

VSIN PRO

BASEBALL

BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION



THE BOYS OF SUMMER

TIPS & STRATEGIES ON BETTING BASEBALL

OUR PRO GUIDE INCLUDES

- A PLAYER'S PERSPECTIVE ON HANDICAPPING PITCHERS
- AWARDS & FUTURES MARKETS
- FULL STATS GLOSSARY

VSIN

Greetings, all!

We're very lucky to be out here in Las Vegas, where the winter is far more manageable than it is in most places, but the start of Spring Training always seems to provide a bit of a morale boost to know that better weather is coming and so is baseball. Hopefully the VSiN MLB Betting Guide also serves as a way to get you excited for the upcoming season.

In this year's MLB Guide, you will find:

- A stats glossary from lead MLB analyst Adam Burke
- General baseball betting tips
- A breakdown of the 2025 World Series odds
- Players to consider in the Cy Young and MVP Awards markets
- A Player's Perspective on handicapping pitchers from new VSiN host and former MLB reliever Jensen Lewis
- Links to all 30 of Adam's MLB Team Previews at VSiN.com

It is a long season and we feel like this is the best way to get ready for the grind. Our coverage will continue throughout Spring Training as we look ahead to Opening Day in Tokyo on March 17 between the Dodgers and Cubs and then Opening Day for everybody else on March 27, not to mention all of our daily MLB best bets, picks, and analysis on the site and on our VSiN 24/7 broadcast channel.

Tune into Sirius XM Channel 158, find us wherever you listen to podcasts, catch us on YouTube TV, or simply watch/listen on the site or the VSiN Watch App with your subscription.

Happy reading and happy baseball season!

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WORLD SERIES

SHOTS

By Adam Burke

The last time we had a repeat World Series champion came back in 2000, as the New York Yankees won their third straight and fourth in five years. We haven't even had a team in position to defend their Fall Classic crown since 2009 when the Philadelphia Phillies lost in six games to the Yankees after winning it all in 2008 against the Tampa Bay Rays.

If the odds board is to be believed this season, then the Los Angeles Dodgers will end that drought. After winning their first non-COVID World Series since 1988, the most expensive baseball team on the planet is the shortest price to take down the October (or November) grand prize.

Tying up your money with a +300 return for 7-8 months is a tall ask, even if it is hard to see a path for other teams. After all, the Dodgers have a season win total of 103.5, far and away higher than any other team. Are there some prices worth investing in? Let's find out.

The state of the American League is pretty obvious when you dig into the futures odds. Four NL teams are priced shorter than the second AL representative and the Yankees are nearly half the price of the next likeliest candidate. Not only that, but three NL East teams join the Dodgers at short odds based on the strength and depth of that division.

I'll group the teams into "short, medium, and long" shots and talk about the ones that I like.

SHORT SHOTS (3/1 TO 17/1)

BALTIMORE ORIOLES (17/1)

I don't see the Yankees as a runaway team in the AL East. The Orioles have a strong bullpen and enough starting pitching to be a contender, plus we could see them be aggressive in pursuit of a starter come July based on the position player depth that they have accumulated. After finishing third in wOBA and fifth in wRC+ last season, I expect something similar or possibly more from the Orioles, who are a year older, wiser, and deeper with some stronger bench players and the return of closer Felix Bautista.

This looks like a playoff team to me and a price that should remain towards the top of the market as the season goes along, whereas you might be able to get other teams at better numbers.

MEDIUM SHOTS (22/1 TO 50/1)

DETROIT TIGERS (35/1)

The AL Central is wide open and getting to the dance with a 35/1 like Detroit or a 40/1 like Cleveland is not a bad starting point. The winner of the ALC will be at home in the Wild Card Round and potentially in the ALDS as well, depending on how the AL West shakes out. It is entirely possible that this division produces the No. 2 seed, just like it did last year.

The reason I prioritize the Tigers over the Guardians - and I think those are the two best teams in the division - is because of the depth of Detroit's rotation. The Guardians do have the better bullpen, but the strain on those arms between last season and this season may be detrimental, as we saw in the ALDS against the Yankees last year. Detroit, meanwhile, can get more length from the starters and I doubt the two offenses are that different.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS (50/1)

Similarly, the NL Central is wide open, but I think the Brewers are still the team to beat. Jackson Chourio is a burgeoning superstar and Milwaukee always finds enough arms to get through 162 games. I don't think any team outside of the four short shots (Dodgers, Braves, Phillies, Mets) makes it to the World Series, but you can lock up some profit with a 50/1, especially if the Brewers can navigate the NL Wild Card Series to get a round deeper. This is more of a pick on the Brewers to win the NL Central and have a ticket to the dance.

