeBlanc made 27 starts in 2018 but regressed to just eight last year. Still, he threw 121.1 innings for the Mariners, and that included 84.2 innings in his 18 relief efforts. He is likely to start this season for the depleted Orioles (heaven help them). Milone also moved to Baltimore, though his role is much less clear. The last three years Milone has made just 18 starts while relieving 27 times. Two negatives here.

### **Adrian Sampson, Rangers**

He is in the Korean Baseball League now.

In the end, keep a close on teams who are admitting that they plan to use bulk relievers



## The Role of Injuries in 2020

The injured list will move from 10 games to 15 this season, something that I detailed in [New Rules in 2020](#). That situation alone will have an impact on squads in the coming season. Moving further down the rabbit hole, we need to consider how to view players who have missed a good deal of time in the recent past. Should we label these players as “troubled” and just move on? Does that mean guys like **Rich Hill** and **Giancarlo Stanton** should be left to be others people’s problems? We will look at this line of thought in what follows, as well as discussing a study that broke down how the hamstring issue early in the year, and how that could be an even bigger concern in 2020.

### THIS SEASON – GAMES MISSED MATTER

We aren’t playing 162 games in 2020.

We are seemingly playing something from 80-100 games in 2020 (we just don’t know as of this writing).

The shorter season magnifies the amount of time a player will miss by drastically increasing the percentage of games missed, even if a trip to the IL lasts only 15 days.

Here is a table with the percentages clearly listed for games missed based on a 13-game setting (for the sake of this exercise we will assume that 13 games will be played per each 15-day segment, though of course this number wouldn't be constant in the real world). The number in parenthesis is the games total that was used to lead to each percentage listed.

	15-Day IL (13)	30-Day IL (26)	45-Day IL (39)
162 Game Season	8.0%	16.0%	24.1%
100 Game Season	13.0%	26.0%	39.0%
80 Game Season	16.3%	32.5%	48.8%

As can be plainly seen, a trip to the IL is far from crushing to a players value over the course of a normal season, but we aren't *normal* in 2020. Any time missed by a player has a proportionally larger impact, to the point that if a player missed a month of time he will be out of action for a massive percent of the game action. Players frequently miss a month of time with a muscle pull or an ankle issue, and that generally costs the player roughly 16 percent of the game action. This year, a similar injury will cost a quarter to a third of all the games to be missed. Further, a 6-8 week injury could cost a player half, or more than half, the games in 2020 which could leave a massive hole to fill for a fantasy squad.

## DURABILITY MATTERS MORE THAN USUAL

It might be wise to prioritize those players who have been on the field a lot in the recent past. This is the patently obvious conclusion to reach. What that means is that we should certainly be viewing stable/boring players with a bit more interest this season than in years past. As we saw above, missing time due to injury could have a debilitating effect on the player's value this season. So, all those folks every year who take draft day chances on players, telling themselves 'if he can only stay healthy this year,' those folks are taking an even bigger risk than they normally would be in 2020. In a traditional season it's a questionable strategy to utilize. This year, it might be better termed a dubious one.

With that, here are some of the iron men of game. These are the players, and pitchers, that in the recent past we've been able to count on being on the field. Does that guarantee they will play daily this season? Of course not. At the same time, the longer I break down the game of baseball the more that I become persuaded that staying on the field might just be a skill.

Here are the players who have appeared in 150-games each of the last three years.

Player
Nolan Arenado
Alex Bregman
Nick Castellanos
Paul Goldschmidt
Eric Hosmer
Manny Machado
Carlos Santana

Here are the players who have appeared in 140-games each of the last three years.

Player	Player
Nolan Arenado	Francisco Lindor
Josh Bell	Manny Machado
Charlie Blackmon	Trey Mancini*
Alex Bregman	Whit Merrifield
Lorenzo Cain	Mike Moustakas
Nick Castellanos	Jose Peraza
Shin-Soo Choo	Kevin Pillar
Brandon Crawford	Anthony Rizzo
Freddy Galvis	Yolmer Sanchez
Brett Gardner	Carlos Santana
Paul Goldschmidt	Trevor Story
Alex Gordon	Eugenio Suarez

Here are the pitchers who threw 162-innings in each of the last three years.



**Pitcher**

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Trevor Bauer

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Gerrit Cole

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Patrick Corbin

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Jacob deGrom

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Zack Greinke

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Mike Leake

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Jon Lester

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German Marquez

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Aaron Nola

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Rick Porcello

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Jose Quintana

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Tanner Roark

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Max Scherzer

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Julio Teheran

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Justin Verlander

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Here are the pitchers who threw 140-innings in each of the last three seasons.

Pitcher	Pitcher
Trevor Bauer	Lance Lynn
Jose Berrios	German Marquez
Dylan Bundy	Charlie Morton
Andrew Cashner	Aaron Nola
Gerrit Cole	Ivan Nova
Patrick Corbin	Jake Odorizzi
Jacob deGrom	Rick Porcello
Mike Fiers	Jose Quintana
Kyle Gibson	Tanner Roark
Zack Greinke	Chris Sale*
Cole Hamels	Max Scherzer
J.A. Happ	Masahiro Tanaka
Clayton Kershaw	Julio Teheran
Mike Leake	Justin Verlander
Jon Lester	Trevor Williams

## DOES IT MATTER WHEN A PLAYER IS HURT?

Let's go back to a man mentioned above – *Rich Hill*. As discussed [in this podcast](#), it sounds like there is a good chance that Hill will be recovered from his elbow procedure in time to be an option for the Twins the first week of the 2020 season. Therefore, he's been moved up in the rankings, and that is how it should be. Still, we have to grapple with complacency here. Let me be very clear about this. *Just because a guy has already been hurt and is recovering, does not mean that he will avoid future setbacks.*

I know that some folks will overlook this fact. They will think – Hill has already had his injury and he's healthy now. Even if that is true, what about his track record, name me one thing that should suggest that the now 40 year old pitcher won't suffer a setback of some kind in 2020? He's injured every year, and just because he's already been injured does not remove the injury label from him one bit.

The moral of this story is to be careful with players who have "already had their injury," especially if that player has a track record of missing games.

## HAMSTRING INJURIES

Jeff Passan tweeted out a [study on hamstrings](#) that was produced with the following mouthful of a title: Hamstring Injury Trends in Major and Minor League Baseball: Epidemiological Findings From the Major League Baseball Health and Injury Tracking System. The study took a look at players and their hamstrings from 2011-16. Here is a crude summary of the work.

**METHOD:** Data collected for this study included date of injury, activity during injury, time lost, primary injury or reinjury status, and imaging findings as well as player demographic information related to level of play, age, and position for all hamstring injury events. Injury rates were reported as hamstring injuries per number of games.

**RESULTS:** From 2011 to 2016, there were 2633 hamstring strains in professional baseball players. The rate of hamstring strains increased in MLB from a low of 1 injury every 39 games in 2011 to a high of 1 injury every 30 games in 2016. In MiLB, there were 2192 hamstring strains, with 1 injury every 35 games in 2011 compared with 1 injury every 30 games in 2016. The majority of injuries occurred in the infielder positions (37.5%) and resulted from base running (>50%), most commonly from home to first base. The most common hamstring injury was a grade 2 injury to the distal biceps femoris. *The mean time missed after a hamstring injury was 14.5 days...* The rate of hamstring strains in professional baseball players has increased over the past 6 years and has resulted in a significant loss of playing time... *Pitchers sustained more hamstring injuries than other player positions, and the most common injury mechanism was running to first base...* In various professional sports leagues (NFL, NBA, MLB), hamstring strains have been found to occur earlier in the season.<sup>9</sup> *Our study found similar results, with the highest number of hamstring sprains in April and May; the rate of injuries steadily decreased as the regular season progressed.*

So, let's wrap this up. The study suggested that players miss an average of 14.55 days with the average hamstring issue, which would of course be one cycle on the IL. The study also suggested that pitchers injured their hamstrings at a higher rate than players. However, this concern is obviously mitigated by the use of the universal designated hitter this season which we believe will be the case. This is overall good news for hurlers.

The study pointed out that hamstring injuries occurred at a higher level early in the season with the highest amount of strains the first two months of the season. If the 2020 campaign follows the same results, there could be an awful lot of early season health issues with players' wheels.

Hamstring injuries appear to result in a moderate total of missed games if the injury isn't severe, but they also tend to be most prevalent early in the year. With the uncertainty about the shape players have kept themselves in with the Covid-19 outbreak, it is logical to this scribe to believe that the rate of early season injuries could even tick up a bit. Even if the overall numbers of hammy injuries goes down this season with pitchers not hitting/running, we could still see an awful lot of players miss time on the IL. It's further possible that with the importance of each game this season, that players that hurt their hamstring might try to play through it, or to return quickly from the injury, while playing a slightly more moderate game. That could easily result in a reduction in extra base hits (doubles/triples) by players who don't want to leg it out, or in a reduction in steal attempts which is just something to keep in mind when you put that roster together, or attempt to adjust it, in 2020.



## Short Season: Pitfalls of Pitcher Walk Rates

By Ray Flowers

The season will be shorter in 2020. Whether it's 114 games, 100 games, 82 games or 80, the simple and obvious truth is that we will not be playing a full slate of games this season. As such, we need to reassess players and the skills they possess relative to the schedule. The topic in this piece will be the walk and how hurlers with excessive free pass levels could be more dangerous than ever in 2020.

In general, I always say that if we need a down a dirty way to asses a pitcher, we should be looking for strikeouts, grounders and a lack of walks. I've even gone as far as promoting a whole category to help along these line called [SWIP](#) (that measure doesn't include grounders, I'm still working on a way to include that component, but SWIP does deal with the other two main components – strikeouts and walks). Everyone, everywhere, talks about the punchout. This piece will talk about the third piece, the walk.

## THE LEAGUE AVERAGE

Some baseline data on the walk.

	BB-Rate	BB/9
2015	7.7	2.92
2016	8.2	3.14
2017	8.5	3.29
2018	8.5	3.25
2019	8.5	3.29

Pretty obvious what we should be expecting this season as the numbers in both categories are nearly identical the last three season.

## WHEN DOES A WALK RATE NORMALIZE?

Sample size matters, a lot more than some folks seem to consider at times. It's 2020 though, and with me beating most of you over the heads with the sample size talk on a nearly daily basis, I feel confident that stating it matters is a [\*fait accompli\*](#) for you all.

When we talk about sample size for walk rates, what number of batters faced are we ideally looking at? *It's fairly safe to suggest that we need about 150-175 batters faced before we start to get a handle on the walk rate.*

Here are some of the batters faced [per game averages](#) from pitchers in 2019.

There were 63 men who faced 20 or more batters per game.

There were 48 men who faced 23 batters per game.

There were 34 men who faced 24 batters per game.

There were 17 men who faced 25 batters per game.

There were seven men who faced 26 batters per game.

Let's use that total of 23 batters per game as our target number. In order to get to 175 batters faced you would need roughly 7-8 starts for a walk rate to normalize, provided of course that there aren't a game or two in that run where the hurler really struggled and faced 15 or so batter in an outing. A struggle or two could lead to that 7-8 outings becoming 8-9 outings.

It doesn't sound like much, I'll give ya that, but think about it.

*Eight starts out of 30 over the course of a full season is about 27 percent of a pitchers starts.*

*Eight starts out of 15, with the season being half as long, is about 53 percent of a pitchers starts.*

***That means, it will take roughly half the season in 2020 for a pitcher's walk rate to stabilize.***

When you look at it like that, thinking it will take half the season to really figure things out, it becomes clear that we need to try our best to establish who these pitchers really are before the season begins

because how many of you are going to let a hurler struggle for half the season before moving on? Simply put, if your hurler is walking 4.5 batters per nine, are you really going to continue to run that arm out there for half the season this year? I'd think not. This means it is wise to avoid the guys that issue free passes as best as we can on draft day, on the trade market or off the waiver-wire.

## **2019 WALK NUMBERS**

Last season there were 75 pitchers who threw 150-innings. You can check the excel page linked to below if you want to look at the entire list. Here are some of the highlights.

*There were 13 pitchers who walked 1.99 or fewer batters per nine innings.*

*There were three men who walked 4.25 batters or more per nine innings.*

*There were 10 men who walked 3.50 batters per nine innings.*

*There were 18 men who walked 3.25 batters per nine.*

There were 130 men who threw at least 100-innings last season. Here are the numbers for this group.

*There were 19 pitchers who walked 1.99 or fewer batters per nine innings.*

*There were five men who walked 4.25 batters or more per nine innings.*

*There were 24 men who walked 3.50 batters per nine innings.*

*There were 39 men who walked 3.25 batters per nine.*

## **GENERAL RULES TO FOLLOW IN 2020**

Understand that there will be a good deal of variance this season in general because of all the obvious changes. If you chose to add hurlers with issues controlling the free pass, your levels of uncertainty will only go up (duh).

The uncertainty that "wild" arms bring could be damaging to a fantasy squads WHIP. That's always the case of course, but when we're talking about 30 starts per arm of that, versus 15 starts per arm, we run a great risk of poisoning the well if you will. With just half the innings at our disposal this season, there is less time for a club to make up for one hurlers struggles. This situation will result in more decisions having to be made more quickly than normal as you can have a bit more patience with a guy who is struggling to throw strikes when he has time to right the proverbial ship.

It's gonna take a long time to see those walk rates normalize this season, potentially as much as half a season worth of starts. Having the patience to work through that will be trying in 2020.

Pass on hurlers with larger than ideal walk rates unless they are likely to offset that risk with the punchout seems like the prudent play this season.



## WORRISOME HURLERS TO NOTE

Here are the men who threw at least 100-innings last season who walked four or more batters per nine innings. All of these men are risky options, for a variety of obvious reasons, and as noted above, a smaller sample size of overall innings pitched for a fantasy squad could amplify the negative effects of the walk at even higher levels than before.

**Aaron Sanchez** (4.66 walks per nine) can't stay healthy, and never has generated the overall numbers his skills suggest he should.

**Dakota Hudson** (4.43) is a ground ball wizard, but 7.01 K/9 and that walk rate left him with a ghastly 1.58 K/BB last season.

**Drew Smyly** (4.34) is still pitching?

**Robbie Ray** (4.34) is the first true strikeout arm on this list. He has struck out 12 batters or more per nine each of the last three years, though his WHIP has been at least 1.33 – the league average – in 5-of-6 career seasons while his ERA is 4.17 the last two seasons.

**Julio Teheran** (4.28) is broken down in more detail in his [Player Profile](#).

**Steven Brault** (4.21) was shut down in spring with a shoulder strain. No one should care in fantasy.

**Chris Archer** (4.14) is the second true strikeout arm on this list. For more, see his [Player Profile](#).

**Antonio Senzatela** (4.11) was embarrassingly allowed to make 25 starts for the Rockies last year despite a 6.71 ERA, 1.75 WHIP and all those walks.

**Jhoulys Chacin** (4.01) is nothing more than a streaming option at best. Will he start for the Red Sox? Does he produce enough strikeouts for it to matter even if he does? I'd say nope.

I would suggest looking closely at any player with a rate of 3.50 or higher, a list that also includes **Luis Castillo** (3.73), **Cole Hamels** (3.56) and **Aaron Nola** (3.56).

## I KEEP THE WALK IN CHECK

You might consider bumping these guys up your personal rankings just a little bit this season as these arms do a really good job at limiting the free pass. Of course, there is more to pitching, much more, than simply avoiding the walk, so don't take things too far here.

