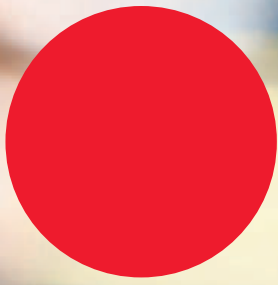


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TODAY  
SPORTS**

SPECIAL EDITION

- Keys to victory for all 30 teams
- Projected lineups
- Predicting the regular season

SEASON PREVIEW

# BASEBALL

Giants put belief  
in veteran core

ANDREW MCCUTCHEN (ABOVE) JOINS  
EVAN LONGORIA IN SAN FRANCISCO

# AMERICAN LEAGUE PREVIEW

USA TODAY's predictions:

East	W-L
New York Yankees	93-69
Boston Red Sox	89-73
Toronto Blue Jays	79-83
Tampa Bay Rays	76-86
Baltimore Orioles	72-90
Central	
Cleveland Indians	97-65
Minnesota Twins	86-76
Chicago White Sox	73-89
Kansas City Royals	73-89
Detroit Tigers	63-99
West	
Houston Astros	100-62
Los Angeles Angels	86-76
Seattle Mariners	81-81
Texas Rangers	80-82
Oakland Athletics	74-88

## PLAYOFF PROJECTIONS

AL wild cards: Red Sox, Angels  
 AL Division Series winners: Astros, Indians  
 ALCS winner: Indians  
 World Series: Indians over Nationals

2018 prediction

72-90

2017 record:  
 75-87  
 Fifth place  
 AL East  
 Missed playoffs

# Baltimore Orioles

**Manager:** Buck Showalter, eighth season full season with Orioles (622-569)

**Coaches:** Scott Coolbaugh (hitting); Roger McDowell (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Caleb Joseph	31	8	28	0	10	72	.256	.287	.413
1B	Chris Davis	65	26	61	16	11	95	.215	.309	.423
2B	Jonathan Schoop	92	32	105	1	35	142	.293	.338	.503
3B	Tim Beckham	67	22	62	6	36	167	.278	.328	.454
SS	Manny Machado	81	33	95	9	50	115	.259	.310	.471
LF	Trey Mancini	65	24	78	1	33	139	.293	.338	.488
CF	Adam Jones	82	26	73	2	27	113	.285	.322	.466
RF	Colby Rasmus	17	9	23	1	7	45	.281	.318	.579
DH	Mark Trumbo*	79	23	65	1	42	149	.234	.289	.397

\*check status

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO
RH	Dylan Bundy	13-9	4.24	28	0	169.2	152	51	152
RH	Kevin Gausman	11-12	4.68	34	0	186.2	208	71	179
RH	Andrew Cashner	11-11	3.40	28	0	166.2	156	64	86
RH	Chris Tillman	1-7	7.84	24	0	93.0	125	51	63
RH	Alex Cobb	12-10	3.66	29	0	179.1	175	44	128
Closer									
RH	Brad Brach	4-5	3.18	0	18	68.0	51	26	70



Manny Machado  
 USA TODAY SPORTS



Dylan Bundy  
 GETTY IMAGES

## Keys to victory

**1. Start off well:** Given the uncertain future of Manny Machado, Adam Jones, Zach Britton and Brad Brach, who all become free agents after the season, the Orioles need to win early and a lot. Otherwise, the quartet could be gone by the July 31 trade deadline.

**2. Anchoring the rotation:** The Orioles are counting on young pitchers Dylan Bundy and Kevin Gausman to grow. They made big strides last year and are now expected to become the leaders of the staff. Bundy went 13-9 with a 4.21 ERA in 169 2/3 in-

nings over 28 starts in his first full season as a starter. Gausman, the opening-day starter in 2017, saw his ERA skyrocket to 6.60 in mid-June. But a strong finish lowered it to 4.68 after he posted a 3.39 ERA in his final 19 starts.