LONG SHOTS (60/1 AND UP)

PITTSBURGH PIRATES (120/1)

In full disclosure, I do not have a bet on this, but this is the long shot I would think long and hard about. The offense leaves a lot to be desired, but Paul Skenes, Jared Jones, and Bubba Chandler in a short series is not enjoyable to face. If the Pirates can play low-scoring games in a hypothetical playoff series, a hit here or a hit there could be the difference, thus making them something of a live underdog against a superior team.

The NL Central is wide open, and while the Pirates are lined as the long shot (I think the Cardinals should be), the upside of their starting pitching is hard to ignore in a division where no team or unit truly stands out otherwise.

WORLD SERIES ODDS

Odds from DraftKings
February 25

LOS ANGELES DODGERS 3/1
ATLANTA BRAVES +750
NEW YORK YANKEES 8/1
PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES 12/1
NEW YORK METS 12/1
HOUSTON ASTROS 15/1
BALTIMORE ORIOLES 17/1
BOSTON RED SOX 22/1
ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS 25/1
TEXAS RANGERS 25/1
MINNESOTA TWINS 25/1
SEATTLE MARINERS 28/1
SAN DIEGO PADRES 28/1
KANSAS CITY ROYALS 30/1
CHICAGO CUBS 30/1
DETROIT TIGERS 35/1
CLEVELAND GUARDIANS 40/1
TAMPA BAY RAYS 50/1
MILWAUKEE BREWERS 50/1
TORONTO BLUE JAYS 60/1
SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS 80/1
CINCINNATI REDS 100/1
ST. LOUIS CARDINALS 120/1
PITTSBURGH PIRATES 120/1
LOS ANGELES ANGELS 200/1
ATHLETICS 250/1
WASHINGTON NATIONALS 300/1
MIAMI MARLINS 500/1
COLORADO ROCKIES 500/1
CHICAGO WHITE SOX 500/1



AMERICAN LEAGUE

PREVIEWS BY ADAM BURKE

CLICK A TEAM TO VIEW THE PREVIEW

AL EAST PREVIEWS



BALTIMORE ORIOLES



BOSTON RED SOX



NEW YORK YANKEES



TAMPA BAY RAYS



TORONTO BLUE JAYS

AL CENTRAL PREVIEWS



CHICAGO WHITE SOX



CLEVELAND GUARDIANS



DETROIT TIGERS



KANSAS CITY ROYALS



MINNESOTA TWINS

AL WEST PREVIEWS



ATHLETICS



HOUSTON ASTROS



LOS ANGELES ANGELS



SEATTLE MARINERS



TEXAS RANGERS

NATIONAL LEAGUE

PREVIEWS BY ADAM BURKE

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NL EAST PREVIEWS



ATLANTA BRAVES



MIAMI MARLINS



NEW YORK METS



PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES



WASHINGTON NATIONALS

NL CENTRAL PREVIEWS



CHICAGO CUBS



CINCINNATI REDS



MILWAUKEE BREWERS



PITTSBURGH PIRATES



ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

NL WEST PREVIEWS



ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS



COLORADO ROCKIES



LOS ANGELES DODGERS



SAN DIEGO PADRES



SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS



BASICS OF BETTING BASEBALL

By Adam Burke

There are some fundamental differences between baseball and other sports that are worth discussing, along with some higher-level thoughts to keep in mind as the season draws near.

Let's start with the differences and then get into the strategy.

MLB BETTING UNIQUENESS

BASEBALL IS A MONEYLINE SPORT

Instead of having a spread like football and basketball, baseball is a moneyline sport. In nearly all cases, there will be a plus-money line on the underdog and a minus-money line on the favorite, something like -140 and +120.

The moneyline odds, much like in other sports, convert to an implied win probability, which is how the sportsbooks set the odds and how bettors analyze which side they want to bet.

You can bet a version of a spread called the "run line", which is traditionally listed at -1.5, but there are "alternate run lines" out there like -2.5, -3.5, +2.5, etc., but moneylines are the most common bet type.

STARTING PITCHERS DETERMINE THE ODDS

The strength of the team and the lineup are absolutely factors, but the starting pitcher is the most important part of the handicap and they are actually listed by the odds for the game. That is obviously different from something like the NFL or NHL, where the quarterback and goaltender are extremely important, but aren't specifically listed.

A really bad offensive team may have its best starting pitcher on the mound and they won't be nearly as much of an underdog as they would be with somebody else in line for the start.