Name	Team	K/BB	K/9	BB/9	BB%
Hyun-Jin Ryu	Dodgers	6.79	8.03	1.18	3.30%
Mike Leake	- - -	4.70	5.80	1.23	3.20%
Ryan Yarbrough	Rays	5.85	7.43	1.27	3.60%
Zack Greinke	- - -	6.23	8.07	1.29	3.70%
Miles Mikolas	Cardinals	4.50	7.04	1.57	4.20%
Kyle Hendricks	Cubs	4.69	7.63	1.63	4.40%
Shane Bieber	Indians	6.48	10.88	1.68	4.70%
Justin Verlander	Astros	7.14	12.11	1.70	5.00%
Max Scherzer	Nationals	7.36	12.69	1.72	4.80%

Michael Pineda	Twins	5.00	8.63	1.73	4.70%
Matt Strahm	Padres	5.36	9.26	1.73	4.50%
German Marquez	Rockies	5.00	9.05	1.81	4.90%
Walker Buehler	Dodgers	5.81	10.61	1.83	5.00%
Tommy Milone	Mariners	4.09	7.58	1.85	5.10%
Madison Bumgarner	Giants	4.72	8.80	1.86	5.10%
Yonny Chirinos	Rays	4.07	7.70	1.89	5.30%
Jacob deGrom	Mets	5.80	11.25	1.94	5.50%
Chris Paddack	Padres	4.94	9.79	1.98	5.50%
Masahiro Tanaka	Yankees	3.73	7.37	1.98	5.30%
Jordan Zimmermann	Tigers	3.28	6.59	2.01	5.00%
Gerrit Cole	Astros	6.79	13.82	2.03	5.90%
Joe Musgrove	Pirates	4.03	8.30	2.06	5.40%
Clayton Kershaw	Dodgers	4.61	9.54	2.07	5.80%
Mike Soroka	Braves	3.46	7.32	2.11	5.90%
Gabriel Ynoa	Orioles	2.58	5.45	2.11	5.40%
Adam Plutko	Indians	3.00	6.42	2.14	5.60%
Pablo Lopez	Marlins	3.52	7.68	2.18	5.80%
John Means	Orioles	3.18	7.03	2.21	6.00%
Brandon Woodruff	Brewers	4.77	10.58	2.22	6.10%

**Mike Leake** doesn't get strikeouts, but he doesn't beat himself either.

**Ryan Yarbrough's** [Player Profile](#) tells his story.

**Michael Pineda** produces punchouts and always avoids the free pass. His suspension, and role, leave him with more uncertainty than usual this season.

**Matt Strahm** is a potential [Bulk Reliever](#) option this year.

**Yonny Chirinos** has a [Player Profile](#).

**Masahiro Tanaka** is 31 years old and has had a 4.45 or higher ERA in 2-of-3 years, but his career worst WHIP is only 1.24 and he has walked 2.07 or fewer batters per nine each of his six big league seasons.

**Joe Musgrove** walked 2.06 batters per nine last season and has a career mark of 2.09. The skills are present for him to be a significant contributor though we haven't seen those skills result in an ERA under 4.06 in four seasons.

**Pablo Lopez** has a [Player Profile](#).

**Brandon Woodruff** has seemingly ended up on all my drafted teams to date. With an elite level of bats likely to be missed, as well as the ability to keep the ball in the strike zone, he has the profile of a pitcher who could take the next step this season.



## Short Season: Pitfalls of Average Risk

By Ray Flowers

The league batting average last season was .252. Players are more concerned with launch angle, doing damage with those batted balls, and frankly, getting on base than they are at producing base hits. This piece will talk about the new approach that so many possess, in a season with less than 162 games played.

Let's begin by looking at the changes the league has gone through with batting average.

### THE LEAGUE LEVELS

In 1989 the league hit .254.

In 1999 the league hit .271.

In 2009 the league hit .262.

From 2010-19 the league hit between .248 and .257.

The last three years the league has hit .255, .248 and .252.

The league has, in general, focused more on lifting the baseball. There is also a willingness to swing and miss, strikeouts aren't much of an issue anymore, as players are more content to wait on a pitch they

can drive, perhaps more than ever before. Here are some K-rate numbers from some select seasons of late.

1989: 14.9 percent

1999: 16.4 percent

2009: 18.0 percent

2019: 23.0 percent

There's been a significant uptick in punchouts, and last season set the all-time record.

## THE FANTASY CONTEXT

Let's take a look at a 5x5, 12-team league I was in last year. Here is how each team, using 14 active players per week, finished in batting average.

.278	.269	.263
.278	.266	.262
.272	.265	.257
.269	.264	.254

All of the 12-teams bettered the league's overall average of .252.

10-of-12 teams bettered the league average by at least .010 points.

Let's give the average teams 7,500 at-bats.

Let's say the average team hit .265.

***That means the average roster spot comes in at the following: a .265 average, 142 hits & 536 at-bats.***

That's a pretty darn close match to what **Andrew Benintendi** did last season by the way (144-for-541, a .266 average).

So, if we assume the same setup, 12-teams, 14 hitters, .265 batting average, what are we looking at in 2020? We will assume the same at-bat pace per game, cutting the total down to reflect the percentage of games that might be played this season.

YEAR	GAMES	AB	HITS	AVG
2019	162	7500	1988	.265
2020	100	4630	1227	.265
2020	81	3750	994	.265
2020	60	2780	737	.265

Now, let's look at how each of the 14 slots would perform, on average, per game played.

YEAR	GAMES	AB	HITS	AVG
2019	162	536	142	.265
2020	100	331	88	.266
2020	81	268	71	.265
2020	60	198	52	.263

Let's insert a .230 hitter by removing a .265 hitter. So, we will have a team of 13 batters hitting .265 and one batting .230. What will the team mark become? Here are the teams with 13 hitters at .265.

YEAR	GAMES	AB	HITS	AVG
2019	162	6964	1846	.265
2020	100	4299	1139	.265
2020	81	3482	923	.265
2020	60	2582	685	.265

If we add in one guy at .230, here is the result.

YEAR	GAMES	AVG
2019	162	.263
2020	100	.262
2020	81	.262
2020	60	.262

One hitter at .230 barely drops the average of the team by two or three points.

What if it's .265 for 12 hitters and .230 for two on our hypothetical 14-roster spot team?

YEAR	GAMES	AB	HITS	AVG
2019	162	7500	1950	.260
2020	100	4630	1203	.260
2020	81	3750	975	.260
2020	60	2780	723	.260

Of course, this is not how the real-world works, nothing is equal across all teams, but you get the point.

However, that does not mean that there isn't additional risk with a .230 type of hitter.

Why?

Simply put, there is generally speaking more variation with .230 hitters than .265 hitters. Again, being really unfocused here with the point, but let me explain.

The more holes a hitter has, and let's face it if he's consistently batting .230 that guy has holes, the more open that player is to struggling.

*Guys that hit .230... and there were 19 men who hit .230 or lower last season over 400 plate appearances, follow. Here is that data.*

***Are usually more about the fly ball than ground ball.***

Only 6-of-19 men had a GB/FB ratio above 1.25.

***Are dependent on fly balls landing in the seats.***

12-of-20 had a HR/FB ratio of at least 14 percent.

***Are often guys that don't put the ball in play a lot.***

8-of-16 posted a K-rate of 27 percent. Further, 13-of-16 posted a mark of 24 percent, worse than the league average of 23 percent.

***Aren't going to perform well because of all the fly balls.***

Only one man had a .295 BABIP (Mallex Smith at .302). Only 5-of-16 posted a mark of .280.

***Are sometimes platooned because of significant weaknesses.***

Here is the list of names.

Player	Player
Teoscar Hernandez	Brandon Drury
Hunter Renfroe	Mallex Smith
Rougned Odor	Rhys Hoskins
Harrison Bader	Kevin Kiermaier
Rowdy Tellez	Justin Smoak
Khris Davis	Brandon Crawford
Jackie Bradley Jr.	Orlando Arcia
Jake Bauers	Jarrod Dyson
Daniel Vogelbach	Jurickson Profar
Matt Carpenter	

Not an impressive group overall, though there are still usable pieces here in the right setup, or for a team with a certain need.

## **PLAYERS TO WORRY ABOUT in 2020**

*These players could lose playing time because of holes in their offensive game.*

*They could also see their batting average fluctuate more substantially than players with a better approach.*

*If a .270 hitter is hitting .250 you hold, but if a .230 hitter is struggling and batting .210 how long are you going to keep that guy in the abbreviated 2020 season? How much patience will you show with a guy who is crushing your batting average with the '20 campaign being more of a sprint than ever before?*

With that, here are some of the players who could (A) lose playing time this season or (B) perform poorly causing issues with your fantasy squad.

**Harrison Bader** is part of a full Cardinals outfield. His defense is impressive, but can he hit enough to stay in the lineup on a daily basis? Bader went 12/11 last season, but he also hit .205 with a 29 percent K-rate and had a pathetic .366 SLG.

**Cavan Biggio** is one of the few guys on this list who is likely to be productive. He takes a ton of walks, so even as he hit .234 last year with the Jays, he still had a .364. He's much closer to *Rougned Odor* than most are willing to admit in the fantasy game, with a poor batting average outlook but the ability to continually go 20/10. Biggio is a better offensive player in real life, but we're playing fantasy here.



**Jake Bauers** has hit .214 over 695 at-bats in two seasons, and the Indians have veteran options they can turn at-bats over to.

**Jay Bruce** could be a power source if he's consistently hitting homers at the DH spot, but it will come at a cost given that he's hit .219 over his last 192 games.

**Kole Calhoun** has appeared in 289 games the last two seasons. He's gonna play every day this season for the D'backs, and he's averaged 27-66-82-7 in that time. However, he's also hit just .221 which is, as they say, not at all good.

**Matt Carpenter** has hit less than .245 in 2-of-3 seasons, and over those three years he's hit .243. He could see time at DH helping to protect what appears to be a body that is wearing down at 34 years of age. He can still can on base and has enough power to remain in the Cardinals' lineup.

**Paul DeJong** hit .258 in the first half and .202 in the second last season. Overall, he hit .233, this after a .241 campaign. He's also posted OBP marks of .313 and .318 the last two years. He did see his walk rate go up last season while his strikeout rate went down, and he's not gonna lose playing time. He's also not going to hit well enough to outpace a league average hitter (most likely).

**Randall Grichuk** has hit between .232 and .245 the last four seasons, and his career mark is .244. He also owns a .293 career OBP and has been in the .280's in 3-of-4 years. He has a strong defensive game, and the Jays have a serious boner for him, but he's a very limited offensive player.

**Teoscar Hernandez** is a guy I did a [Player Profile](#) on.

**Rhys Hoskins** is a guy I'm buying this season. Check out his [Player Profile](#) for why that is.

**Rougned Odor** has slumped for years. He's nearly been replaced for years. He's constantly productive in four categories. See his [Player Profile](#).

**Jurickson Profar** hit .218 last season. He still went 20-67-65-9 as a productive player, but that average and .711 OPS stunk. The Padres also brought in **Brian Dozier** to give themselves another option at second base if Profar struggles again.

**Hunter Renfro** isn't someone I'm targeting. See his [Player Profile](#) for an explanation.

**Gary Sanchez** is the new Zunino. Ok, that's not quite fair. Sanchez is an imminently better version of Zunino. Still, there is some truth to the comparison. Sanchez has hit 30-homers in 2-of-3 seasons, but he's also hit .186 and .232 the last two years for a combined .211 batting average. Sanchez has also produced a terrible .305 OBP the last two seasons. He will play most days, and is a good bet to lead the catcher position in homers (duh), but there are limits to what he can offer.

**Daniel Vogelbach** is a limited player, though he could/should play daily for the Mariners anyway. See his [Player Profile](#).

**Mike Zunino** can't hit. We all know it by now. You pay an extremely high price for some homers.



## Short Season: Pitfalls of Being a Rookie

By Ray Flowers

With each passing day it seems more and more likely that we won't be playing 82 games this season. With MLB's latest offer to the players on Monday, it seems that even 75 games could be a stretch. No matter how it plays out, it appears that less than half the full complement of games will be played this year. While everyone is aware of these issues/facts, I've rarely seen people discussing how this all affects rookies. In this piece I'll described the perils of being a rookie in 2020 baseball, and why that might mean it will be harder than at any point in the recent past to break into the bigs for those minor leaguers.

### TRADITIONAL SETUP

*\*I would recommend reading the refresher course on youngsters by checking [out Rookies, The Sorted Tale](#).*

A full year of service time is set at 172 days (the season is 187 days long). Players are often kept in the minors for a couple of weeks to start the year – **George Springer**, **Kris Bryant** and **Vlad Guerrero** being examples – so that teams can keep the players service time under 172 days so that they can control the player for another year before they reach free agency.

Super 2 status is the top-22 percent of rookies in service time. There is no exact date because the number is figured off the actual call up dates of the rookies at the end of the season. Generally speaking, the date is around 65 days of service time in a season. In real world terms, that means if you

keep a guy in the minors for about two months you can make sure that he avoids qualifying for Super 2 status.

## THE 2020 SETUP

Owners and players have agreed on a few things for the 2020 season. Here are a couple of salient points.

If no games are played in 2020, players will receive the same amount of credit they picked up for playing time in 2019. That means if no games are played Mookie Betts will be a free agent next season, even after never playing a single game for the Dodgers. It also means that players in the last year of their deal, like Springer, will be free agents next year.

Whether the season is 48 games or 82, or anywhere in between or over that figure, players on the active roster, or the injured list, the entire year will receive a full season of service time in 2020.

Here is really important part...

***Service time will be prorated based on days on the roster.***

This is a huge issue for rookies. Huge. The upshot is that teams will be ***disinclined*** to promote rookie.

Here is what I mean.

A full season is 162 games.

A full completed big-league season is considered 172 days on the roster.

A full season of days in an actual season has been 187 days.

However, in 2020 the season isn't based off 187 days but 172 days.

That means, whatever number of games are played, they equate to a 172-day season.

Practically speaking, a 90-day season is the same as a 172-day season.

An 80-day season is the same as a 172-day season.

A 65-day season is the same as a 172-day season.

So, let's get down to brass tacks.

If the season is 86 days long, which at this point might be longer than it will realistically be, players would be getting ***double*** the normal credit towards service time (86 is half of 172). *In essence, one day on the roster this year would equate to two on the roster last season.* A season of that length would probably be about 75 games played, and what are the odds that the season is that long at this point? According to [my Twitter followers](#), the answer is about a fifth of you buy that a season that long will happen.

What happens if the league decides to implement that 50-game season that we keep hearing about? Let's assume that a 50-game season is 60-days long. In this example each day on the roster would be worth nearly ***triple*** a standard campaign. That would mean a player who was on the roster for 21 days would get credit for like 60 days. Such a player, on the roster for about three weeks this season, would likely be eligible for Super 2 status. Just three weeks this season would get a player millions of dollars more in the long run, and you know that no owner would want to pay that if they didn't have to.

Why would a team promote a rookie to start the season on day one? Unless that player has a contract in place – like a **Luis Robert** – it would make no sense. From a contract perspective, ***every day is gonna be 2-3 times more impactful than in the past*** when it comes to contracts. Not just that, players are getting much less developmental work at the big-league level as the team simply isn't getting any bang for their buck. Each four at-bat day of development might be as costly as if that player had received 12 at-bats in a normal season. Those 70 at-bats this season come at the same price to the team as 210 at-bats last year. The team is therefore paying as if the player is developing at a rapid pace despite the fact that really isn't likely to happen. Hell, teams don't even want to pay them the contracts they agreed to this year, so what makes you think they are going to have an appetite to increase the pace that players move toward getting paid millions of dollars?

With the owners crying that they are losing crap tons of money this season because of Covid, are they going to want to come out of pocket earlier and more often for young players? Such a commitment would belie what we are currently witnessing in their action as the league slashes the draft to save money while seemingly daily allowing us to be regaled with stories about them losing more than \$640,000 with every game played without fans this season (not to mention the other lost games). Further, players can make millions upon millions more if their arbitration clock starts early which is why service manipulation is such a thing these days. Strains credulity to me to think that the current environment will lead to teams being more aggressive with their rookies.