**3. Schoop's progression:** Jonathan Schoop had a breakout season in 2017 and was the team's best player, making the American League All-Star team and receiving votes for the AL MVP award. At 26, he has room to improve. He set career highs in home runs (32), RBI (105) and OPS (.841) and

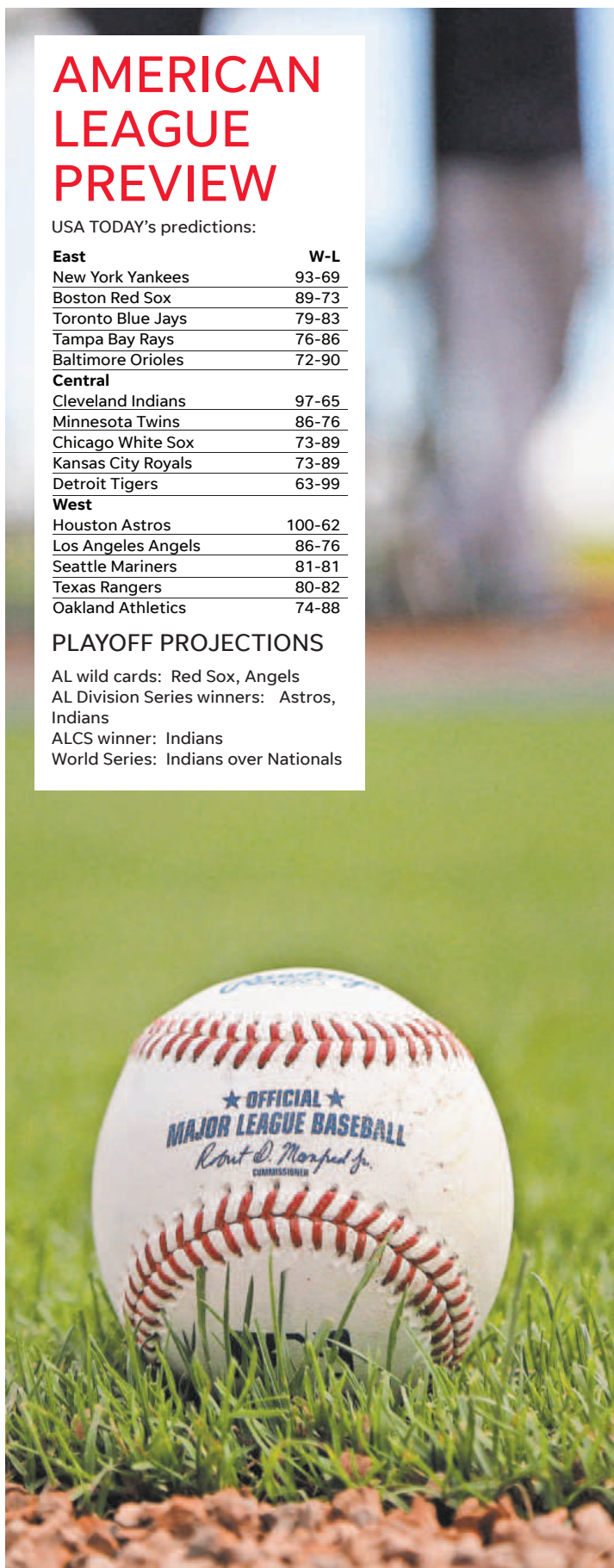
could expand on those numbers slotted in the three hole in the lineup.

**4. Showalter miracle:** Buck Showalter is a three-time manager of the year. He has an enduring ability to get the most out of his roster, even if his teams seemingly have lesser talent than that of his division foes. But even Showalter likely will need a miracle to finish with a winning record and better than third in a top-heavy AL East behind the New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox.

Scott Boeck

## In the end:

Organization wrestles with decision on trading Manny Machado en route to losing season.





2018  
prediction**89-73**2017 record:  
93-69First place  
AL East  
Lost in ALDS

# Boston Red Sox

**Manager:** Alex Cora, first season with Red Sox**Coaches:** Tim Hyers (hitting); Dana LeVangie (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Christian Vazquez	99	5	32	7	17	64	.290	.330	.404
1B	Hanley Ramirez	58	23	62	1	51	116	.242	.320	.429
2B	Eduardo Nunez	60	12	58	24	18	54	.313	.341	.460
3B	Rafael Devers	58	10	30	3	18	57	.284	.338	.482
SS	Xander Bogaerts	94	10	62	15	56	116	.273	.343	.409
LF	Andrew Benintendi	84	20	90	20	70	112	.271	.352	.424
CF	Jackie Bradley Jr.	58	17	63	8	48	124	.245	.323	.402
RF	Mookie Betts	101	24	102	26	77	79	.264	.344	.459
DH	J.D. Martinez	85	45	104	4	53	128	.303	.376	.690