1ST 5 VS. FULL GAME

Bettors have the option to bet on the 1st 5 Innings (think 1st Half) or full game. A lot of bettors will shy away from full-game betting in baseball because of the volatility of bullpens and relief pitchers. Also, you've handicapped the game based on the starting pitchers. What happens when they leave the game is open to a lot of interpretation.

It's not like the QB suddenly gets replaced for somebody with a fresher arm in the third quarter or a goaltender gets pulled because he's tired in the third period. Relative to baseball, other sports operate under a "the game is the game" type of premise. In baseball, the guy with the biggest impact on the game is typically pitching five or six innings of a nine-inning game.

1ST INNING BETS

A lot of bettors love to play "Yes/No 1st Inning Run" props. You could think of this as a 1st Quarter or "Race to X Points" prop if you want, but these are growing in popularity, especially because there are a lot of people out there who find baseball boring and would rather have an instant gratification bet in play. These odds will obviously be set based on the starting pitchers and the top of each batting order.

These are the four main differences. There are other nuances, but I'll touch on those as part of the strategy elements.

MLB BETTING STRATEGIES

SHOP AROUND FOR THE BEST ODDS

Baseball used to have a standard called "Dime Lines", which are still used in faraway places at some sportsbooks, but most of the market now uses a 20-cent line or sometimes higher.

You want to find a sportsbook that offers fair MLB odds. A "20-cent line" would be like the above example of an underdog at +120 and a favorite at -140. A "dime line" or "10-cent line" would be more like +120 and -130 or +125 and -135. The type of line is defined by the difference between the two odds.

It is always in your best interest to shop around for the best odds and moneyline sports make that concept even more vital. Don't take -140 when you can have -135. If you are betting \$100 per unit, it is a five-dollar difference to bet \$140 to win \$100 as opposed to \$135 to win \$100. Those differences add up. More often than not, spreads are very similar across the board. Moneyline sports can have more variance from sportsbook to sportsbook with the odds.

ANALYZE THE WEATHER AND THE BALLPARK

Basketball courts are pretty much all the same. Football fields have different playing surfaces, but are still 100 yards with two end zones. Baseball stadiums vary greatly and play to different strengths and weaknesses.

Home teams across sports have advantages based on the crowd, familiarity, and sometimes the weather, but all 30 Major League stadiums are different. Every stadium stores the baseballs to be used in the game in a humidifier to try and account for the atmospheric differences in an effort to standardize the ball.

But, all ballparks and environments are different. In hotter weather, a team that hits for

more power may have a big advantage over a team that does not. Teams without power bats may fare better in the cooler months in April and early May than they will in the summertime because the other team's offensive output will be diminished. Ballparks with deeper dimensions may hurt left-handed hitters or right-handed hitters based on how far away the wall is from home plate.

Some ballparks also play differently based on the wind. Wrigley Field is a prime example, where totals with the wind blowing in might be 6.5 or 7 and totals with the wind blowing out might be 12 or 12.5. All of these things have to be factored into your handicap. Temperature and wind are two very big factors when betting totals.

Remember, MLB teams play 81 games at home (with the exception of international games or extreme circumstances), so they can tailor their rosters and skill sets to their specific ballpark in hopes of having more success.

PICKING OUT PROPS

Prop betting is really popular in baseball. Bets like "Will [Player] hit a home run?" or "Total Bases" or "Pitcher Strikeouts" are among the most common, but there are plenty of others. The individual battles in baseball make these enticing handicaps because it is batter vs. pitcher or pitcher vs. team for most of those stats.

You don't have to worry about other players on the floor or on the field. It also allows you to focus on one particular element of the game instead of the game as a whole. With the immense amount of publicly-available data, you can look at everything about a pitcher vs. batter matchup and confidently take a position. A lot of people will only bet props as a result.

BE PREPARED FOR THE GRIND

The last, and probably most important, "strategy" element I will leave you with is that the MLB season is long. It is 187 days and every team plays 162 games. The only days with no games will be during the All-Star Break. Most days will have 15 games, with lighter travel days on Monday and Thursday. You might get 15 games a couple times per season in the NBA/NHL and football teams only play once a week.

It is a very different beast and one that can absolutely get overwhelming, especially during the days and weeks when it seems like nothing is going right. Try to keep a level head and the right perspective. Take a day off when you need to. Focus on your strengths and work on your weaknesses as time permits. Find what works for you and try to stick to that routine.



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MLB STATS TO KNOW

By Adam Burke

My go-to line when explaining baseball stats and analytics to people is to say that “they quantify what the eyes can see.” Advanced MLB stats simply paint a better picture than the traditional stats and provide more layers of context to help explain how much a player is helping or hurting his team.