Presenting the other side, I can see two main issues that rookies have in the favor.

First, there appears to be very little shot of there being any type of minor league season. I find it hard to believe that teams will simply throw away a year of development with players, so they are going to try and find ways for them to be active. Does that mean that some of the elite prospects could be promoted by organizations that deem their importance to be so high that they are willing to take on whatever financial hit they have to in order to make sure the player develops into an all-star?

Second, it seems like we are getting at least 14 playoff teams this season, though the most recent proposal by the owners suggest that up to 16 teams might make the playoffs. Yes, more than half the league. With so many teams potentially qualifying for the post-season, would organizations throw caution to the wind and just go for it, damn the potential financial implications? Possibly, but that would of course be on a team-by-team basis.

Taking everything in, given what we know as I write this sentence, I think it's prudent to push rookies down your board a bit this season.





## The All 30-Year Old Team

By Ray Flowers

Everyone is obsessed with age. Be it the age of your car, the person you want to meet off that dating site, or of the age of the baseball players on your fantasy roster. Ray Flowers will speak to the best 30-year old players this season and why you shouldn't be afraid to draft them in 2020. Yes, you can have players over the age of 27 years old on your roster and be just fine. Yes, as hard as it is to believe, you could actually win a fantasy league comprised of mostly 30+ year old players.

*\*Birthday as of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020.*

### 30-33 YEAR OLD TEAM

**CATCHER:** Yasmani Grandal

He's excellent defensively so he's always in the lineup averaging 137 games played the last four seasons. He's also hit at least 20-homers each year averaging 25-69 per campaign.

**FIRST BASE:** Freddie Freeman

Had career bests in homers (38) and RBI (121) last year while going .295/.389/.549.

**SECOND BASE:** Jose Altuve

In a down season last year he slugged a career best 31 homers while driving in 74 and scoring 89 times. He did all this despite appearing in just 124 games. Just one more base hit last year and he also would have hit .300.

**THIRD BASE: Anthony Rendon**

Good for years, Rendon became great last season as he led the NL in doubles (44) and RBI (126) as his fantasy line sparkled to the tune of .319-34-126-117-5.

**SHORTSTOP: Elvis Andrus**

He doesn't have the overall bat to star in today's game, his 12 homers last season were the second most of his career, but Andrus drove in 72, scored 81 times and stole 31 bases while batting .275, a direct match for his career mark.

**OUTFIELD: J.D. Martinez, Starling Marte Charlie Blackmon**

Martinez is so good that he had his worst season in three years last year and he still had a .939 OPS while going .304-36-105-98. Yeah, he's good. All Marte did the last two years was hit 46 homers with 58 steals while going 20/25 both years. Also had a career best 82 RBI and 97 runs scored last year. Blackmon doesn't run anymore with just two steals last year, but his bat was still superb (.314-32-86-116 with a .940 OPS).

**UTILITY: Whit Merrifield, Tommy Pham, Michael Brantley**

Merrifield has hit .304 and .302 the last two years while stealing 65 bags. The steals are fourth most in the game in that time while his total of 398 hits leads baseball. Pham went 20/25 last year giving him a three-year average of 22 homers and 22 steals. He's also posted an OBP of at least .367 each of those years. Brantley seemingly destroyed his shoulder, but he's been impressively productive the last two years as he's averaged .310-20-83-89-8 for the Indians and Astros.

**STARTING PITCHER: Stephen Strasburg, Jacob deGrom, Clayton Kershaw, Yu Darvish, Madison Bumgarner**

Strasburg led the NL with 209 innings pitched last season. Who thought we would ever see that happen? He also led the league with 18 wins while posting 251 strikeouts and a 1.04 WHIP. deGrom has won the last two NL Cy Young awards. Kershaw is no longer a superstar. He just has to settle for being awesome (16-5, 3.03 ERA, 1.014 WHIP, 9.5 K/9). Darvish was spotty at the start last season, but he was amazing in the second half on his way to a 1.10 WHIP and 229 punchouts in 178.2 innings last year. Finally, Bumgarner posted a 1.13 WHIP with 203 punchouts over 207.2 innings last season.

**RELIEF PITCHER: Aroldis Chapman, Kirby Yates, Liam Hendricks**



Chapman recorded the second most saves of his career last year with 37. He's had at least 33 saves in 7-of-8 years. Yates waited until he was 32 years old to emerge and did he ever do that with his 1.19 ERA and 41 saves last year. Hendricks was 30 when he emerged last year with a 1.80 ERA, 13.13 K/9 and 25 saves.

## **34+ YEAR OLD TEAM**

### ***CATCHER:* Yadier Molina**

He wasn't great, but a .270-10-57 effort, in just 113 games, wasn't terribly far off his .290-11-64 average over 133 games the previous 11 years.

### ***FIRST BASE:* Edwin Encarnacion**

He only appeared in 109 games last year but he still managed to blast 34 homers with 86 RBI and 81 runs scored. That's roughly 44-110-105 pace over 140 games which is obviously elite levels of run production.

### ***SECOND BASE:* Howie Kendrick**

At 35-36 years of age last season he went... bonkers. Kendrick not only had the best season of his career last year, he posted numbers that were astounding including a .344 average, a .395 OBP and a .572 SLG. That's a .966 OPS to go along with 17 homers in just 334 at-bats. He was a monster.

### ***THIRD BASE:* Josh Donaldson**

After a lost 2018 campaign of just 52 games, Donaldson rebounded to pretty much his normal last season going .259-37-94-96 with a .900 OPS.

### ***SHORTSTOP:* X**

I could be wrong, but I don't think there is any 34+ year old starting shortstop in baseball. Further, I don't believe that any player that age qualifies at shortstop this season and has an ADP inside the top-50 at the position.

### ***OUTFIELD:* Shin-Soo Choo, Ryan Braun, Brett Gardner**

Choo will be 38 in July, and he continues to get it done. Each of the last three years he's gone at least 21-61-83 and he even swiped 15 bags last year. Braun is aging no doubt, but the dude can still get it done. Might surprise most when they realize that not only did he play 144 games last season, a seven year best, but he also went 20/10 while batting .285. Gardner doesn't run anymore, but he is coming off his best power season ever (28-74) and he scored 86 runs, the seventh straight year he's been over 80.

**UTILITY: Nelson Cruz**

Here are his numbers, on average, since he turned 34 years of age: .288-41-104-86 with a .928 OPS. Mind blow, Right?

**STARTING PITCHER: Max Scherzer, Justin Verlander, Zack Greinke, Charlie Morton, David Price**

Scherzer was third in NL Cy voting last year while Verlander won the award in the AL. Greinke went 18-5 last year with a 2.93 ERA and 187 punchouts over 208.2 frames. Morton finished third in the AL Cy voting with a 3.05 ERA, 1.08 WHIP and 240 punchouts in 194.2 innings. Price will pitch for the Dodgers this season and he still had a 10.73 K/9 rate and a 4.00 K/BB ratio in limited work last season.

**RELIEF PITCHER: Ian Kennedy, Sergio Romo, Will Harris**

Kennedy closed for the first-time last season and posted 73 Ks in 63.1 innings with 30 saves. Romo is seemingly an after thought every year, yet he has 25 and 20 saves the last two years. Harris is an ideal setup man who had four wins, four saves, 26 holds, a 1.50 ERA and a 0.93 WHIP last season.



## MLB Ballpark Factors

By Ray Flowers

We all know the role of ballparks matters in baseball. As I write this it is unclear where games will be played this season, so it's unclear if this exercise is worth your time or not in the short-term. Regardless, it's wise to understand what the numbers mean as well as the pros and cons of *Park Factors*. Even if the 2020 season ends up in a scenario where we don't have baseball per usual in all the parks, you will at least understand the way to understand the measure moving forward.

### HOW TO FIGURE OUT AND READ THE NUMBERS

Simply put, *Park Factors* (or Park Effects), attempt to place the stadium in the context of a league average venue. This is accomplished by looking at the stats produced in a stadium.

1 – The numbers looked at are usually – ***Runs, Home Runs, Singles, Doubles & Triples.***

2 – The numbers are the total of the home team and all the visitors in the 81 contests played at home as well as the 81 contests on the road with both teams (or whatever number a season ends up using).

To figure out the numbers...

***Take the runs scored at the ballpark (both teams). Take the runs scored on the road (both teams). Divide home/road.***

3 – A number of 1.00 means the stadium performed ***exactly*** to the league average.

4 – A number **below** 1.00 means the stadium favored **pitchers**.

5 – A number **above** 1.00 means the stadium favored **hitters**.

Examples.

Yankee Stadium had a 1.27 mark in homers. This would mean that there were 27 percent more homers hit there than the league average park.

Oracle Park had a 0.76 mark in homers. This would mean there were 24 percent less homers hit there than the league average park.

Some sources discount interleague numbers in the review process ([Baseball Reference](#) does this) – because of the adding or removing of the designated hitter during interleague play.

## PROS

Understanding the home environment hitters and pitchers perform in can help to shape the fantasy outlook of each player by giving context to some of their performances. If a park plays up for hitters, and a solid offensive player had a down effort at home last season, is it reasonable to expect those numbers to improve in the following season? Conversely, what if the same solid player performed great at home but the ballpark traditionally favors pitchers? Park Effects can help to move toward an answer to the question of what you can expect moving forward with the player.

Park Factors can support, or shoot down, the common perception folks have about a ballpark. Yes, the data doesn't always match the perception of a stadium.

## CONS

Park Effect results, year to year, are somewhat random. As you will be able to see on the spreadsheet looking at the last three years, parks can play up, or down, in consecutive years.

Teams change from years to year. As a result of roster turnover, the makeup of a team can affect the overall performance of the team (duh). Lose an ace, the park looks more offensively minded. Lose a power hitter or two, perhaps the offensive exploits of the stadium diminish. What if the team is a ground ball hitting squad, or a fly ball hitting group? What if the hurlers on the team are ground ball or fly ball centric? *Therefore, the strength, or lack of strength of the home team, is half the data being reviewed creating potential volatility.*

The competition can change. While the inner-divisional games remain the same, the rest of the schedule could be different, and that could affect the results. Even if the opponents are the same team wise, player movement can still affect the composition of the squads coming into the stadium to play. *Therefore, the strength, or lack of strength of the visiting team, is half the data being reviewed creating potential volatility.*

The weather can play a factor. One year the weather is warm and the ball flies. The next, it's cold and the ball dies. Further, perhaps a team plays a lot of early games at home when the weather is cold one year, and the next their schedule is loaded with home games mid-year when the weather is warmer.

Run environments change. The same run total in Year I might result in a 1.09 mark one year and in Year II that same run total might equal a mark of 1.01. In this scenario the run scored results are exactly the same, but the context of the season under review can alter the Park Effects mark.

Is the data the same if we're talking a righty or left? If you look at generic Park Effects the answer is – you don't know. Therefore, it really is of more importance to find data that speaks to the handedness of the batter if possible.

## THE DATA

Looking at least year's data is always the first place to start, but as noted above, it is wise to look into each park in more detail than that. Attached to this article is a spreadsheet that lists the following.

*Park Effects for each of the last three seasons (2017-19) – from ESPN.*

*Park Effects for left-handed and right-handed batters the last three years (2017-19) – from Baseball Prospectus.*

(**RED** means the ballpark favors pitchers substantially while **GREEN** means the park favors hitters in a substantial way – a difference of 10 percent or more).

Not included on the spreadsheet, but available here, are the [2019 Minor League Park Effect Numbers](#).

Should you look at Park Effects?

YES.

Should you be swayed away or onto players because of Park Effects?

ONLY IN EXTREME SCENARIOS.

Park Effects should be considered during roster construction, but their importance may be overstated in some circles in respect to definitive answers being gained for players.

*To get the charts click on [THIS LINK](#).*



## Post-Hype Sleepers in 2020: AL

By Ray Flowers

As we try to refocus on the 2020 baseball campaign, we thought it would be a good time to reconsider some of those players that might have slipped through the cracks. We've termed those players, for the sake of this piece, as Post-Hype Sleepers (I hate the term sleeper, but using it in this context makes sense since everyone knows exactly what I'm saying). Who fits into this bucket of players? A variety of options are at our feet, with three being the main focus of this piece. (1) The players could have failed to live up to fantasy expectations and now have a lower price point. (2) The players could have failed to live up to the scouting communities' expectations. (3) The players could have dealt with injuries causing their star to dim, even if they have performed up to useful fantasy levels in the recent past.

With that, here is a list of potential post-hype sleeper options in year 2020, the year of Covid-19.

- *ADP is from the NFBC, from the date of April 1<sup>st</sup> onward.*



## AMERICAN LEAGUE

### HITTERS

**Wily Adames, SS, TB** (380.0): He's not being drafted if you're in a traditional 12-team mixed league, and that is understandable given the tremendous depth of the shortstop position this year. It might surprise folks to learn that in his first full season he had *more* homers than Trea Turner/Corey Seager/Tim Anderson, eight *more* runs scored than Kevin Newman and a *better* batting average than Paul DeJong.

**Franklin Barreto, 2B, OAK** (694.3): Could, possibly, maybe, grab the lions' share of work at second base for the Athletics. He's been awful in 80 games in the big leagues with a .189/.220/.378 slash line. However, he's crushed it in the minors with a .285/.356/.505 slash line over 290 games at Triple-A. Those numbers include last years 98 game run of .295-.19-.65-.88-.15. That's elite level stuff on a per game basis. He's on waivers in every single league out there, but he has the skills to hit 20 homers and to steal 10 bases per season if it all comes together.

**Andrew Benintendi, OF, BOS** (117.4): It's all explained in his [Player Profile](#).

**Byron Buxton, OF, MIN** (150.9): Come on, you know I'm not giving up. I just can't. You shouldn't either. Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Derek Fisher, OF, TOR** (729.5): He was supposed to have arrived about two years ago. He went 20/30 in 2015. He went 20/25 in 2016. He went 20/15 in 2017. Over a mere 419 big league plate appearances he's hit 16 homers with 10 steals. You get the idea. So there has to be a catch, right? Of course, there is. Fisher has power and speed, but he is about as refined as a Single-A ball player. He has a massive 36.5 percent K-rate in the majors with a horrid .191 batting average and .279 OBP. He's got a chance to play daily this season, but there are significant warts he must overcome.

**Maikel Franco, 3B, KC** (548.9): He hit at least 22 homers for 3-straight years before dipping to 17 last season. He had just 389 at-bats last season, hitting a homer every 22.9 at-bats, a nearly identical match to the 22.4 at-bat mark he posted from 2016-18. He should play every day this season for the Royals, but he's a career .249 hitter who has a mere .302 OBP. He makes tons of contact, but his upside is certainly limited, despite his inclusion on this list.

**Austin Hays, OF, BAL** (264.4): Both Baseball America and MLB.com had Hays as a top-25 overall player in all the minors in 2018. He struggled with health and performance in 2018 and 2019 barely hitting .240 with a sickening .280-ish OBP. He was just a bad offensive performer. Still, he's always been thought of as a middle of the lineup, 30-homer type of hitter. This season, he's likely to get a good deal of playing time with the sad-sack Orioles and it's not like he couldn't sock the long ball at a proficient rate if given the at-bats.

**Danny Jansen, C, TOR** (246.1): I'm a fan. Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Kyle Lewis, OF, SEA** (594.3): A borderline elite level prospect for years. He's had lots of physical setbacks, especially with the wheels, and he's just not as dynamic an athlete as he once was. He had a solid season at Double-A last year, but it was the six homers in 18 games with the Mariners that have folks excited. He's not that level of hitter, make no mistake, so his inclusion on this list is merely a function of the expected level of performance this season in relation to his ADP.