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
LH	Chris Sale	17-8	2.90	32	0	214.1		165	43	308
LH	David Price	6-3	3.38	16	0	74.2		65	24	76
RH	Rick Porcello	11-17	4.65	33	0	203.1		236	48	181
LH	Drew Pomeranz*	17-6	3.32	32	0	173.2		166	69	174
RH	Steven Wright	1-3	8.25	5	0	24.0		40	5	13

### Closer

RH	Craig Kimbrell	5-0	1.43	67	35	69.0		33	14	126
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\*check status

J.D. Martinez  
USA TODAY SPORTSChris Sale  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Keeping the bullpen healthy:** Over the past two years, the Red Sox bullpen has struggled because its expected impact players, besides Craig Kimbrell, have been injured. In each of the previous two offseasons, Boston acquired Carson Smith and Tyler Thornburg to build a bridge to Kimbrell, but both players combined for just eight innings in two years.

**2. Finding the power:** After losing David Ortiz last year, Boston failed to replace his power, finishing last in the American League in home runs. The

Red Sox are hoping for a big year from Rafael Devers in his first full major league season. Last year's rookie sensation hit 10 home runs in 58 games. The Red Sox also signed J.D. Martinez to DH. He hit 45 homers last year.

**3. David Price returning to form?** In his second season for Boston, Price battled injuries, starting only 11 games and pitching 74.2 total innings. However, he did make an impact down the stretch as a reliever, proving there were no aftereffects of his injury. Now that he's fully healthy,

Boston is looking for him and Chris Sale to set the tone at the top of the rotation and form one of the better 1-2 punches.

**4. Can Dustin Pedroia return to the lineup soon?** The veteran second baseman had knee surgery after the playoffs and likely won't be back until early June. Until then, Brock Holt and Eduardo Nunez will try to fill his void. However, given the Red Sox's offensive issues last year, they need a healthy Pedroia to compete.

Daniel Chavkin

## In the end:

Red Sox make another run but will have a tough time dealing with pitching depth of other playoff teams.

2018  
prediction**73-89**

2017 record:

67-95  
Fourth place  
AL Central  
Missed  
playoffs

# Chicago White Sox

**Manager:** Rick Renteria, second season (67-95)**Coaches:** Todd Steversen (hitting); Don Cooper (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Wellington Castillo	44	20	53	0	22	97	.282	.323	.490
1B	Jose Abreu	95	33	102	3	35	119	.304	.354	.552
2B	Yoan Moncada	31	8	22	3	29	74	.231	.338	.412
3B	Yolmer Sanchez	63	12	59	8	35	111	.267	.319	.413
SS	Tim Anderson	72	17	56	15	13	162	.257	.276	.402
LF	Nicky Delmonico	25	9	23	2	23	313	.262	.373	.482
CF	Adam Engel	34	6	21	8	19	117	.166	.235	.282
RF	Avisail Garcia	75	18	80	5	33	111	.330	.380	.506
DH	Tyler Saladino	23	0	10	5	23	67	.178	.254	.229

Yoan Moncada  
USA TODAY SPORTSLucas Giolito  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
RH	James Shields	5-7	5.23	21	0	117.0		116	53	103
RH	Lucas Giolito	3-3	2.38	7	0	45.1		31	12	34
RH	Miguel Gonzalez	8-13	4.62	27	0	156.0		167	55	100
RH	Carson Fulmer	3-1	3.86	7	0	23.1		16	13	19
RH	Reynaldo Lopez	3-3	4.81	19	0	91.2		96	36	72

### Closer

RH	Nate Jones	1-0	2.31	11	0	11.2		9	6	13
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## A closer look

### 1. The performance of young starting pitchers:

The White Sox acquired Lucas Giolito and Reynaldo Lopez for Adam Eaton last year, and the two combined for about 100 innings in 2017. Giolito finished strong and is looking to build off his 2.38 ERA, while Lopez is looking to improve upon his 4.72. Additionally, Carson Fulmer has a 3.86 ERA in 23.1 innings and he will have a chance to perform while Carlos Rodon recovers from shoulder surgery.

**2. Jose Abreu's trade status:** Chicago has spent much of the past year

trading talented players to rebuild, and Abreu is next in line. The first baseman's future is probably with another team, and a strong first half may lead to a trade at the deadline to the contender. Until then, he will take his place in the middle of the lineup, but the stronger his start is, the more likely he is to be traded.