You may watch a game and notice that the center fielder isn’t very good defensively. He’s getting a late read on fly balls and doesn’t have the speed to compensate. He’s got a “noodle arm”. Well, the advanced metrics can look at things like “Outs Above Average” or “Defensive Runs Above Average” to show how much worse than “average” fielder that player is.

A lot of traditional metrics fall short. Think about on-base percentage, which is walks plus hits divided by plate appearances $((BB + H) / PA)$. That stat really came to prominence around the time that the Michael Lewis book Moneyball was released in 2003. Batting average had always been the go-to stat, but the whole goal as a hitter is not to make an out. Walks are a big part of that equation, thus OBP became a better indicator of offensive output than BA.

But, let’s think more about OBP. Should a home run count the same as a single? Should a double count the same as a walk? With OBP, there is no distinction between the ways of reaching base. Enter wOBA, or weighted on-base average, which is an OBP variant that assigns run values to the manner in which a hitter reaches base. For example, in 2024, a single was worth .882 runs, while a home run was worth 2.050 runs in the formula for wOBA. A walk was worth .689 runs, but a double was worth 1.254. Why? Because doubles increase the chances of scoring a run or driving in a run more than a walk does.

The way I analyze baseball is to utilize the metrics and the statistics to try and find betting opportunities. I don’t want readers or listeners to be overwhelmed by the numbers. It’s my job to explain what they mean, why they are important and how we can use them in our handicapping to find smart bets to make.

I know these stats and abbreviations can be daunting. My only request is that you keep an open mind throughout the season.

The following are some of the stats that I use in my team previews and will use throughout my daily article and my on-air appearances over the course of the season:

ALTERNATE TEAM STANDINGS METRICS

BASERUNS

In my season previews, I talk about the BaseRuns record. BaseRuns is a “context-neutral environment” that takes all of the individual outcomes, puts them together and spits out expected runs for and against.

Think about these six events in an inning: HR, 1B, 1B, K, K, K. Depending on the order, a team might score three runs (1B, 1B, K, K, HR, K), two runs (1B, HR, K, 1B, K, K), one run (HR, 1B, 1B, K, K, K). The same six outcomes, just in different orders. BaseRuns removes “sequencing”, which is largely random. This also eliminates the randomness of hitting or defending with runners in scoring position. A big disparity between actual record and BaseRuns record might show that a team got lucky or won a lot of close games.

PYTHAGOREAN WIN-LOSS

Pythagorean Win-Loss is a standings metric based on run differential. A team’s runs scored and runs against are put into a formula and an expected record is produced. This concept is used across all sports and is sometimes just labeled “Expected W-L”.

TEAM AND PLAYER MLB STATS

FANGRAPHS WINS ABOVE REPLACEMENT PLAYER (fWAR)

Wins Above Replacement Player (WAR) is one of the most comprehensive individual player statistics available. It shows how much value a player has provided relative to his peers. The “f” stands for FanGraphs, which is where I pull my player WAR data from, since I think they do the best job of calculating it.

A player with a fWAR under 1.0 is a replacement-level player, or not a very good one. A player with a 1-2 fWAR is a decent role player or a platoon type of guy. A player with a 2-3 fWAR is a solid player that any team would be happy to have. The scale goes up from there and separates the bad players from the good players and the good players from the great players.

WEIGHTED ON-BASE AVERAGE (wOBA)

wOBA is one of my favorite stats because it does add more context than on-base percentage (OBP). Much like OBP, a high wOBA is good and a low wOBA is bad for hitters. On the flip side, a low wOBA is good and a high wOBA is bad for pitchers. Once again, it just adds another layer of context where the outcomes of reaching base are weighted differently based on their importance.

WEIGHTED RUNS CREATED PLUS (wRC+)

Using wOBA, we can get to a stat called wRC+. With this stat, a player that has a 100 wRC+ is exactly league average. A player with a 120 wRC+ is 20% more productive than a league average player. A player with an 80 wRC+ is 20% less productive than a league average player. Anything over 100 is good, anything under 100 is bad.

The “Plus” means that the stat is park-adjusted and league-adjusted for the run environment. “Park-adjusted” means that there are factors within the formula that account for the way that Coors Field is a better hitter’s park than Miller Park or that Fenway Park is a better hitter’s park than Tropicana Field.

“League-adjusted” basically means grading on a curve. If a lot of runs are being scored, batters have to be that much productive to be above average. If it is a low run environment, then great hitters will stand out that much more.

K% AND BB%

I don’t like using raw strikeout and walk numbers or strikeouts per nine innings (K/9) or walks per nine innings (BB/9). I prefer to use K% and BB%, which is simply the percentage of plate appearances that end in a strikeout (K%) or a walk (BB%). This can be used for both pitchers and hitters.