**Nomar Mazara, OF, CWS** (244.0): I've been right for three years on Mazara, despite being shouted at from the rooftops by everyone. Maybe it finally happens this year, the first time in his big-league career that folks are actually out on him. I'm still dubious.

**Kyle Tucker, OF, HOU** (168.6): He has the skills to go 20/20. No one doubts that. He might even be able to push those numbers upwards. That said, there are some holes in his game, and more directly, it's unclear exactly what his role will be this season. That said, folks are paying a pretty high price to take the chance that they can get in on the ground floor of his takeoff.

## PITCHERS

**Kolby Allard, SP, TEX** (742.6): He's free and he has a chance to be the first name called on when an opening presents itself in the Rangers' rotation. He was a top-100 MLB prospect in 2016, 2017 and 2018. He's lost some velocity, and doesn't miss bats at anywhere near an acceptable rate. Did I just talk myself out of Allard? Probably.

**Dylan Bundy, SP, LAA** (214.6): Is this finally the year it happens? Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Dylan Cease, SP, CWS** (274.8): He has a dynamic arm, upper end heat, a smooth delivery and he is studious off the field. All the pieces are there for a seriously successful run this season if he can only eliminate the walk. Even with all the struggles last season he still had a 9.99 K/9 rate, but there was that 4.32 BB/9 mark and 1.85 HR/9 rate. He has arm talent you cannot teach.

**Reynaldo Lopez, SP, CWS** (335.8): Can Yasmani Grandal help to unleash the talent? Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Brendan McKay, SP, TB** (342.4): He can hit a bit, might even see some time at DH this year, but it's obviously all about his arm. His price on draft day fell because he was demoted because his shoulder was barking and because he was sent down to the minors. Who cares if he was demoted in late March? That means nothing now, and though he isn't throwing off the mound, his shoulder should be fine. Some thoughts [in this podcast](#).

**Justus Sheffield, SP, SEA** (438.9): The arm is top notch. However, he has a max effort delivery, can lose control of the strike zone at times, and there are still some questions about whether or not he should be shifted to the bullpen. My guess is that he would be dynamite as a bulk reliever. Not necessarily someone who throws 4.2 innings per outing, but someone who comes in and mows down the opponent for two frames.

**Forrest Whitley, SP, HOU** (558.8): Last year many had Whitley as the top right-handed arm in the minors, and BA/MLB/BP all had Whitley as a top-10 overall prospect in the game. He was hideous when on the field (7.99 ERA, 1.73 WHIP, 6.6 BB/9 in 59.2 IP), struggled with shoulder fatigue, and basically had a completely lost season. He looked better in the Arizona Fall League (1.24 WHIP, 11.5 K/9, 3.2 BB/9 in 25 IP), but after last year's complete and total faceplant, it's hard to know how 2020 will play out.



## Post-Hype Sleepers in 2020: NL

By Ray Flowers

As we try to refocus on the 2020 baseball campaign, we thought it would be a good time to reconsider some of those players that might have slipped through the cracks. We've termed those players, for the sake of this piece, as Post-Hype Sleepers (I hate the term sleeper, but using it in this context makes sense since everyone knows exactly what I'm saying). Who fits into this bucket of players? A variety of options are at our feet, with three being the main focus of this piece. (1) The players could have failed to live up to fantasy expectations and now have a lower price point. (2) The players could have failed to live up to the scouting communities' expectations. (3) The players could have dealt with injuries causing their star to dim, even if they have performed up to useful fantasy levels in the recent past.

With that, here is a list of potential post-hype sleeper options in year 2020, the year of Covid-19.

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- *Here is a link to the [American League piece](#).*

## NATIONAL LEAGUE

### HITTERS

**Jesus Aguilar, 1B, MIA** (435.3): Gets a new lease on his career with the Marlins. Should play most days, and you would never know from his ADP that he is a mere season removed from going .274-30-108-80. When was the last time people bailed on a 30-100 guy this quickly?

**Lewis Brinson, OF, MIA** (695.0): I've been in this guys corner for years. He's been awful, hideous really, with a .533 OPS over 709 big-league plate appearances. You can still point to his elite pedigree, his defensive acumen and the fact that he was having a big spring as an olive branch. He also ripped it up with a .871 OPS and 16 homers and 16 steals in just 81 Triple-A games last season. *He is the NL version of Byron Buxton.*

**Ian Happ, 2B/OF, CHC** (252.5): There were positive changes last season, and playing time seems to be on its way. Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Francisco Mejia, C, SD** (239.6): One of my favorites this season at the catcher's spot. From my [FSGA Review](#)... *"He's a vastly superior offensive option to teammate Austin Hedges (who still holds a significant defensive advantage over Mejia). It's admittedly a small sample size, but Mejia was a robust offensive performer in the second half last season when his 141 plate appearances resulted in a .305 average, a .866 OPS and a .363 wOBA. This is the year that he finally emerges..."*

**Tyler O'Neill, OF, STL** (577.8): The Cardinals have a mix of options in the outfield and designated hitter: O'Neill, Tommy Edman, Harrison Bader, Dexter Fowler and Dylan Carlson. O'Neill is ripped and can mash but... Carlson is a better all-around talent, Bader is great defensively, Edman was impressive last year and Fowler has a huge contract. O'Neill, and yes there are two "L's", could be a 30-homer hitter in the bigs. It's also not easy to come up with a way for him to be in the lineup on a daily basis without there being an injury.

**Austin Riley, 3B/OF, ATL** (323.1): I wrote about his plight in [Who Benefits from the Universal DH?](#)

**Brendan Rodgers 2B/SS, COL** (661.1): I've done plenty of articles and podcasts dealing with the Rockies' infield situation and the outlook for Hampson/Rodgers in particular. Check out the link right above to the *Universal DH story*.

**Nick Senzel, OF, CIN** (215.8): One of my favorite players coming up. He's had a plethora of injuries seemingly blocking his development, but the addition of the DH this season in the NL should benefit Senzel substantially. Even if he doesn't fill the role, it could open up a spot for him to wear a glove in the outfield for the Reds. A nice blend of power and speed, no one works harder than Senzel. He's also a leader, and we need that in the world these days.

**Domonic Smith, 1B/OF, NYM** (687.7): The Mets could stick Yoenis Cespedes in the DH spot... if he can stay healthy. If/when he can't, Smith could see plenty of time there. Smith could always hit, but through two big-league seasons he just didn't. Dom looked much better last season with an impressive .881 OPS over 197 plate appearances but he doesn't run and he isn't likely to hit enough to be truly exciting as a 1B/UT option. At least he also qualifies in the outfield as well.

**Dansby Swanson, SS, ATL** (238.6): Some people are really into Swanson this season. Part of that is because of cost, while part of it seems to come from the belief that he figured things out last year. Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Luis Urias, SS, MIL** (447.7): He was terrible with the Padres (.655 OPS over 71 games) and he hurt his hamate bone requiring surgery this January. However, he was dealt to the Brewers who seem to understand the talent he possesses. After all, Urias was a top-30 prospect in baseball coming into last season, and his work in 73 games at Triple-A was dynamic as he went .315-19-50-62 with a .998 OPS. Could face a battle for playing time from Orlando Arcia, but Urias' overall approach and offensive game is simply more advanced.

**Jesse Winker, OF, CIN** (599.4): I really like this skill set. A lot. Check out his [Player Profile](#).

## PITCHERS

**Corbin Burnes, SP/RP, MIL** (361.9): I really like the potential here, and wrote about it in [Using Bulk Relievers in 2020](#).

**Jon Gray, SP, COL** (243.7): Hasn't yet been able to harness his ample parts. There's always a chance that everything coalesces and the performance impresses. Still, [his vexing inability](#) to pitch better on the road than at Coors is an ongoing issue.

**Mitch Keller, SP, PIT** (231.0): A big arm, a good approach and some serious positive regression is on its way for the righty. Check out his [Player Profile](#).

**Joe Musgrove, SP, PIT** (216.4): Doesn't quite have the pure stuff of Gray, but he too seems to have lots of pieces that impress, even if the results don't always follow. He's always controlled righties with a .299 wOBA in his career, and his home (.313 wOBA) and road (.316 wOBA) splits show little difference. We've been waiting for a few years for the righty to emerge, and you know how hope springs eternal.

**Sean Newcomb, SP/RP** (542.0): If Cole Hamels is healthy, and Felix Hernandez has anything left, Newcomb will have to work out of the bullpen. Looking at the Braves depth out there, and there is a lot of talent, the only lefty is Will Smith so Newcomb could certainly fill a needed role. The Braves also have other youngsters like Kyle Wright, Bryse Wilson, Ian Anderson and Touki Toussaint who could start in case someone is needed for the rotation. The role is therefore up in the air for Newcomb though it certainly should be noted that Sean was successful last season out of the bullpen with a 3.00 K/BB ratio, a .661 OPSA and a 1.16 WHIP over 51 appearances. He just blends into the woodwork as a reliever, and it's unclear if he is refined enough at the moment to truly excel as a starter.

**Alex Reyes, SP/RP, STL** (670.5): He's been, at various times (A) the best pitching prospect with the Cardinals, (B) the best pitching prospect in baseball, (C) an elite starting pitching option and (D) a potential closer. He entered the year attempting to start, but his velocity was a bit down. His outlook in terms of role is currently unknown. His career long outlook is also completely fogged up as he's been hurt roughly every nine weeks for the past couple of years. The only consistent part of his game – is a lack of ill-health. He will have to stay healthy for any of that talent to matter.





## Short Season: Fast Starting Hitters

By Ray Flowers

So, it's come to this. I'm writing about something I don't really believe in, but I feel like I've been forced into a corner so I have to come out swinging. The 2020 MLB season will be more of a sprint than ever before. Sounds like we might have a best-case scenario of half a season worth of games, though there are those doomsday thoughts of a 48-game season as well. Regardless the length of the season, it will be shorter than ever which means we might have to break with our established worldviews of how to analyze players. As a result, we will have to make decisions about players faster than ever before, which bring me to the current topic – *hot starting hitters*.

I say it all the time – what is the difference between July 5<sup>th</sup> and July 15<sup>th</sup>? Practically speaking there is no difference. That said, one game is in the first half, the other game in the second half, so the results that we record – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> half performance – artificially break up the data to make it appear as if things are drastically different on those two dates, even though we know that simply isn't the case. I often follow up that first statement by saying – there is no difference between the two dates, so don't be one of those people that buys into players being *first or second half guys*.

I've also spoken of the fact that we all love to use artificial end points. Be it first/second half or April/July kinda stuff, we're often talking about periods in time that, again, really offer very little difference (to restate, what's the difference between May 29<sup>th</sup> and June 4<sup>th</sup>?). It's simple and clean, and it sure seems a bit more logical to say 'May 1 to June 1' than to say 'May 12 to June 12.'

Despite those legitimate positions of concern, I'm moving ahead anyway with discussing hot and cold performers early in the season because I think we must given the season this year. Some caveats.

1 – Differences this year are pronounced. In the past, the players followed their normal schedule all offseason, and eased into the season per normal. This year we have Covid-19 and the potential health impact on players/families/friends. We have no idea who has been training as hard as they normally would. We have no idea who has slacked off a bit in their training. We have no idea who is going through family strife. We also have pronounced social unrest that everyone is dealing with. Is it really fair to posit that the 2020 season is similar enough to the "norm" that any of that historical data is actually relevant?

2 – There is no April-May-June to discuss in terms of game action this season. Is it really fair to say 'this guy has been a hot starter' when that players hasn't had a chance to do anything this year? Will that player be hot in July merely because it is the start of the season? Speaking of hot/cold... with the late start to the season, the cold weather will be gone from the early schedule. It's unknown how this removal of cold weather early games will effect the players.

3 – Should a traditional "second half player" be the one we are looking at as a potential hot starter this year? After all, the second half guy will start playing games around the "traditional" time the player gets hot.

4 – Are there really first/second half guys? Are there really hot/cold starters? We have to take into account sample size here. Let's take a look at the following.

Player A is a .285 hitter in the first half and .265 in the second half.

The assumption would be that Player A is a first half hitter, but is that truly the case?

*Let's say Player A has played six years.*

*In the first six first halves he's hit .260, .260, .320, .270, .340, .260.*

*Is Player A really a first-half hitter?*

Overall, the numbers say yes as he's been .020 points better at .285. However, look at the six years. In half of the seasons Player A has hit **worse** than his second half number of .265. Once, he was only .005 points better. So, in 2/3 of the seasons he's basically been just slightly worse than the guy he's been in the second half. It's just those two years of .320 and .340 that skew the data. So, I ask again, is Player A really a first half hitter?

With all those caveats, I still wanted to push forward with some data. Perhaps there will be something we can glean from it.

Because I think that one year of data simple isn't enough, I'm going to spread things out to three years. Again, not sure it's really enough either, but we gotta dive in somewhere.



## FIRST HALF: 2017

Name	Team	G	PA	HR	R	RBI	SB	AVG	OBP	SLG	wOBA	wRC+
Aaron Judge	Yankees	84	366	30	75	66	6	0.329	0.448	0.691	0.466	198
George Springer	Astros	83	378	27	76	61	2	0.310	0.380	0.613	0.414	166
Joey Votto	Reds	88	384	26	65	68	3	0.315	0.427	0.631	0.432	166
Jose Altuve	Astros	86	380	13	62	50	18	0.347	0.417	0.551	0.409	162
Carlos Correa	Astros	81	363	20	62	65	0	0.325	0.402	0.577	0.409	162
Bryce Harper	Nationals	81	364	20	69	65	2	0.325	0.431	0.590	0.422	159
Jose Ramirez	Indians	86	361	17	62	48	10	0.332	0.388	0.601	0.409	155
Paul Goldschmidt	Diamondbacks	88	381	20	73	67	13	0.312	0.428	0.577	0.417	153
Michael Conforto	Mets	70	273	14	47	41	2	0.284	0.403	0.542	0.395	149
Yonder Alonso	Athletics	79	298	20	46	43	1	0.275	0.372	0.562	0.388	148
Anthony Rendon	Nationals	81	339	16	46	54	5	0.304	0.407	0.552	0.403	147
Marcell Ozuna	Marlins	87	372	23	52	70	0	0.316	0.374	0.566	0.393	147
Justin Smoak	Blue Jays	87	333	23	48	56	0	0.294	0.360	0.575	0.390	146
Ryan Zimmerman	Nationals	80	324	19	52	63	1	0.330	0.373	0.596	0.402	146
Daniel Murphy	Nationals	82	356	14	57	64	1	0.342	0.393	0.572	0.399	144
Logan Morrison	Rays	85	346	24	49	57	1	0.258	0.367	0.564	0.382	144
Cody Bellinger	Dodgers	70	292	25	50	58	5	0.261	0.342	0.619	0.389	144
Giancarlo Stanton	Marlins	86	369	26	60	58	1	0.277	0.360	0.572	0.386	142
Zack Cozart	Reds	66	284	9	42	35	2	0.316	0.394	0.547	0.396	142
Kris Bryant	Cubs	82	363	18	57	38	6	0.269	0.399	0.529	0.391	141
Buster Posey	Giants	77	318	10	36	35	1	0.324	0.406	0.498	0.384	140
Corey Dickerson	Rays	85	370	17	60	42	2	0.312	0.355	0.548	0.376	140
Nelson Cruz	Mariners	85	344	17	42	70	1	0.292	0.372	0.520	0.375	140