**3. Yoan Moncada:** Moncada is the face of the White Sox rebuild thanks to being the main piece in the Chris Sale trade. The second baseman had a solid rookie year, hitting eight homers with 22 RBI

and a .750 OPS, but enters his first full season looking for improvement.

**4. How soon will Eloy Jimenez make it to the majors?** Jimenez was the prize of the Jose Quintana trade and is touted as a top 10 prospect in all of baseball. The outfielder is a righty with a ton of power, and it's only a matter of time until he gets the call to the majors. When he does, Jimenez will likely take over in left field, and he can make an immediate impact if he proves to be ready.

Daniel Chavkin

## In the end:

A losing season, but some flashes of promise from young players acquired over the years.

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**Sports Weekly** provides game and event previews, analysis, features, personalities, opinions, power rankings and more with a heavy emphasis on Major League Baseball, NFL, fantasy and college football and basketball.

2018  
prediction

97-65

2017 record:  
102-60  
First place  
AL Central  
Lost in ALDS

# Cleveland Indians

Manager: Terry Francona, sixth season with Indians (454-354)

Coaches: Ty Van Burkleo (hitting); Carl Willis (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Roberto Perez	22	8	38	0	26	71	.207	.291	.373
1B	Yonder Alonso	72	28	67	2	68	118	.266	.365	.501
2B	Jason Kipnis	43	12	35	6	28	71	.232	.291	.414
3B	Jose Ramirez	107	29	83	17	52	69	.318	.374	.583
SS	Francisco Lindor	99	33	89	15	60	93	.273	.337	.505
LF	Michael Brantley*	47	9	52	11	31	50	.299	.357	.444
CF	Bradley Zimmer	41	8	39	18	26	99	.241	.307	.385
RF	Lonnie Chisenhall	34	12	53	2	25	55	.288	.360	.521
DH	Edwin Encarnacion	96	38	107	2	104	133	.258	.377	.504

\*check status

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB
LH	Corey Kluber	18-4	2.25	29	0	203.2	141	36
LH	Carlos Carrasco	18-6	3.29	32	0	200.0	173	46
RH	Mike Clevinger	12-6	3.11	27	0	121.2	92	60
RH	Trevor Bauer	17-9	4.19	32	0	176.1	181	60
RH	Josh Tomlin	10-9	4.98	26	0	141.0	166	14
		Closer						
RH	Cody Allen	3-7	2.94	69	30	67.1	57	21

Jose Ramirez  
USA TODAY SPORTSCorey Kluber  
USA TODAY SPORTS2018  
prediction

63-99

2017 record:  
64-98  
Fifth place  
AL Central  
Missed  
playoffs

# Detroit Tigers

Manager: Ron Gardenhire, first season with Tigers

Coaches: Lloyd McClendon (hitting); Chris Bosio (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	James McCann	39	13	49	1	26	89	.253	.318	.415
1B	Miguel Cabrera	50	16	60	0	54	110	.249	.329	.399
2B	Dixon Machado	17	1	11	1	10	32	.259	.302	.319
3B	Jeimer Candelario	18	3	16	0	13	30	.283	.359	.425
SS	Jose Iglesias	56	6	54	7	21	65	.255	.288	.369
LF	Mikie Mahtook	50	12	38	6	23	79	.276	.330	.457
CF	Leonys Martin	14	3	9	7	8	33	.172	.232	.281
RF	Nicholas Castellanos	73	26	101	4	41	142	.272	.320	.490
DH	Victor Martinez	38	10	47	0	36	63	.255	.324	.372

Miguel Cabrera  
USA TODAY SPORTSMichael Fulmer  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB
RH	Michael Fulmer	10-12	3.83	25	0	164.2	150	40
LH	Matthew Boyd	6-11	5.27	26	0	135.0	157	53
RH	Jordan Zimmermann	8-13	6.08	29	0	160.0	204	44
LH	Daniel Norris	5-8	5.31	22	0	101.2	120	44
LH	Francisco Liriano	6-7	5.66	38	0	97.0	105	53
		Closer						
RH	Shane Greene	4-3	2.66	71	9	67.2	50	34

## Keys to victory

**1. Replacing Carlos Santana:** To combat the loss of Santana, the Indians signed Yonder Alonso, who is coming off a career season. While Alonso out-produced Santana last year, Santana has been more consistent over the past few seasons. For the first time in his career, Alonso is trying to replicate a 20-home run season, and it is fair for the Indians to be worried about Alonso regressing this year.