Last season, the league average K% was 22.6% and the league average BB% was 8.1%.

FIELDING INDEPENDENT PITCHING (FIP)

ERA is subject to a lot of things that a pitcher can't necessarily control, like batted ball luck and sequencing (the timing of hits, are there runners on base, etc.). FIP takes fielders and balls in play out of the equation by producing a pitcher metric using strikeouts, walks, hit by pitches and home runs, which are believed to be things a pitcher can control.

There is a follow-up metric called **xFIP**, which stands for "Expected Fielding Independent Pitching", which is calculated by assuming a pitcher has a league average home run rate per fly ball rate (HR/FB%). This is an indicator used by a lot of bettors that move lines. The idea is that a pitcher with a low ERA and a high xFIP is overperforming and is in line for "Negative Regression" and a pitcher with a high ERA and a low xFIP is underperforming and is in line for "Positive Regression".

I do a lot of regression analysis handicapping, looking for stats and metrics that focus on pitchers that are seemingly getting lucky or unlucky.

BATTING AVERAGE ON BALLS IN PLAY (BABIP)

This is a really strong indicator of luck. Think of this as batting average minus strikeouts and home runs. A strikeout is not a ball in play and a home run cannot be fielded, thus it is not a ball in play. The league average BABIP last season was .291. Extremes one way or the other are likely to "regress to the mean".

LEFT ON BASE PERCENTAGE (LOB%)

This is different from LOB in the box score. This is calculated using a pitcher's actual hits, walks and runs allowed and the percentage of runners that they have stranded. Think about ERA and how subjective it can be to something like this. The timing of hits (sequencing) matters a lot. LOB% can be a really good stat to use for positive or negative regression.

League average was 72.1% last season. Like BABIP, extremes one way or the other are likely to regress. High-strikeout pitchers typically carry higher LOB% marks because they are going to strand more runners than guys that allow more balls in play.

GB%/FB%/LD%

These are batted ball types, with ground ball percentage (GB%), fly ball percentage (FB%) and line drive percentage (LD%). These are the percentages of balls in play and the distribution of each type. Guys with a high GB% are likely to give up more hits, but fewer home runs. Guys with a high FB% will give up more home runs, but fewer hits, because more ground balls go for hits than fly balls. Line drives are bad for pitchers to give up because they are harder to field.

The league average GB% last season was 42.2%.

HR/FB%

As mentioned with xFIP, HR/FB% is home run per fly ball percentage - How often does a fly ball become a home run? The league average last season was 11.6%. Anything on the high end is likely to come down and anything on the low end is likely to go up.

There are major exceptions. Pitchers with a high GB% could have a higher HR/FB% because they don't have the sample size of fly balls needed to lower the rate. Similarly, pitchers with a high FB% may give up a lot of homers, but have a lower HR/FB% because they have a larger sample size of fly balls.

You can see most or all of these stats at places like FanGraphs (for a library with more detailed explanations - <https://library.fangraphs.com/>) or Baseball-Reference.

MLB STATS - STATCAST DATA

In recent years, more and more data has been posted for public consumption. Statcast data falls under that category. Housed at BaseballSavant.com, you can see a lot of really detailed statistics for both pitchers and hitters.

I won't hit on them all, but here are several that I use:

AVERAGE EXIT VELOCITY (EV OR EXIT VELO)

This is a measure in miles per hour of how hard the average batted ball is hit. League average last season was 88.8 mph. Pitchers that are 90 mph or higher give up a lot of hard contact, which is harder to field and often much more damaging. Pitchers that are 87 mph or lower tend to give up softer contact, which is easier to field and less damaging.

HARD HIT%

This is one of my favorite indicators for pitchers. Hard Hit% is the percentage of batted balls hit at least 95 mph. With each mile per hour increase in exit velocity, a batted ball has a higher batting average and a higher slugging percentage.

For example, batted balls hit at least 95 mph last season led to a batting average of .490 with a SLG of .966. Batted balls hit at least 94 mph led to a batting average of .473 and a SLG of .921. Batted balls hit at least 93 mph led to a batting average of .459 and a SLG of .882.

As you can see, with each mph you go down, the numbers start to get better for pitchers. On the flip side, the higher you go, the worse the numbers get. This is a good indicator of pitchers that are commanding their pitches well. The less hard contact, the better a pitcher's chances of limiting hits and runs.

Of course, you can also look at this for hitters or teams and see teams that make more hard contact than others. The top teams in Hard Hit% last season? Braves, Yankees, Orioles, Mets, Dodgers. Some pretty good offenses there. There is a high correlation between contact quality and success.