## FIRST HALF: 2018

Name	Team	G	PA	HR	R	RBI	SB	AVG	OBP	SLG	wOBA	wRC+
Mookie Betts	Red Sox	78	355	23	79	51	18	0.359	0.448	0.691	0.470	199
Mike Trout	Angels	97	428	25	71	50	15	0.310	0.454	0.606	0.438	184
J.D. Martinez	Red Sox	92	397	29	72	80	2	0.328	0.393	0.644	0.432	173
Jose Ramirez	Indians	94	419	29	68	70	20	0.302	0.401	0.628	0.426	170
Jesus Aguilar	Brewers	87	316	24	49	70	0	0.298	0.373	0.621	0.413	160
Alex Bregman	Astros	96	434	20	67	64	8	0.288	0.389	0.539	0.397	157
Eugenio Suarez	Reds	79	348	19	50	71	1	0.312	0.399	0.574	0.408	156
Aaron Judge	Yankees	93	423	25	66	60	6	0.276	0.392	0.544	0.397	154
Manny Machado	Orioles	96	413	24	48	65	8	0.315	0.387	0.575	0.399	153
Freddie Freeman	Braves	94	420	16	59	61	6	0.315	0.405	0.533	0.395	149
Nelson Cruz	Mariners	81	333	22	39	55	1	0.267	0.363	0.538	0.381	147
Francisco Lindor	Indians	94	442	25	85	62	13	0.291	0.367	0.562	0.391	146
Nolan Arenado	Rockies	90	395	23	63	68	2	0.312	0.395	0.586	0.411	146
Paul Goldschmidt	Diamondbacks	95	417	21	61	52	3	0.281	0.386	0.534	0.390	146
Matt Carpenter	Cardinals	89	378	19	57	43	0	0.263	0.373	0.530	0.381	144
Shin-Soo Choo	Rangers	90	416	18	54	43	3	0.293	0.405	0.506	0.392	142
Jose Altuve	Astros	99	434	9	63	44	14	0.332	0.394	0.470	0.374	141
Brandon Nimmo	Mets	85	311	13	48	30	7	0.253	0.373	0.490	0.372	140
Andrew Benintendi	Red Sox	91	405	14	68	57	17	0.297	0.380	0.517	0.381	139
Eddie Rosario	Twins	93	401	19	64	60	6	0.311	0.353	0.537	0.375	138
Scooter Gennett	Reds	92	389	16	59	63	2	0.326	0.373	0.521	0.379	137
Joey Votto	Reds	95	422	9	55	50	1	0.289	0.422	0.442	0.380	137
Matt Kemp	Dodgers	92	324	15	42	60	0	0.310	0.352	0.522	0.369	137
Nicholas Castellanos	Tigers	94	409	15	54	56	1	0.305	0.359	0.517	0.373	136
Jed Lowrie	Athletics	94	406	16	43	62	0	0.285	0.357	0.492	0.364	135
Brandon Belt	Giants	81	345	13	43	42	2	0.287	0.383	0.480	0.368	135

# FIRST HALF: 2019

Name	Team	G	PA	HR	R	RBI	SB	AVG	OBP	SLG	wOBA	wRC+
Mike Trout	Angels	87	391	28	71	67	8	0.301	0.453	0.646	0.442	183
Cody Bellinger	Dodgers	88	377	30	70	71	8	0.336	0.432	0.692	0.448	183
Christian Yelich	Brewers	82	365	31	66	67	19	0.329	0.433	0.707	0.450	180
Peter Alonso	Mets	89	376	30	57	68	1	0.280	0.372	0.634	0.410	160
Josh Bell	Pirates	88	388	27	69	84	0	0.302	0.376	0.648	0.408	155
Kris Bryant	Cubs	85	375	17	66	44	1	0.297	0.403	0.552	0.399	148
Anthony Rendon	Nationals	75	324	20	65	62	1	0.304	0.386	0.611	0.404	148
Freddie Freeman	Braves	90	406	23	69	68	3	0.309	0.394	0.584	0.403	148
Alex Bregman	Astros	88	394	23	61	56	4	0.265	0.393	0.533	0.387	147
Carlos Santana	Indians	87	378	19	60	52	4	0.297	0.418	0.540	0.398	147
Jeff McNeil	Mets	76	318	7	41	36	3	0.349	0.409	0.509	0.389	146
Charlie Blackmon	Rockies	73	341	20	67	57	2	0.330	0.378	0.632	0.414	143
Juan Soto	Nationals	79	342	15	53	56	6	0.300	0.406	0.537	0.394	142
Rhys Hoskins	Phillies	89	392	20	47	59	1	0.263	0.401	0.530	0.389	140
Willson Contreras	Cubs	77	302	18	41	52	1	0.286	0.381	0.556	0.388	140
Luke Voit	Yankees	78	349	17	53	50	0	0.280	0.393	0.509	0.381	140
Yoan Moncada	White Sox	79	336	16	49	48	6	0.308	0.364	0.544	0.377	139
Michael Brantley	Astros	84	366	12	48	46	3	0.324	0.383	0.511	0.375	139
DJ LeMahieu	Yankees	81	367	12	65	63	4	0.336	0.383	0.518	0.378	138
Rafael Devers	Red Sox	87	378	16	69	62	8	0.324	0.377	0.546	0.383	137
Xander Bogaerts	Red Sox	86	388	17	67	65	3	0.294	0.384	0.535	0.382	136
Daniel Vogelbach	Mariners	85	341	21	49	51	0	0.238	0.375	0.505	0.370	136
Matt Chapman	Athletics	89	389	21	60	52	0	0.268	0.355	0.535	0.370	135

# APRIL 2017

Name	Team	G	PA	HR	R	RBI	SB	AVG	OBP	SLG	wOBA	wRC+
Ryan Zimmerman	Nationals	24	96	11	22	29	1	0.420	0.458	0.886	0.545	240
Bryce Harper	Nationals	25	114	9	32	26	0	0.391	0.509	0.772	0.515	220
Freddie Freeman	Braves	23	101	9	22	14	4	0.381	0.485	0.798	0.514	220
Eric Thames	Brewers	24	103	11	28	19	0	0.345	0.466	0.810	0.512	219
Mike Trout	Angels	27	115	7	18	18	5	0.364	0.443	0.707	0.466	200
Aaron Judge	Yankees	22	90	10	23	20	1	0.303	0.411	0.750	0.468	199
Miguel Sano	Twins	23	97	7	17	25	0	0.316	0.443	0.684	0.461	193
Mitch Haniger	Mariners	21	95	4	20	16	2	0.342	0.447	0.608	0.444	187
Justin Turner	Dodgers	24	99	1	9	12	1	0.404	0.465	0.562	0.441	178
Avisail Garcia	White Sox	23	93	5	15	20	0	0.368	0.409	0.621	0.432	177
Nelson Cruz	Mariners	25	108	7	14	23	1	0.315	0.407	0.618	0.421	171
Zack Cozart	Reds	21	85	1	11	9	1	0.352	0.447	0.606	0.438	169
Corey Dickerson	Rays	24	96	6	13	10	0	0.330	0.379	0.636	0.419	169
Khris Davis	Athletics	24	99	10	18	17	1	0.268	0.374	0.659	0.416	167
Eugenio Suarez	Reds	23	94	5	19	13	1	0.329	0.415	0.610	0.429	164
Steven Souza Jr.	Rays	25	108	4	14	17	0	0.330	0.411	0.543	0.406	160
Yoenis Cespedes	Mets	18	75	6	12	10	0	0.270	0.373	0.619	0.408	157
Francisco Lindor	Indians	24	109	7	20	17	1	0.309	0.380	0.638	0.411	156
Paul Goldschmidt	Diamondbacks	27	117	4	21	19	7	0.315	0.462	0.522	0.420	155
Starlin Castro	Yankees	23	98	5	15	16	0	0.352	0.398	0.549	0.403	155
Justin Upton	Tigers	21	82	5	15	15	2	0.290	0.402	0.565	0.405	155
Jose Ramirez	Indians	24	103	6	13	21	2	0.330	0.388	0.593	0.408	154
Corey Seager	Dodgers	25	107	5	16	17	2	0.319	0.411	0.549	0.404	153
Jay Bruce	Mets	23	100	7	14	16	0	0.292	0.370	0.584	0.399	152

## APRIL 2018

Name	Team	G	PA	HR	R	RBI	SB	AVG	OBP	SLG	wOBA	wRC+
Mookie Betts	Red Sox	24	107	8	29	18	3	0.344	0.439	0.733	0.481	207
Didi Gregorius	Yankees	28	121	10	24	30	2	0.327	0.421	0.735	0.463	199
Manny Machado	Orioles	28	125	9	14	22	2	0.361	0.448	0.676	0.464	198
Daniel Robertson	Rays	23	84	3	14	8	1	0.333	0.476	0.561	0.446	191
Mitch Haniger	Mariners	27	112	10	17	27	1	0.309	0.384	0.701	0.440	187
Aaron Judge	Yankees	28	128	7	24	18	2	0.317	0.453	0.584	0.436	181
Mike Trout	Angels	28	125	10	21	18	5	0.291	0.408	0.631	0.432	180
Jed Lowrie	Athletics	28	126	6	13	27	0	0.339	0.397	0.583	0.416	170
Rhys Hoskins	Phillies	28	116	4	16	19	3	0.303	0.457	0.528	0.423	168
Brandon Belt	Giants	25	104	6	13	14	1	0.302	0.413	0.581	0.415	167
Tommy Pham	Cardinals	25	106	3	22	10	5	0.341	0.453	0.511	0.417	167
Matt Davidson	White Sox	24	104	9	16	18	0	0.253	0.375	0.609	0.413	167
A.J. Pollock	Diamondbacks	27	114	9	20	24	6	0.291	0.351	0.670	0.421	166
Asdrubal Cabrera	Mets	25	112	5	20	17	0	0.340	0.393	0.580	0.410	165
Yasmani Grandal	Dodgers	24	102	4	15	20	0	0.315	0.402	0.551	0.408	162
Freddie Freeman	Braves	27	126	4	19	19	2	0.314	0.437	0.559	0.413	160
Ozzie Albies	Braves	27	127	9	29	20	3	0.293	0.341	0.647	0.410	158
Francisco Cervelli	Pirates	23	92	4	10	20	0	0.308	0.391	0.564	0.402	156
Kris Bryant	Cubs	22	102	2	13	11	0	0.291	0.441	0.506	0.405	156
Kyle Schwarber	Cubs	24	91	7	15	17	0	0.273	0.385	0.584	0.403	155

## APRIL 2019

Name	Team	G	PA	HR	R	RBI	SB	AVG	OBP	SLG	wOBA	wRC+
Cody Bellinger	Dodgers	31	132	14	32	37	5	0.431	0.508	0.890	0.547	248
Christian Yelich	Brewers	29	124	14	26	34	6	0.353	0.460	0.804	0.492	207
Hunter Dozier	Royals	25	103	7	14	17	0	0.349	0.447	0.686	0.458	190
Mike Trout	Angels	27	119	6	19	16	4	0.294	0.487	0.565	0.428	174
Tim Anderson	White Sox	23	99	6	21	18	10	0.375	0.394	0.615	0.420	168
Willson Contreras	Cubs	25	98	7	17	17	1	0.288	0.418	0.625	0.427	166
Joey Gallo	Rangers	25	109	10	20	25	0	0.264	0.404	0.678	0.431	165
Peter Alonso	Mets	29	123	9	20	26	0	0.292	0.382	0.642	0.416	164
Trey Mancini	Orioles	28	121	6	23	14	0	0.355	0.405	0.618	0.420	164
Brian Goodwin	Angels	27	95	4	19	11	0	0.338	0.426	0.575	0.414	164
Paul DeJong	Cardinals	29	129	5	26	13	2	0.342	0.403	0.607	0.419	163
Elvis Andrus	Rangers	27	120	5	19	20	6	0.361	0.425	0.583	0.422	159
Jeff McNeil	Mets	28	116	1	15	12	0	0.370	0.457	0.500	0.408	159
Yandy Diaz	Rays	26	114	7	18	18	1	0.298	0.395	0.596	0.403	158
Rhys Hoskins	Phillies	28	128	8	19	24	0	0.279	0.414	0.587	0.415	158
Jorge Polanco	Twins	26	113	5	15	10	0	0.320	0.389	0.600	0.406	156
Christian Walker	Diamondbacks	28	113	7	16	15	3	0.307	0.381	0.614	0.406	152
Shin-Soo Choo	Rangers	27	117	3	20	11	2	0.333	0.419	0.569	0.413	152
Yoan Moncada	White Sox	26	115	6	22	20	2	0.314	0.374	0.571	0.392	150
Nelson Cruz	Twins	23	91	5	14	15	0	0.295	0.396	0.564	0.398	150
Matt Chapman	Athletics	32	131	8	15	20	0	0.282	0.382	0.564	0.390	149
Joc Pederson	Dodgers	29	110	10	22	18	0	0.239	0.355	0.620	0.394	148

## OVERALL RESULTS

Here are some names to think about in 2020 as potential "hot starters." *For what its worth of course.*

*\*Note: When I say April that also includes a handful of games that were played in March.*

**Javier Baez** has gone .276-18-54-57 in just 81 April games, a pace for .275-35-100-115 over 162. He also owns a first half wRC+ of 114 compared to a mere 97 in the second half.

**Cody Bellinger** has a career best 1.090 OPS in April and that doesn't even include his .350 batting average in 65 games. In those 65 outings he's hit 19 homers with 51 RBI and 56 runs scored.

**Brandon Belt** has a second half OPS of .773 in his career but the first half mark is .820.

**Michael Brantley** has hit .308, .341 and .331 the last three Aprils for an overall mark of .327. His three year low in SLG is .517 while his three year low in April for OPS is .885. He's even better than his normal best to start the year.

**Matt Chapman** has an OPS of .922 in June and .944 in August, but his .919 mark in Aprils is still elite.

**Carlos Correa** has hit .314 the last two Aprils. His first half OPS is also .074 points higher than his second half mark at .875.

**Nelson Cruz** has his best monthly OPS in April at .905. That effort includes a .360 OBP and .545 SLG with a .385 wOBA and 142 wRC+, also the best marks of his career.

**Paul DeJong** has crushed it early on. The only month of his career with an .800 OPS is April, and the mark in that time is an elite .944. He also has a 116 wRC+ in the first half compared to 100 in the second.

**Eduardo Escobar** was a fantasy star last season, but look at his excellent work the last two Aprils: .302-.9-31-29 over 50 games. That's a 150-game pace of .302-27-90-85 which is pretty damn good. His OPS the last two Aprils has also been .926 and .920.

**Freddie Freeman** has a career April slash line of .297/.390/.523. The last three years, in 79 April games, he's gone .328-18-51-64. Obvious, elite stuff.

**Joey Gallo** has a .374 wOBA and 127 wRC+ in April.

**Yasmani Grandal** has hit at least .283 in 3-of-4 Aprils. In those three Aprils he's posted OPS marks of .903, .953 and .856.

**Rhys Hoskins** has hit .290 in April. He has no other month above .265. He has a .434 OBP in April. He has no other month above .386. He has a .994 OPS overall with a .269 ISO and massive .419 wOBA and 162 wRC+ marks.

**Max Kepler** is a career .238 hitter, but he's hit at least .278 each of the last three Aprils. His career OPS mark in the month is .882, it was .920 last season, with a .371 wOBA overall.

**Nick Markakis** has hit .286 with a .372 OBP in his career in April. In each of the last six years, six in a row folks, he's hit at least .302 with an aggregate mark of hitting .313 over 559 at-bats. That full season of April work has resulted in a fantasy line of .313-7-78-85-3.

**David Peralta** has hit .302 or better the last three Aprils with his lowest OPS in that time checking in at .893. In 76 games in the month he's gone .315-12-44-47-4.