**2. Jason Kipnis:** The Indians second baseman spent half of last season on the disabled list, and

even when he was healthy he struggled to produce. In fact, the Indians got into their groove when Kipnis was injured, forcing the veteran to play center field when he was healthy for the playoffs.

**3. How much of an impact can Francisco Mejia make?** Mejia represents the Indians' best prospect, and the catcher is knocking on the doors to the major leagues. While Cleveland still has Yan Gomes and Roberto Perez at that position, neither one offers as much as Mejia, who will take one of their spots when he is

ready for the majors. Mejia, who has had 13 major league at-bats, hit .297 with 14 homers and 52 RBI in 92 minor league games last year.

**4. Can Jose Ramirez repeat his career year?** In 2017, Ramirez finished third in MVP voting, posting a .318 batting average, 29 homers and 83 RBI. With Santana's loss, it is even more important for Ramirez to at least come close to last year's pace, as he played his way into being a cornerstone piece for this team.

Daniel Chavkin

## Keys to victory

**1. Staying healthy:** Miguel Cabrera had the worst season of his career in 2017 and must find a way to regain his form. Victor Martinez enters what could be his final season after having cardiovascular surgery for an irregular heartbeat in September, so it's unclear how he will perform after recovery. Michael Fulmer had a strong first half but struggled mightily in the second half, partially because of an elbow injury.

**2. Nicholas Castellanos' performance:** Castellanos was one of the few bright spots in 2017,

with 26 home runs and a .811 OPS. As he aims to repeat and improve upon last year's production, he moves from third base to right field to make room for Jeimer Candelario. Castellanos' defense will likely be a liability again, but putting up strong offensive numbers would allow him time to adjust to a new position.

**3. How much will younger players produce?** Third baseman Jeimer Candelario, 24, was the prize of the Justin Wilson deal. Matthew Boyd and Daniel Norris will both start the season ro-

tation, but they each had an ERA over 5.00 last year. Mike Fiers could replace one of them when he returns from a back injury.

**4. Jordan Zimmermann:** The right-hander has been a huge disappointment after signing a five-year, \$110 million contract in 2016, as he pitched to a 6.08 ERA in 2017. The Tigers need as much help as possible to compete, and another terrible season for Zimmermann could eliminate any hopes the Tigers have of making a surprise playoff run.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:** Third consecutive division crown and a chance at club's first title since 1948.

**In the end:** Pushing 100 losses and one of worst offenses in baseball.



2018  
prediction

100-62

2017 record:  
101-61  
First place  
AL West  
Won World  
Series

# Houston Astros

Manager: A.J. Hinch, fourth season with Astros (271-215)

Coaches: Dave Hudgens (hitting); Brent Strom (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Brian McCann	47	18	62	1	38	58	.241	.323	.436
1B	Marwin Gonzalez	67	23	90	8	49	99	.303	.377	.530
2B	Jose Altuve	112	24	81	32	58	83	.346	.410	.547
3B	Alex Bregman	88	19	71	17	55	97	.284	.352	.475
SS	Carlos Correa	82	24	82	2	53	92	.315	.391	.550
LF	Derek Fisher	21	5	17	3	17	54	.212	.307	.356
CF	George Springer	112	34	85	5	64	111	.283	.367	.522
RF	Josh Reddick	77	13	82	7	43	72	.314	.363	.484
DH	Evan Gattis	41	12	55	0	19	50	.263	.311	.457

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation					IP	H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv					
RH	Justin Verlander	15-8	3.36	33	0		206.0	170	72	219
LH	Dallas Keuchel	14-5	2.90	23	0		145.2	116	47	125
RH	Gerrit Cole	12-12	4.26	33	0		203.0	199	55	196
RH	Charlie Morton	14-7	3.62	25	0		146.2	125	50	163
RH	Lance McCullers	7-4	4.25	22	0		118.2	114	40	132
Closer										
RH	Ken Giles	1-3	2.30	63	34		62.2	44	21	83

Jose Altuve  
USA TODAY SPORTSJustin Verlander  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Keep hitting:** By OPS+, which adjusts for a team's era and hitting environment, the 2017 Astros tied the 1927 Yankees as the best offensive team in MLB history. The majority of Houston's lineup will return, so it will only need to avoid regression to repeat as the league's best hitting team.