The lowest teams in Hard Hit% last season? Guardians, White Sox, Reds, Angels, Rays. Some bad teams and offenses in that bunch.

BARREL (BARREL%)

A "barrel" is a batted ball hit at least 95 mph with an optimized range of launch angle. All you need to know is that a barreled ball has an expected batting average of at least .500 and an expected slugging percentage 1.500, so think doubles and home runs.

There were 9,716 barreled balls last season, leading to a .719 BA and a 2.402 SLG. Pitchers that give up a lot of barrels are not in good shape.

Barrel% is the percentage of batted balls that are "barreled". Something around or above 9% is pretty concerning here.

SPIN RATE

With starting pitchers, I'm always looking for decreases or increases in spin rate. A decrease in spin rate can be a good indicator of injury. When foreign substances were banned last season, we saw a lot of decreases in spin rate because pitchers didn't have sticky substances to stay on the ball later and create more friction and spin.

Spin rate matters because it affects the movement of a pitch. A fastball with a high spin rate will appear to "rise" because it isn't as affected by gravity on the way to the plate. Breaking balls with higher spin rates will move tighter and break later. There is a high correlation between pitcher spin rate and hitter success in terms of things like batting average and slugging percentage.

Decreases in spin rate will also affect control and command because pitchers are used to throwing in a certain spot. The ball won't move as much and won't do what the pitcher wants. It's why Coors Field is such a hard place to pitch. The thin air and elevation don't produce as much friction on the ball, so pitches move less, thus making them easier to hit.

Again, all I ask is that you keep an open mind and take the time to try to incorporate some of these metrics or at least read to understand what they mean and why they are important.

HANDICAPPING YOUR STARTING PITCHERS

By Jensen Lewis

Happy baseball season, everyone! As we get closer to the Dodgers/Cubs matchup in Tokyo to kick off the 2025 regular season, here are some key concepts to keep in mind when handicapping your starting pitchers.

1. FORGET THE NAME - FOLLOW THE MOVEMENT

The “bet with your head, not your heart” approach is essential when finding actionable spots in baseball, regardless of who’s on the mound. Long-term profitability comes from recognizing the line movement and understanding how sharp money impacts the market. While your experience and “eye test” matter, keep an eye on where the betting market is moving. When tracking these line shifts, make sure to note when the movement happens (earlier is better), check lineups (especially for day games), and evaluate the starting pitcher’s form over their last 3-5 outings.

2. “CAN’T WAIT TO GET HOME..”

I love targeting East Coast teams coming off long, three-city road trips, particularly those finishing up on the West Coast.

How to attack:

- Back the home team against the road team who’s headed home after the final game of that trip.
- Back the road team when the home team returns from a three-city road trip, especially in the first game of their homestand.
- This strategy targets the wear and tear from travel, regardless of the starting pitcher’s name. You can easily identify these spots on the calendar right now, so keep your eyes peeled for those matchups!

3. SPIT THE HOOK & DOUBLE UP!

When betting on pitcher strikeout totals, don’t overthink it. Sure, you might have to pay a little more juice for the 6+ K prop, but it’s worth it to avoid sweating the half-K difference between 6 and 6.5 strikeouts. I also like to parlay two lower K total props for a potential even-money or better payout. For example, if Zack Wheeler is listed at 7.5 K’s and Gerrit Cole at 6.5, a parlay of Wheeler at 6+ K’s and Cole at 5+ K’s could give you a solid payout with reduced risk.

4. EARLY EXITS

Managers are increasingly cautious about letting pitchers face lineups for the third time in a game. This is especially true for pitchers coming off injuries, getting their pitch counts built up, or facing teams with patient, high-OBP lineups. In addition, the effects of the pitch clock and hot, humid conditions are becoming more apparent, contributing to quicker fatigue. With all of this in mind, look for Unders on outs recorded and strikeouts, and Overs on walks – these are strong angles to consider as the season progresses.

Factor all these insights into your scouting when betting on pitching prop markets!





FOUR CY YOUNG TARGETS IN 2025

By Adam Burke

The MLB Cy Young Award voting won't always be as obvious as it was in 2024. Tarik Skubal secured all 30 first-place votes in the American League and Chris Sale racked up 26 of them in the National League. Two pitchers that have had their fair share of injuries, especially Sale, managed to stay healthy enough to let their greatness shine and took home some hardware as a result.

From a health standpoint, the Cy Young betting market is a crapshoot. Sale's 177.2 innings in 2024 were the most he had thrown since 2017 and more than he had thrown over the previous four seasons. Skubal's 192 innings set a career-high by a mile a year removed from making just 15 starts covering 80.1 innings.