**Tommy Pham** has an elite career April line of .314/.431/.482, a .912 OPS with a .394 wOBA and 152 wRC+ over 53 games.

**Miguel Sano** has the best BB/K of his career in April (0.41). He also has a month best with a .365 OBP and .869 OPS.



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So, it's come to this. I'm writing about something I don't really believe in, but I feel like I've been forced into a corner so I have to come out swinging. The 2020 MLB season will be more of a sprint than ever before. Sounds like we might have a best-case scenario of half a season worth of games, though there are those doomsday thoughts of a 48-game season as well. Regardless the length of the season, it will be shorter than ever which means we might have to break with our established worldviews of how to analyze players. As a result, we will have to make decisions about players faster than ever before, which brings me to the current topic – *hot starting pitchers*.

I say it all the time – what is the difference between July 5<sup>th</sup> and July 15<sup>th</sup>? Practically speaking there is no difference. That said, one game is in the first half, the other game in the second half, so the results that we record – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> half performance – artificially break up the data to make it appear as if things are drastically different on those two dates, even though we know that simply isn't the case. I often follow up that first statement by saying – there is no difference between the two dates, so don't be one of those people that buys into players being *first or second half guys*.

I've also spoken of the fact that we all love to use artificial end points. Be it first/second half or April/July kinda stuff, we're often talking about periods in time that, again, really offer very little difference (to restate, what's the difference between May 29<sup>th</sup> and June 4<sup>th</sup>?). It's simple and clean, and it sure seems a bit more logical to say 'May 1 to June 1' than to say 'May 12 to June 12.'

Despite those legitimate positions of concern, I'm moving ahead anyway with discussing hot and cold performers early in the season because I think we must given the season this year. Some caveats.

1 – Differences this year are pronounced. In the past, the players followed their normal schedule all offseason, and eased into the season per normal. This year we have Covid-19 and the potential health impact on players/families/friends. We have no idea who has been training as hard as they normally would. We have no idea who has slacked off a bit in their training. We have no idea who is going through family strife. We also have pronounced social unrest that everyone is dealing with. Is it really fair to posit that the 2020 season is similar enough to the "norm" that any of that historical data is actually relevant?

2 – There is no April-May-June to discuss in terms of game action this season. Is it really fair to say 'this guy has been a hot starter' when that players hasn't had a chance to do anything this year? Will that player be hot in July merely because it is the start of the season? Speaking of hot/cold... with the late start to the season, the cold weather will be gone from the early schedule. It's unknown how this removal of cold weather early games will effect the players.

3 – Should a traditional "second half player" be the one we are looking at as a potential hot starter this year? After all, the second half guy will start playing games around the "traditional" time the player gets hot.

4 – Are there really first/second half guys? Are there really hot/cold starters? We have to take into account sample size here. Let's take a look at the following.

Pitcher A has a 3.60 ERA hitter in the first half and 4.20 in the second half.

The assumption would be that Pitcher A is a first half pitcher, but is that truly the case?

*Let's say Pitcher A has played six years.*

*In the first six first halves he's the owner of the following ERA's: 2.25, 3.75, 3.25, 4.50, 4.00, 3.90.*

*Is Player A really a first-half pitcher?*

*Once he was electric, but only twice in six years was his ERA lower than the average ERA he posted in the first half of 3.60. Is that guy really a first half pitcher?*

## FIRST HALF: 2017

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	LOB%	ERA	FIP	xFIP
Corey Kluber	Indians	7	3	0	14	14	93.1	11.86	2.31	0.77	0.75	2.80	2.44	2.66
Chris Sale	Red Sox	11	4	0	18	18	127.2	12.55	1.55	0.78	0.74	2.75	2.10	2.67
Lance McCullers Jr.	Astros	7	2	0	16	16	91.1	10.45	2.66	0.59	0.74	3.05	2.74	2.74
Clayton Kershaw	Dodgers	14	2	0	19	19	132.1	10.81	1.50	1.22	0.89	2.18	3.02	2.76
Luis Severino	Yankees	5	4	0	17	17	106.2	10.46	2.28	1.01	0.74	3.54	3.17	3.06
Max Scherzer	Nationals	10	5	0	18	18	128.1	12.13	1.89	0.91	0.80	2.10	2.62	3.08
Jeff Samardzija	Giants	4	10	0	18	18	118	9.69	1.07	1.37	0.67	4.58	3.45	3.09
Zack Greinke	Diamondbacks	11	4	0	18	18	116.1	10.13	1.78	1.16	0.77	2.86	3.17	3.13
Jimmy Nelson	Brewers	8	4	0	18	18	109	9.74	2.23	0.91	0.77	3.30	3.19	3.31
Jacob deGrom	Mets	9	3	0	17	17	111	10.54	3.08	1.46	0.81	3.65	3.98	3.34
Carlos Carrasco	Indians	10	3	0	17	17	104.2	9.80	2.32	1.03	0.77	3.44	3.42	3.40
Chris Archer	Rays	7	5	0	19	19	123	10.76	2.78	0.95	0.73	3.95	3.17	3.44
Stephen Strasburg	Nationals	9	3	0	18	18	112.2	10.22	2.64	0.88	0.72	3.43	3.14	3.51
Marcus Stroman	Blue Jays	9	5	0	18	18	112.1	7.45	2.32	1.04	0.81	3.28	3.89	3.52
Michael Pineda	Yankees	8	4	0	17	17	96.1	8.60	1.96	1.87	0.73	4.39	4.66	3.61
Trevor Bauer	Indians	7	7	0	17	17	92.2	10.00	3.30	1.36	0.68	5.24	4.06	3.67
Carlos Martinez	Cardinals	6	8	0	18	18	116.1	9.90	3.48	1.08	0.76	3.40	3.79	3.69
Drew Pomeranz	Red Sox	9	4	0	17	17	90	9.80	3.20	1.10	0.77	3.60	3.64	3.69
Robbie Ray	Diamondbacks	8	4	0	17	17	106	11.97	4.42	1.19	0.85	2.97	3.77	3.73
Jon Lester	Cubs	5	6	0	19	19	108	9.17	3.08	1.25	0.67	4.25	3.98	3.74

## FIRST HALF: 2018

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	LOB%	ERA	FIP	xFIP
Chris Sale	Red Sox	10	4	0	20	20	129	13.12	2.16	0.70	0.82	2.23	2.18	2.46
Jacob deGrom	Mets	5	4	0	19	19	123.1	10.87	2.19	0.51	0.86	1.68	2.33	2.76
Patrick Corbin	Diamondbacks	6	4	0	20	20	122.1	10.96	2.57	0.81	0.76	3.24	2.83	2.82
Jon Gray	Rockies	8	7	0	18	18	99.1	11.33	2.72	1.00	0.64	5.44	3.05	2.86
James Paxton	Mariners	8	4	0	20	20	119.1	11.69	2.49	1.21	0.76	3.70	3.16	3.07
Trevor Bauer	Indians	8	6	0	20	20	136.1	11.55	2.77	0.40	0.77	2.24	2.24	3.08
Corey Kluber	Indians	12	5	0	20	20	133.2	8.89	1.14	1.28	0.83	2.76	3.44	3.09
Gerrit Cole	Astros	10	2	0	20	20	128.1	12.41	3.16	0.98	0.83	2.52	2.99	3.10
Charlie Morton	Astros	11	2	0	19	19	112.1	11.70	3.61	0.88	0.80	2.96	3.30	3.12
Luis Severino	Yankees	14	2	0	20	20	128.1	10.10	2.24	0.70	0.83	2.31	2.75	3.13
Max Scherzer	Nationals	12	5	0	20	20	134.2	12.16	2.27	1.00	0.83	2.41	2.82	3.17
Aaron Nola	Phillies	12	3	0	20	20	129	9.14	2.44	0.42	0.80	2.30	2.62	3.24
Zack Greinke	Diamondbacks	10	5	0	20	20	121.2	9.17	1.70	1.18	0.82	3.18	3.50	3.39
Tyler Skaggs	Angels	7	5	0	17	17	98	9.64	2.57	0.73	0.82	2.57	3.03	3.40
Carlos Carrasco	Indians	11	5	0	18	17	102.2	9.82	2.02	1.14	0.72	4.12	3.44	3.41
Nick Pivetta	Phillies	6	7	0	20	19	96.1	10.56	2.80	1.31	0.72	4.58	3.76	3.43
Justin Verlander	Astros	9	5	0	21	21	137.2	11.24	1.57	1.05	0.84	2.29	2.85	3.49
Lance McCullers Jr.	Astros	10	4	0	19	19	112.1	9.53	3.45	0.88	0.71	3.77	3.65	3.51
Marco Gonzales	Mariners	10	5	0	19	19	113.1	7.78	1.75	0.79	0.75	3.41	3.29	3.52
Alex Wood	Dodgers	5	5	0	19	19	105.2	8.01	1.70	1.02	0.68	3.92	3.48	3.55
Mike Foltynewicz	Braves	7	5	0	18	18	101.2	10.62	3.72	0.89	0.80	2.66	3.41	3.56
Blake Snell	Rays	12	5	0	20	20	119	10.13	3.55	0.91	0.86	2.27	3.43	3.59
Jameson Taillon	Pirates	6	7	0	19	19	106	8.75	2.55	1.02	0.74	3.91	3.62	3.60
Dallas Keuchel	Astros	7	8	0	20	20	122.1	6.84	2.43	0.88	0.73	3.75	3.75	3.72



# FIRST HALF: 2019

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	LOB%	ERA	FIP	xFIP
Gerrit Cole	Astros	9	5	0	19	19	116.2	13.11	2.31	1.31	0.77	3.09	3.02	2.71
Max Scherzer	Nationals	9	5	0	19	19	129.1	12.60	1.60	0.63	0.81	2.30	2.02	2.83
Shane Bieber	Indians	8	3	0	19	18	112.1	11.30	1.84	1.36	0.76	3.45	3.37	3.08
Hyun-Jin Ryu	Dodgers	10	2	0	17	17	109	8.17	0.83	0.83	0.87	1.73	2.89	3.12
Stephen Strasburg	Nationals	10	4	0	18	18	116.1	10.68	2.24	1.01	0.72	3.64	3.20	3.16
Chris Sale	Red Sox	3	8	0	18	18	107	12.87	2.19	1.35	0.70	4.04	3.34	3.16
Charlie Morton	Rays	10	2	0	19	19	112.2	11.34	2.88	0.72	0.81	2.32	2.85	3.19
Jacob deGrom	Mets	4	7	0	18	18	110	11.29	2.05	1.15	0.80	3.27	3.15	3.30
Brandon Woodruff	Brewers	10	3	0	18	18	108	10.50	2.08	0.83	0.74	3.67	2.92	3.35
Matthew Boyd	Tigers	6	6	0	18	18	107	11.94	1.68	1.60	0.78	3.87	3.57	3.38
Walker Buehler	Dodgers	8	1	0	17	17	104	9.78	1.21	0.95	0.68	3.46	2.85	3.39
Max Fried	Braves	9	4	0	20	18	98.2	8.85	2.65	1.19	0.76	4.29	3.93	3.45
Sonny Gray	Reds	5	5	0	17	17	90.1	10.26	3.29	0.90	0.73	3.59	3.36	3.49
Clayton Kershaw	Dodgers	7	2	0	15	15	99	8.27	1.45	1.18	0.78	3.09	3.60	3.50
German Marquez	Rockies	8	4	0	20	20	127.1	8.84	1.98	1.20	0.69	4.45	3.76	3.62
Zack Greinke	Diamondbacks	10	3	0	19	19	122	7.97	1.11	0.89	0.78	2.73	3.16	3.65
Patrick Corbin	Nationals	7	5	0	18	18	113.1	10.24	2.62	1.03	0.74	3.34	3.36	3.69
Justin Verlander	Astros	10	4	0	19	19	126.2	10.87	1.92	1.85	0.91	2.98	4.20	3.72
Kyle Gibson	Twins	8	4	0	18	17	94.2	8.94	2.66	1.24	0.71	4.09	4.06	3.79
Luis Castillo	Reds	8	3	0	18	18	106	10.53	4.50	0.76	0.83	2.29	3.68	3.81
Zack Wheeler	Mets	6	6	0	19	19	119	9.83	2.57	1.21	0.66	4.69	3.66	3.87
Aaron Nola	Phillies	8	2	0	19	19	110.2	10.08	3.58	1.22	0.78	3.74	4.09	3.87
Lance Lynn	Rangers	11	4	0	18	18	115	9.63	2.03	0.78	0.72	3.91	2.99	3.88
Tyler Mahle	Reds	2	9	0	17	17	92.2	9.62	2.43	1.75	0.76	4.47	4.54	3.88
Jon Gray	Rockies	9	6	0	19	18	108	9.58	3.50	1.17	0.78	3.92	4.02	3.90

# APRIL 2017

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	LOB%	ERA	FIP	xFIP
Chris Sale	Red Sox	1	2	0	5	5	37.2	12.42	1.43	0.24	0.84	1.19	1.30	2.32
Noah Syndergaard	Mets	1	2	0	5	5	27.1	10.54	0.66	0.00	0.55	3.29	1.15	2.38
Luis Severino	Yankees	2	1	0	4	4	27	11.00	1.33	1.33	0.71	3.00	3.08	2.41
Michael Pineda	Yankees	3	1	0	5	5	28.2	11.62	1.26	1.57	0.78	3.14	3.26	2.48
Jason Vargas	Royals	3	1	0	4	4	25.2	9.82	0.70	0.35	0.83	1.40	1.72	2.60
Jacob deGrom	Mets	1	1	0	5	5	31.2	12.51	3.13	1.14	0.86	2.84	3.06	2.88
Lance McCullers Jr.	Astros	2	1	0	5	5	29	11.17	2.79	1.24	0.76	4.34	3.61	2.92
Clayton Kershaw	Dodgers	4	1	0	5	5	35.1	9.93	0.76	1.02	0.80	2.29	2.68	2.97
James Paxton	Mariners	3	0	0	5	5	32.1	10.86	1.67	0.00	0.82	1.39	1.30	3.01
Marcus Stroman	Blue Jays	2	2	0	5	5	36.1	6.94	1.73	0.50	0.76	2.97	2.99	3.31
Carlos Carrasco	Indians	2	2	0	5	5	35.1	8.66	1.78	1.27	0.96	2.04	3.75	3.37
Mike Leake	Cardinals	3	1	0	5	5	33.1	6.75	1.35	0.00	0.85	1.35	2.11	3.39
Dallas Keuchel	Astros	5	0	0	6	6	44.2	7.25	2.22	0.81	0.99	1.21	3.52	3.39
Adam Wainwright	Cardinals	2	3	0	5	5	25	9.36	2.52	1.08	0.67	6.12	3.48	3.41
Jake Arrieta	Cubs	3	1	0	5	5	29	10.55	2.48	1.86	0.72	4.66	4.43	3.46
Madison Bumgarner	Giants	0	3	0	4	4	27	9.33	1.33	0.67	0.77	3.00	2.60	3.48
Stephen Strasburg	Nationals	2	1	0	5	5	35	7.97	1.80	0.51	0.71	3.09	2.73	3.51
Hyun-Jin Ryu	Dodgers	1	4	0	5	5	26.2	9.79	2.70	2.03	0.87	4.05	5.03	3.51
Zack Greinke	Diamondbacks	2	2	0	6	6	36.2	9.82	1.96	1.23	0.84	3.19	3.40	3.52
Carlos Martinez	Cardinals	0	3	0	5	5	28.2	12.24	4.40	1.26	0.70	4.71	3.93	3.54
Felix Hernandez	Mariners	2	2	0	5	5	26.2	7.43	1.01	2.03	0.84	4.73	5.00	3.54
Robbie Ray	Diamondbacks	2	1	0	5	5	30.1	11.57	5.04	1.19	0.79	3.56	3.98	3.56
Ivan Nova	Pirates	3	2	0	5	5	36	5.50	0.25	0.50	0.79	1.50	2.82	3.58