Back in 2022, Justin Verlander won the Cy Young coming off of Tommy John surgery. In 2022, Sandy Alcantara won it before needing Tommy John late in 2022. In 2021, Robbie Ray won it...before needing Tommy John in 2023. Jacob deGrom owns two Cy Young Awards and has now pitched 265.1 innings over five seasons and 47 starts since his second one.

Pitching is a devastating activity on the arm, but as cold and callous as it sounds, you hope as a bettor that you avoid that injury-plagued season and land on a guy with the opportunity to put up big numbers.

HOW TO WIN THE CY YOUNG AWARD

There are some prerequisites to winning the Cy Young Award. The goalposts have moved a bit with increased specialization of starting pitchers and more attention paid to the third time through the order penalty. Three of the last eight winners have won with fewer than 180 innings. That hadn't happened with a starting pitcher since David Cone in the strike year of 1994.

You also have to be a starting pitcher. Eric Gagne was the last reliever to win back in 2003. Dennis Eckersley was the last AL reliever back in 1992. Both guys had over 50 saves. Over the last 30 MLB seasons, only 14 closers have had 50 saves in a season. Francisco Rodriguez had 62 in 2008. He finished third in Cy Young voting with zero first-place votes.

Pitchers need 200+ strikeouts. The last pitcher with under 200 strikeouts (in a non-COVID year) was Rick Porcello in 2016 with 189. He

had 22 wins that season. Wins, by the way, are less important now. Four of the last eight Cy Young winners have had fewer than 15 wins.

Porcello is also the only starter since C.C. Sabathia in 2007 with an ERA higher than 3.00. By the way, Justin Verlander had 14 first-place votes compared to Porcello's eight, so Porcello probably shouldn't have even won the award.

This is an award about opportunity, health, strikeouts, and ERA, so you'll want to factor defense, managers, and team into the equation.

2025 AMERICAN LEAGUE CY YOUNG AWARD

The health part is the tricky one in the AL. How many starting pitchers have the chance at getting to 170+ innings? Then how many of the durable guys are strikeout artists? And how many have managers that will let them go?

I'll give you a couple guys to think about.

LOGAN GILBERT (16/1)

Gilbert's price has been about cut in half throughout the offseason, as he was upwards of 30/1 not that long ago. Pitch efficiency is a big deal and Gilbert only walked 4.6% of opposing batters. He had over a strikeout per inning and pitches in a very good park for hurlers. He's also been remarkably durable with 32, 32, and 33 starts and 185.2, 190.2, and 208.2 innings pitched. As a frequent strike-thrower, Gilbert can and will allow home runs, which is why he's never had an ERA under 3.00, but he did make strides with his Hard Hit% and Barrel% last season that give him a chance this season.

HUNTER BROWN (25/1)

After some arsenal tweaks and some upgraded pitch distribution, Brown shined in the second half for the Astros. He allowed a .255 wOBA over his final 71.2 innings with a 74/22 K/BB ratio and just four home runs. Compare that to a .324 wOBA with a 105/38 K/BB ratio and 14 homers allowed in his first 98.1 innings of 2024. Better pitch efficiency would help Brown work deeper into games, as he made 31 starts, but only threw 170 innings. Still, he saw almost a 14% reduction in Hard Hit%, cut his Barrel% by more than half, and did all of that while not sacrificing swings and misses.

2025 NATIONAL LEAGUE CY YOUNG AWARD

Six-man rotations could be all the rage in the NL this season, as a few teams with potential Cy Young candidates may look to go that route. The Dodgers are definitely one of them and a team that could somewhat submarine the chances for guys like Blake Snell, Tyler Glasnow, and Yoshinobu Yamamoto. Of course, pitching with extra rest could make them even more effective.

One other thing to keep in mind is that you don't want to invest in a guy that could be traded to the other league like Dylan Cease or Sandy Alcantara.

I'll give you a couple guys to think about.

SPENCER SCHWELLENBACH (40/1)

I am all-in on Schwellenbach this season. He's my favorite awards market bet of any of them. I find that he has superstar potential coming off of his first 123.2 MLB innings. He also threw 45 innings in the minors, so I don't have any big workload concerns coming off of 168.2 innings if the Braves want to extend him into the 180s. He has the pitch efficiency I referenced with Gilbert earlier with a 4.6% BB%. He had a 25.4% K% as a rookie, but bumped that to 27.5% in the second half. He's only going to get better in the Atlanta pitching factory and has a very good defensive team behind him.