## APRIL 2018

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	LOB%	ERA	FIP	xFIP
Patrick Corbin	Diamondbacks	4	0	0	6	6	40	12.38	1.58	1.13	0.88	2.25	2.71	2.04
Noah Syndergaard	Mets	2	0	0	6	6	34.2	11.94	1.30	0.78	0.69	2.86	2.15	2.17
Gerrit Cole	Astros	2	1	0	6	6	41.2	13.18	1.73	0.65	0.84	1.73	1.89	2.42
J.A. Happ	Blue Jays	4	1	0	6	6	36	12.50	1.75	1.50	0.79	3.50	3.38	2.59
Lance McCullers Jr.	Astros	4	1	0	6	6	34	11.65	3.18	0.79	0.72	3.71	2.96	2.73
Jacob deGrom	Mets	3	0	0	6	6	39.1	10.98	2.52	0.46	0.82	2.06	2.30	2.77
Marco Gonzales	Mariners	3	2	0	6	6	28.2	9.73	1.57	0.94	0.68	5.02	2.99	2.78
Charlie Morton	Astros	4	0	0	6	6	36.2	11.05	3.19	0.98	0.93	1.72	3.35	2.83
Zack Greinke	Diamondbacks	3	2	0	6	6	36	10.50	1.00	1.50	0.71	4.50	3.49	2.89
Max Scherzer	Nationals	5	1	0	6	6	39	13.15	2.08	0.46	0.77	1.62	1.75	2.91
Clayton Kershaw	Dodgers	1	4	0	6	6	38	9.95	2.13	1.18	0.86	2.84	3.37	2.92
Jose Berrios	Twins	2	3	0	6	6	34.2	9.35	1.56	0.78	0.66	3.63	2.81	3.02
Hyun-Jin Ryu	Dodgers	3	0	0	5	5	28.1	10.80	2.86	0.95	0.87	2.22	3.20	3.04
Chris Sale	Red Sox	2	1	0	6	6	35	11.57	2.06	1.03	0.88	2.31	2.85	3.06
Corey Kluber	Indians	4	1	0	6	6	45.1	9.33	1.79	0.99	0.86	2.18	3.12	3.07
Alex Wood	Dodgers	0	3	0	6	6	35	7.71	0.77	0.51	0.46	4.11	2.45	3.21
Luis Severino	Yankees	4	1	0	6	6	38	9.95	2.61	0.47	0.75	2.61	2.58	3.25
Miles Mikolas	Cardinals	3	0	0	5	5	33	7.36	0.55	1.36	0.77	3.27	3.77	3.25
Stephen Strasburg	Nationals	2	3	0	6	6	39.2	9.76	2.27	1.59	0.75	3.63	4.19	3.27
Rick Porcello	Red Sox	4	0	0	6	6	40.1	8.48	0.89	0.22	0.75	2.23	2.05	3.28
Zack Godley	Diamondbacks	4	1	0	5	5	28.1	8.89	3.49	0.64	0.73	3.81	3.27	3.40
Nick Pivetta	Phillies	1	1	0	6	6	33	9.27	1.91	0.55	0.75	3.27	2.71	3.42
Jon Gray	Rockies	2	4	0	6	6	32.2	9.64	2.48	1.10	0.62	5.79	3.53	3.45
Joey Lucchesi	Padres	3	1	0	6	6	32.1	9.74	2.78	0.84	0.76	2.78	3.13	3.46
Jameson Taillon	Pirates	2	3	0	6	6	31.2	8.24	2.56	1.14	0.68	4.83	4.01	3.47

## APRIL 2019

Name	Team	W	L	SV	G	GS	IP	K/9	BB/9	HR/9	LOB%	ERA	FIP	xFIP
Max Scherzer	Nationals	1	3	0	6	6	39.1	12.36	1.14	0.92	0.64	4.12	2.32	2.57
Blake Snell	Rays	2	2	0	5	5	28.1	12.39	1.91	1.59	0.90	2.54	3.39	2.64
Gerrit Cole	Astros	2	4	0	7	7	43.1	13.50	3.12	1.25	0.60	3.95	3.05	2.86
Sonny Gray	Reds	0	4	0	6	6	29.2	10.92	2.43	0.30	0.59	3.64	2.14	3.04
Stephen Strasburg	Nationals	2	1	0	6	6	37.2	11.47	2.39	1.43	0.74	3.82	3.53	3.05
James Paxton	Yankees	3	2	0	6	6	34.2	13.24	2.60	0.78	0.73	3.38	2.35	3.12
Caleb Smith	Marlins	2	0	0	5	5	29	11.48	2.17	0.93	0.86	2.17	2.73	3.24
Jose Quintana	Cubs	3	1	0	6	5	33.2	10.16	2.41	1.34	0.77	3.48	3.69	3.24
Tyler Glasnow	Rays	5	0	0	6	6	36	9.50	1.75	0.75	0.91	1.75	2.77	3.34
David Price	Red Sox	1	2	0	5	5	30	11.10	2.40	1.20	0.76	3.60	3.28	3.40
Jack Flaherty	Cardinals	3	1	0	6	6	31	10.45	1.74	2.03	0.86	4.06	4.50	3.43
Matthew Boyd	Tigers	2	2	0	6	6	37.1	11.57	2.41	0.48	0.70	3.13	2.30	3.47
Luis Castillo	Reds	3	1	0	7	7	43.1	10.38	3.53	0.42	0.90	1.45	2.89	3.48
Zack Greinke	Diamondbacks	5	1	0	7	7	44	9.41	1.64	1.64	0.81	3.27	4.03	3.52
German Marquez	Rockies	3	2	0	7	7	46	8.41	1.96	0.98	0.81	2.93	3.54	3.55
Luke Weaver	Diamondbacks	2	1	0	6	6	31.1	10.34	2.01	1.15	0.76	3.73	3.44	3.62
Joey Lucchesi	Padres	3	2	0	6	6	31	9.87	2.90	1.16	0.69	4.94	3.67	3.66
Cole Hamels	Cubs	3	0	0	6	6	36.2	9.08	2.95	0.98	0.74	3.19	3.68	3.67
Justin Verlander	Astros	4	1	0	7	7	44	10.84	2.25	1.43	0.93	2.45	3.83	3.70
Noah Syndergaard	Mets	1	3	0	6	6	34	10.32	2.65	1.32	0.57	6.35	3.80	3.76
Max Fried	Braves	3	1	0	7	5	31.1	7.47	2.01	0.86	0.84	2.30	3.57	3.78

## OVERALL RESULTS

Here are some names to think about in 2020 as potential "hot starters." *For what its worth of course.*

*\*Note: When I say April that also includes a handful of games that were played in March.*

**Trevor Bauer** has a 3.22 ERA in April, the best mark of his career. Other monthly bests include: AVG (.201), OBP (.302), SLG (.336) and wOBA (.284).

**Matthew Boyd** has been terrific in April with easily the best month of his career. It's his only month with an ERA under 4.20, the mark is 3.08. It's his only mark with a wOBA under .304 at .276. Given all his homer issues, he had an impressive 0.48 per nine mark last April and he owns a 0.79 mark for his career in the month. Oh yeah, he also is rocking a 1.15 WHIP in April.

**Patrick Corbin** has been dynamite in April. The career numbers include a 3.00 ERA, .288 wOBA, 8.80 K/9, 3.73 K/BB and .230 BAA.

**Zack Greinke** has a career April wOBA of .294, and the last three years the mark has been .302, .312 and .276. He's also racked up 40 punchouts each month for a total of 128 strikeouts in 116.2 innings with a dynamic K/BB ratio of 6.40.

**Cole Hamels** has 84 strikeouts in 76.1 innings the last two years. In 3-of-4 Aprils his ERA has been under 3.20 and his WHIP has been below 1.15 in 2-of-3 years.

**Joey Lucchesi** has a slightly below average .339 wOBA in the second half, but in the first half his ERA is more than a point lower at 3.69 and he has held batters to a .225 average and a .289 wOBA in the first half.

**Lance Lynn** has a career K/9 rate of 9.31 in April, the best month of his career.

**German Marquez** has a career best .299 wOBA in April as batters have posted a mere .248/.317/.381 slash line (check out that SLG again). In those 84 innings he's allowed only seven homers, good for a 0.75 HR/9 rate thanks in no small part to his 1.81 GB/FB.

**Lance McCullers** is often hurt, but he's been much better in the first half (3.32 ERA, 3.06 FIP, .646 OPS, 0.58 HR/9, .286 wOBA) than in the second (4.55 ERA, 3.70 FIP, .767 OPS, 0.98 HR/9, .333 wOBA).

**Charlie Morton** has a K/9 rate of 11.5 the last two Aprils. He's also posted a left on base rate above 80 percent each month leading to a 2.85 FIP and 3.19 xFIP in 2019 and marks of 3.30 and 3.12 in 2018.

**Aaron Nola** has a fantastic .297 wOBA in the second half in his career, but the mark is even better in the first half at .281. He's also been better in the first half in GB/FB (1.82 compared to 1.58).

**Robbie Ray** has a first half wOBA of .315, compared to .323 in the second half. His ERA is much lower early at 3.84, compared to 4.41 in the second half.

**Caleb Smith** has a career April of a 3.28 ERA, .259 wOBA and .179 BAA with a 1.04 WHIP. Toss in that radical 12.17 K/9 rate and you have on hell of a dominant performer in his 57.2 innings of work.

**Marcus Stroman** has been really difficult to hit in the month of April with a .241 average, a .650 OPS and a .286 wOBA.

**Masahiro Tanaka** has been sparking in his career in April with a 3.42 ERA and 1.07 WHIP.

**Luke Weaver** sees his ERA improve by  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a run in the first half (4.10) while his wOBA drops more than 50 points (.300). He's also been less homer prone at 1.02 per nine in the first half and 1.40 in the second.



## Short Season: Avoid Pitchers With Velocity?

By Ray Flowers

The title of this piece isn't merely for SEO purposes, or to cause an uproar from me trying to make a stupid point, so let's settle this right at the start. Do you avoid a guy like **Justin Verlander** or **Jon Gray** merely because they throw hard? The answer is a definitive *no*. So, what am I intending to talk about then, you might ask?

One of the smarter guys in the fantasy baseball analysis world is *Jeff Zimmerman*. A few years back he wrote an intriguing article, which I felt was worth revisiting this year, titled [Velocity's Relationship With Pitcher Arm Injuries](#) (note that Jeff did an updated review on pitching and the IL [a week ago](#)). From the conclusion of the well-documented piece. "*High velocity pitchers are more likely to go on the disabled list for an arm-related injury than those pitchers whose fastballs don't register as much heat.*" If we think about it for a while, stripping aside everything but common sense, it sure does make sense, don't it? Throwing 95-mph has to wear out your arm quicker than throwing 90-mph. Of course, that's logic a 12 year old would employ. Doesn't make it wrong, but it's just too simplistic. That's why Jeff did actual research which seemed to show a connection between velocity and injury (his research also showed that there didn't seem to be a correlation with adding velocity leading to injury).

What velocity should we be thinking about as entering the potential danger zone? *"A pitcher who throws a fastball harder than 93 mph is almost twice as likely to end up on the DL, for an average of 60 days, than one who throws less than 90 mph."* Another interesting aspect of the study is the fact that the velocity seemed to bite players in year two. *"The difference in injury likelihood is not really in play for the season the pitcher threw hard. The real difference is in the next season."* That's why looking at last years numbers makes sense for the 2020 season. So, let's do just that.

Here are the pitchers who threw 93-mph last season on their fastball (data from *Fangraphs*). I set the minimum at 140-innings pitched. There were 88 such men. Listed is the velocity as well as the percentage of pitches thrown that were the fastball.

Name	FB%	FBv		Name	FB%	FBv
Noah Syndergaard	59.20%	97.7		Chris Paddack	61.10%	93.9
Gerrit Cole	54.00%	97.2		Jack Flaherty	58.20%	93.9
Jacob deGrom	49.50%	96.9		Stephen Strasburg	48.30%	93.9
Zack Wheeler	59.00%	96.7		Andrew Cashner	48.30%	93.9
Walker Buehler	60.30%	96.6		Max Fried	56.90%	93.8
Luis Castillo	50.60%	96.5		Spencer Turnbull	64.70%	93.8
Jon Gray	52.50%	96.1		Dakota Hudson	61.70%	93.7
Sandy Alcantara	57.00%	95.6		Miles Mikolas	51.50%	93.6
German Marquez	52.20%	95.5		Domingo German	44.90%	93.6
James Paxton	59.90%	95.5		Zach Eflin	55.60%	93.6
Reynaldo Lopez	58.60%	95.5		Chris Bassitt	64.80%	93.5
Max Scherzer	48.30%	94.9		Brad Keller	66.80%	93.4
Anthony DeSclafani	55.60%	94.7		Steven Matz	50.60%	93.4
Justin Verlander	49.90%	94.7		Sonny Gray	47.20%	93.3
Trevor Bauer	42.30%	94.6		Kyle Gibson	50.30%	93.3
Charlie Morton	49.00%	94.4		Chris Sale	46.40%	93.2
Lucas Giolito	55.00%	94.3		Shane Bieber	45.60%	93.1
Lance Lynn	71.40%	94.2		Eduardo Rodriguez	54.60%	93.1
Yu Darvish	34.90%	94.2		Homer Bailey	50.60%	93.0
Martin Perez	42.30%	94.1				

The hardest thrower in baseball – Syndergaard – is always hurt. He had Tommy John surgery in March.

Cole/deGrom are rarely out of the lineup with injury.

Wheeler is fourth on the list, and he's had a lot of arm issues, on and off, for years.

You can go down the list and pick out guys that have been healthy, and guys that have dealt with injuries. Is that directly related to velocity? Is it mechanics? What about genetics? Perhaps

it's the type of pitches thrown, the amount of pitches thrown per day or per outing? The truth is that the answer isn't any one of any of those things. There's no formula we can use to plot the expected course of a pitcher's career, let alone if we try to determine a guy's outlook merely based off his velocity. Still, this study suggests that high end velocity brings with it a bit more risk in terms of the pitcher remaining healthy.

How about a couple of real-world numbers to put this into perspective?

A player misses 15 games in a 162-game season misses nine percentage of games.

A player missed 30 games in a 162-game season misses 19 percentage of games.

A player misses 15 games in a 75-game season misses 20 percentage of games.

A player misses 30 games in a 75-game season misses 40 percentage of games.

Obviously, pitchers missing any time this season would have an immensely larger portion of missed games in terms a percentage, and that could crush a fantasy squad. Therefore, being cautious about which players you draft, potentially even tilting a bit toward boring/stable players, might make sense (check out [The Role Of Injuries in 2020](#)).

If we were going to say that there is an increased risk for pitchers with higher velocity, and that any missed time this season is exponentially more damaging to a fantasy squad, then who are some soft throwing arms that might have a better shot at staying healthy than some of their harder throwing brethren? Remember, and let me stress this point, I am NOT saying that you should avoid pitchers with high end velocity. N-O-T saying that. I'm merely speaking to the study that suggest that pitchers might be more susceptible to injury when they live in the upper end of the velocity chain.

Here are the arms that threw less than 93 mph on their average fastball last season while tossing at least 140-innings.