CORBIN BURNES (12/1)

A much shorter price, but a very intriguing candidate. Burnes is back home in Arizona and he's going to enjoy having that Diamondbacks defense behind him. Only the Royals had more Outs Above Average as a defense and Arizona represents more than a 40-run upgrade defensively from the Orioles. Burnes also gets away from the AL East and that could lead to more strikeouts and fewer home runs. He bumped up his Chase Rate last season and posted his fourth season with an ERA under 3.00 and third as a full-time starter. He's also worked over 190 innings in each of the last three seasons, showcasing the durability that allows him to rack up numbers.

Last note: Be sure to look at Cy Young prices in-season and use the schedule to try and pick out spots where pitchers might line up against some weaker offenses so that you can jump on their odds before they move.



2025 MVP RACE

By Adam Burke

There hasn't been a lot of variance in the MVP market since baseball went back to normal following the COVID-shortened 2020 season. Shohei Ohtani has won three MVP awards, two in the AL and one in the NL. Aaron Judge picked up his second MVP award in four years, as he won one the year Ohtani was injured and the other during Ohtani's first season in the Senior Circuit.

With a lot of young superstars around the league, there are a lot of players that we can create an MVP case for heading into 2025. There are certain benchmarks, though, that it appears players need to hit to have a really good chance at the award.

The goalposts are moving a little bit with a younger voting group, as stats like WAR are considered more these days. But, some things remain the same. Dating back to 2014, which is the last time a pitcher (Clayton Kershaw) won the MVP, there have only been two MVPs with fewer than 35 homers in a non-COVID season. They were Mike Trout in 2016 and Jose Altuve in 2017. Altuve hit .346 that season and Trout led in a lot of categories, including WAR.

So, power production still matters. And it seems to matter more recently, as six of the eight MVPs have hit at least 40 homers and driven in at least 100 runs. Also, seven of the last eight and 12 of the last 14 MVPs have batted over .300. Only seven hitters with enough plate appearances to qualify for the batting title hit over .300 last season, so we'll see if this is one of the targets that moves.

Only two pitchers have won MVP since 1992 and only three since 1986. In the minds of voters, they have their own award.

With that in mind, you should be able to cross out a lot of people on the odds board because they're not going to be able to reach some of those benchmarks or don't step in the batter's box.

2025 AMERICAN LEAGUE MVP

Not surprisingly, Judge is the short shot here. This is an award about health and opportunity. A lot of players will have good years, but some will have more chances to drive in runs, see better pitches, and be on the field. That's what you really want to look at in these MLB awards markets.

I'm struggling to even find options beyond Judge (+310), Bobby Witt Jr. (+450), and Yordan Alvarez (+600) based on the above criteria. Gunnar Henderson (+750) batted .281 and hit 37 homers. He was worth 8.0 fWAR. And he should only keep getting better. I think he's a decent price grab with the fact that the voting electorate may look more favorably on him because of his overall value, even if he falls short of .300 or 35 HR. He might flirt with 40 HR again if we get a bit of an increase in pulled fly balls.

Guys like Jarren Duran (35/1), Jose Ramirez (15/1), Rafael Devers (25/1), and Julio Rodriguez (20/1) won't have the batting average, though they might have the WAR to sneak into the discussion. Vladimir Guerrero Jr. (17/1) may be traded, and potentially to an NL team, but he has a good shot at checking the above boxes. It's just that his team probably won't be very good and that may hurt him.

2025 NATIONAL LEAGUE MVP

The NL provides a lot more opportunity for taking some shots further down the board in my opinion. Obviously it is Ohtani's award to lose with his return to pitching, but +170 is somewhat unpalatable. Juan Soto is the next choice at +550 and he obviously has an excellent shot with 40-homer upside and a very high OBP that offsets a batting average below .300.

Jackson Merrill (35/1) has the upside to do it. He plays a high-value defensive position, batted .292 with an xBA of .303, and had a .500 SLG with an xSLG of .534. He had the contact authority necessary to get close to 30 homers if he pulled the ball more frequently. If Merrill takes a leap and the Padres exceed expectations, he's in the discussion. I think he has a shot to have a better year than Corbin Carroll and Carroll is 22/1.

The other one in that range is Jackson Chourio at 35/1. It might be a year early on Chourio, but he batted .310/.363/.552 in the second half with a .387 wOBA and a 150 wRC+. His wOBA was 12th in the second half, trailing Merrill, oddly enough at .395, and he was 17th in wRC+ with some pretty prestigious company. A full season of that would absolutely have him in the running if the Brewers win the NL Central.

As with any awards market, look for in-season opportunities to grab prices as guys maybe get off to a slow start or hit a good patch on the schedule where they can put up some numbers and make things interesting.

(Odds as of February 25 from DraftKings Sportsbook)



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