Name	FB%	FBv		Name	FB%	FBv
Jake Odorizzi	57.80%	92.9		Jose Quintana	61.80%	91.4
Aaron Nola	46.30%	92.9		Cole Hamels	47.50%	91.4
Trent Thornton	46.60%	92.9		Trevor Williams	66.70%	91.3
Jose Berrios	55.30%	92.8		J.A. Happ	67.40%	91.3
Jordan Lyles	51.90%	92.6		Dylan Bundy	50.00%	91.2
Mike Minor	44.60%	92.6		Brett Anderson	48.60%	90.8
Michael Pineda	55.30%	92.6		Daniel Norris	51.60%	90.8
Marcus Stroman	39.40%	92.5		Hyun-Jin Ryu	40.60%	90.6
Mike Soroka	63.40%	92.5		Wade Miley	21.90%	90.5
Yusei Kikuchi	49.10%	92.5		Anibal Sanchez	35.40%	90.5
Joe Musgrove	49.50%	92.4		Rick Porcello	56.50%	90.5
Ivan Nova	54.20%	92.4		Mike Fiers	52.30%	90.4
Robbie Ray	52.60%	92.4		Clayton Kershaw	44.10%	90.4
Kenta Maeda	37.40%	92.1		Jon Lester	38.40%	90.3
Tanner Roark	55.30%	92.1		Joey Lucchesi	51.00%	90.2
Matthew Boyd	53.80%	92.0		Zack Greinke	46.50%	90.0
Jeff Samardzija	45.60%	91.9		Adam Wainwright	38.50%	89.9
Merrill Kelly	46.70%	91.9		Julio Teheran	63.80%	89.7
Eric Lauer	53.00%	91.9		Marco Gonzales	39.30%	88.9
Patrick Corbin	53.70%	91.9		Zach Davies	52.60%	88.5
John Means	50.70%	91.8		Mike Leake	34.30%	88.4
Caleb Smith	53.70%	91.6		Ryan Yarbrough	24.10%	88.2
Jakob Junis	50.90%	91.5		Kyle Hendricks	62.20%	86.9
Masahiro Tanaka	30.60%	91.5		Jason Vargas	49.50%	84.3
Madison Bumgarner	43.10%	91.4				

My comments will focus on those guys under 91 mph.

**Brett Anderson** can't stay healthy, and doesn't miss any bats when he does.

**Daniel Norris** was solid last year when the Tigers made him a 3-inning pitcher.

**Hyun-Jin Ryu** move to AL East, contract, and health concerns dog him. Oh yeah, also coming off one of the most effective pitching seasons in recent memory is also hanging like a weight around his neck.

**Wade Miley** collapsed last season. The definition of *just a guy* who merely eats innings.

**Anibal Sanchez** has trouble staying healthy, but he can be quite effective and can shut down an opponent in any start.

**Rick Porcello** takes the ball and aims for a quality start.

**Mike Fiers** doesn't bring the strikeouts, allows too many fly balls and is living on thin ice after last year's success.

**Clayton Kershaw** doesn't dominate as he once did and is no longer elite, but he's on the next tier.

**Jon Lester** is aging and not much other than a streaming option in mixed leagues.

**Joey Lucchesi** – see his [Player Profile](#).

**Zack Greinke** knows how to pitch, and he's just a likely to beat you with an 88 mph fastball as he is with a 68 mph curve.

**Adam Wainwright** is of no fantasy use, but he has real world value for the Cardinals.

**Julio Teheran** – see his [Player Profile](#).

**Marco Gonzales** needs to miss more bats, but he's proven durable and usually doesn't beat himself.

**Zach Davies** sometimes outpaces the metrics, but sooner or later you have to pay the piper.

**Mike Leake** isn't worth your time on draft day.

**Ryan Yarbrough** – see his [Player Profile](#).

**Kyle Hendricks** is the unicorn of Pitchers in 2020. His ratios are starrng despite having a razor thin margin of error.

**Jason Vargas** is someone we have all owned, but we've never felt anything other than dirty for doing it.

Velocity is not the only game in town and keep in mind that you may have to do some roster juggling this season if you have rostered a ton of big mph arms.



## Handling FAAB in a Shortened Season

By Vlad Sedler

At some point in the not-too-distant future, our lives should be somewhat back to normal. Namely, baseball on the television and fantasy rosters to manage. From the time the world (and baseball) shut down in mid-March until Opening Day 2020 hopefully in early July, it will feel like eons have passed. But by the second week of the season, our favorite distraction will occupy our minds and hearts with that overpowering longing for the great pastime a distant memory. And with that sudden jolt of reality, it will be time to focus on weekly improvement of our rosters via free agent acquisition budgets (FAAB) which, those who do it correctly and mindfully know, is a key component of success in fantasy baseball.

But this year's FAAB will be an entirely new puzzle as we will constantly have to adjust on the fly and stay more alert than any season ever before. Those who take the time to consider the nuances of FAAB in this new, fast-paced environment should find themselves ahead of the curve, in relation to league-mates. *Most notably, this 80 or 82-game season means we will have roughly 13 weekly bidding periods as opposed to our usual 26.* Every new roster addition will be evermore meaningful and our decisions will carry a greater impact on our statistical output and league standing. The old fantasy baseball adage 'marathon not a sprint' will have a stronger essence this half-season, but in reverse: this will be the ultimate sprint with very little margin for error.

## DRAFTING NOT TO FAAB

We will soon have the opportunity to construct rosters via online drafts and auctions, but under novel constraints and a shift in our focus. Not a one among us will draft perfect rosters and just about every single one of us will start focusing on the undrafted players for our weekly FAAB. With the certainty of draft day imperfection and the inevitability of IL stints, the very best approach is to avoid hitters and pitchers with even the faintest scent of physical ailments or poor conditioning.

Not every MLB'er is staying active and fresh over this two-month hiatus and this fact will rear its lazy head when they all come back for Spring Training Part Deux. The rusty ones are much more likely to tweak a hamstring or oblique and in turn, they won't be assets worth investing in on draft day. We always preach overloading 'stashes' (injured players and prospects). And so, it is incredibly important to avoid too many of these in drafts, especially with short seven-player benches. Doing so creates dead spots and puts us behind the eight-ball before Opening Day 2020 even hits. We want to use FAAB offensively, not defensively, if at all possible. Which means having the flexibility to plan who our drops will be and not be forced to drop players we invested worthwhile draft capital in. Cross those liabilities off your list instantly so you have more control of your weekly FAAB.

Focusing on your perennial roto category weaknesses is something else to be mindful of. If you constantly find yourself chasing speed or saves in FAAB every year, put the onus on making sure you leave the draft room comfortable in those categories or positions so you aren't inevitably chasing and overspending valuable FAAB dollars in-season.

Closers and saves are something I'll personally be making a priority when we start drafting again. That doesn't necessarily mean bumping **Josh Hader** into the fourth round (of 15-teamers) or **Kirby Yates** in the sixth. But perhaps just making sure that I leave the 10<sup>th</sup> round with at least two of my favorite guys in the middle range among **Hector Neris**, **Kenley Jansen**, **Ken Giles** or **Edwin Diaz**. Mostly so that I have a stable and long-leashed duo so that I don't have to venture into that next range of dicey and quick-hook options (**Brandon Workman**, **Archie Bradley**) or closers on teams like the Tigers and Pirates who might be lucky to even present 25 save opportunities to **Joe Jimenez** or **Keone Kela**. And heaven forbid having to delve into the dungy backend waters of **Brandon Kintzler**, **Wade Davis** and whatever the Mariners will throw at us. The very last thing we want to be doing this shortened season is wasting all of our valuable free agent mullah on guessing who a team's next closer might be, how long can he hold the job and how much will he cost us.

Drafting with a fine-tuned approach for the short-haul gives us the ability to spend time during the week finding the streaming hitters and pitchers (rentals) we will need to create optimal lineups based on the following week's schedule. Oftentimes, those FAAB adds come for pennies on the dollar in relation to the obscene price tags we are likely to see when a red-hot bat or potential closer du jour pop into your line of sight.

Which brings us to the topic of money management.

## CALCULATED AGGRESSION

Tell me you can't already foresee this scenario.

During that first week of action, Orioles' prospect **Ryan Mountcastle** is slaying opposing pitchers, hitting .420 with three homers and seven RBI. **Reynaldo Lopez**, the guy you passed on in the 30<sup>th</sup> round kicks the season off with an eight-inning gem with no runs allowed and seven whiffs. Meanwhile, **Carl Edwards Jr.** converts two save opps out of the blue for a shockingly hot-start Mariners and we head into the first week of bidding with three highly-coveted FAAB options for that first bidding period.

Most will have the mindset of: *hey, I've got the same \$1,000 to spend this season but half the time to do it in, so I'm doing it big.* That might mean that a typical 2019 bid of \$56 for someone of Mountcastle's ilk might go for \$350 in this new era of FAAB. Others will run with the notion that *first base is a shallow position, I hate my guy there already, Mountcastle's an upgrade so let's go \$350 weeeee.* Yet each and every week there will be someone like Mountcastle available who just had a hot week who could have an even stronger long-term impact on your stats.

That's why knowing the player pool as well as skill levels and upside within the pool is important before we even begin our weekly bidding. You then go through a mental checklist of:

- a) *Is this a flash-in-the-pan week? worth the new inflated price tag?*
- b) *Is he getting more playing time because of injury to a starter and does he have staying power?*
- c) *Where does he hit in the order? Who hits around him? Team context. Ballpark context.*
- d) *Is my team shallow at this position that he'd be an every-week start for me?*
- e) *Who are the comparable hitters in FAAB who will be my secondary/backup bids?*
- f) *What is he worth to me and does he have staying power on my squad?*

This is an exercise you should be running through for each of your bid lists every week. As the season progresses, you'll have a better feel of your league-mates bidding tendencies and nuances to figure out how to get the players you're targeting in FAAB.

Maybe you were already on the Reynaldo Train before this season, believing that he is a talented arm who had always underperformed and that with a strong team behind him and pitch-framer extraordinaire **Yasmani Grandal** behind the plate, Lopez's first start of 2020 was not a fluke. You'd likely first compare him to the pitcher you are pondering to drop for Lopez and assess if it is worth it. Or perhaps you see some nice starts on the horizon for him, say a two-start week against the Royals and Tigers coming up and you are certain you want to get into a bidding war.

Perhaps you are convinced that this Seattle closing gig is made for Edwards and that manager Scott Servais has already declared he prefers to use **Matt Magill** and **Yoshi Hirano** as setup men. You've got two solid closers and a dicey third closer on your roster. You likely won't get Edwards because you're not going to spend \$500 on him, but in a world of volatility, it never hurts to have another saves guy. In this case, you can always throw in a 'keep'em honest' bid of whatever amount you feel comfortable with and perhaps you get lucky. If you miss out, no big whoop as you've got saves covered for now and can perhaps pounce on a closer-in-waiting for single-digit FAAB dollars later down the line.

These scenarios and details illustrate the simple yet important notion that context is everything when it comes to your bids. A season of just 13 total bid periods where on average you make three bids per week means that on a \$1000 budget your average bid price per player is only \$25. Granted, we'll throw some whale bids of a few hundred dollars for the right asset and we will certainly win some players for \$1 to \$7 as well. So, with a few big spends through the first three weeks and your team could be low in

funds. That's why running through these mental exercises of determining value of the player on his own team as well as *for your fantasy team* is of the utmost importance. Bidders will be more aggressive this season than ever. You can do that too but can be more like a sniper who takes his calculated shots.

### **HIGHLY COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT**

We are used to having managers in our leagues skip a bid period, forget to set lineups or give up entirely before we even hit July's All-Star break. Oftentimes, we're in leagues where the number of managers who are competitively setting lineups and bidding on free agents greatly declines in those last couple months. You're able to easily win bids on whoever you want in September if you have money left because there are only a couple others to compete against. Suffice it to say, managers will be more engaged throughout the duration of this year's half-season competition because the finish line appears closer and even those at the bottom of standings will feel like they have a chance to shoot up.

Bidding will be most competitive that first month and will slowly die down as always, but not to the degree of any year before. Granted, many folks taking a more aggressive approach in July bidding means we will see some fantasy football-type bids of 80 to 90 percent of budgets on a budding star or reliever anointed to get saves. That is probably why it will be even more important to save a chunk of your FAAB funds for that final month of the season when you'll really need it.

It will be a delicate balance. If you splurge on a must-have free agent in July or August, your budget is hamstrung down the stretch. On the other end, if you're not aggressive enough on the right additions and your core roster is just idling by, those funds for the final month may not make a difference.

One strategy you could employ is to pretend you only have 80 percent of your budget to start and make your weekly bids accordingly. That way you have \$200 (\$1000 FAAB) or \$20 (\$100 FAAB) remaining for the four-to-six weeks to really hone in on the categories you are deficient in. That might mean streaming two-start pitchers because you need K's and W's because your ratios are good. Or bidding on emerging rabbits because you're so far ahead of the field in power but deficient in stolen bases.

### **CHURN AND BURN**

Last, but not least, be ready to part ways with players you've drafted who aren't earning their keep. Waiting on a hitter to pull out of a slump while in your lineup can be damaging. At the same time, we risk falling into poor timing of our assets where they get hot and start mashing the very week we drop them. For these players, it is important to look at context when deciding whether we dump or keep them. Has another player on the team taken their prime lineup slot? Are they mired in a platoon and not playing every day? Were they previously battling some type of injury or appear out of shape? Are they a low-average, high-strikeout guy more likely to slump?

If you answered yes to any of those questions, then perhaps it's time to move on from them. Real-life managers will pull out all the stops and employ kooky strategies that will have fantasy-related implications. Something that is very likely is these major-league managers having little patience with a starting pitcher struggling in those early innings or a borderline starting hitter or platoon bat going through a rough stretch at the plate. Keep your pulse on what managers around the league are doing with their lineups, rotations and bullpens and that will guide you towards the wiser weekly FAAB decisions.



Most importantly, *pay attention to schedules in the coming weeks*. Treat each two-week period as its own mini-season. For many years now in FAAB, we have targeted hitters heading to play in Coors Field, and the last couple seasons we have picked on Baltimore Orioles pitchers. Perhaps we recognize this half-season that the AL East is a goldmine for hitters because Orioles pitching is horrendous, the Blue Jays are below average, the Red Sox without **Chris Sale** have no depth and that Yankee Stadium continues to be a great place for hitters to excel. If you haven't already built your team in the draft with this in mind, then you can simply focus on picking up hitters in good matchups within this division each week. It may turn out that the NL Central is a hitters' gold mine in 2020, we don't know yet. But at least we'll pay attention to early trends and adjust our strategies accordingly.

At the end of the day, this shortened season is going to be a wild ride. An unpredictable experience like no other. One that we will have to be hyper-alert for and truly treat like the sprint that it will be. Wrapping our heads around the faster-paced, more aggressive nature of FAAB in an 80 or so game season is the first step to success. We then need to focus our draft strategy around less volatile, more grounded hitting and pitching assets. Those least likely to lose their manager's faith if they hit a rough bump or fall into partial playing time only. As the season goes, we run through our mental checklist for each set of bids every week to ensure we are optimizing our lineups not only for the following week, but for the short-term. Finally, whatever you do, do **not** save or stash injured players or prospects on your bench for long. Keep your lineup fluid and flexible, preferably with multi-position eligible hitters, so that you can easily replace guys who get hurt in your lineups so that you avoid the ever-dangerous goose egg in your lineup.

My weekly FAAB column will debut prior to the first week of the season and I'll help guide you to success and domination along the way. The sprint is about to get started, on your marks, get set, go!



## THE PODCAST SECTION

You can find all the podcasts on every topic [HERE](#).

Here are some direct links to help you with the re-draft season.

[SHOULD WE REDRAFT?](#)

[THE UNIVERSAL DH](#)

[ROSTER CONSTRUCTION IN THE COVID ERA](#)

[TYPES OF LEAGUES IN THE COVID ERA](#)

[FAST STARTING PLAYERS IN 2020](#)

[AL POST HYPE SLEEPERS](#)

[NL POST HYPE SLEEPERS](#)

[MIDDLE RELIEVERS TO TARGET](#)

[2020 PRESEASON GREATEST HITS](#)



## THE RANKINGS SECTION

You know where to find them, but in case you don't know, here is where you can find [THE RANKINGS](#). Note, they have been fully updated, as always, by Ray Flowers

You can also find Vlad Sedler's [MLB Draft Book](#) for another take on the players.