**2. Settle on an outfield mix:** The training camp injury to Yuli Gurriel, who will miss the start of the season after having hamate surgery, means versatile Marwin Gonzalez will likely see most of the playing time at first base to open the year. Once Gurriel returns, A.J. Hinch will need to

again be creative in negotiating Gonzalez into an outfield rotation that includes George Springer, Josh Reddick, Derek Fisher and Jake Marisnick. Gurriel hit .304 with a .522 slugging percentage in the playoffs last season.

**3. Get Giles going:** Closer Ken Giles dominated in the 2017 regular season but struggled in the postseason, yielding 10 earned runs in 7½ innings and becoming more of a liability than a strength in the club's World Series run. Giles returns as the Astros' presumptive closer for 2018, but any reprise of that October performance could force a shake-up.

**4. Keep the rotation sharp:** On paper and reputation, a deep staff fronted by Justin Verlander, Dallas Keuchel and Gerrit Cole looks formidable. But Verlander is 35, Keuchel is two years removed from a rough 2016 and Cole is coming off the highest ERA of his career. The Astros have a wealth of viable options to start games, so they can afford to be careful with their big-name aces. Veteran Collin McHugh begins the season in the bullpen and is a viable starting option when he is needed. He has a 4.08 career ERA.

Ted Berg

**In the end:** Defending champions cruise into postseason without hitting rough patch like last year.

2018  
prediction

73-89

2017 record:  
80-82, third  
place  
Third place  
AL Central  
Missed  
playoffs

# Kansas City Royals

Manager: Ned Yost, eighth full season with Royals (629-632)

Coaches: Terry Bradshaw (hitting); Cal Eldred (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Salvador Perez	57	27	80	1	17	95	.268	.297	.495
1B	Lucas Duda	50	30	64	0	60	135	.217	.322	.496
2B	Whit Merrifield	80	19	78	34	29	88	.288	.324	.460
3B	Mike Moustakas	75	38	85	0	34	94	.272	.314	.521
SS	Alcides Escobar	71	6	54	4	15	102	.250	.272	.357
LF	Alex Gordon	52	9	45	7	45	126	.208	.293	.315
CF	Paulo Orlando	9	2	6	1	1	20	.198	.225	.302
RF	Jon Jay	65	2	34	6	37	80	.296	.374	.375
DH	Jorge Soler	7	2	6	0	12	36	.144	.245	.258

Whit Merrifield  
USA TODAY SPORTSDanny Duffy  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation					IP	H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv					
LH	Danny Duffy	9-10	3.81	24	0		146.1	143	41	130
RH	Ian Kennedy	5-13	5.38	30	0		154.0	143	61	131
RH	Jason Hammel	8-13	5.29	32	0		180.1	209	48	145
RH	Nathan Karns	2-2	4.17	9	0		45.1	41	13	51
RH	Jake Junis	9-3	4.30	20	0		98.1	101	25	80
Closer										
RH	Kelvin Herrera	3-3	4.25	64	26		59.1	60	20	56

## Keys to victory

**1. Replacing the free agents:** In Eric Hosmer and Lorenzo Cain, the Royals lost two of their best players this offseason. Lucas Duda and Jon Jay were signed, making the lineup more formidable. Duda adds more power, but lacks the overall consistency that Hosmer gave as both a hitter and a fielder. Additionally, while Jay is a .288 career hitter, he doesn't have the speed, defensive ability or baserunning that Cain offers. However, the Royals were able to keep Mike Moustakas for another year. Moustakas should help give the Royals a respectable offense.

**2. Danny Duffy's health:** 2017 was supposed to be a breakout

year for the lefty, but Duffy spent some of the season injured and the rest struggling with consistency. Entering 2018 healthy, Duffy needs to maintain that health to stay on the field and to develop a groove that he was unable to do last year.

**3. Jorge Soler's and Jorge Bonafacio's development:** After losing so much offense, the Royals need these two to develop into bigger offensive threats. Kansas City acquired Soler for Wade Davis last year, but Soler struggled with a .503 OPS in 35 games and spent most of the season in the minors. This year, Soler needs to bounce back in

a big way. Bonafacio hit .255 with 17 homers and 40 RBIs, but he was suspended 80 games for testing positive for a performance-enhancing drug.

**4. Get production out of the bottom of the rotation:** With Duffy, Ian Kennedy and Jason Hammel set at the top of the rotation, the Royals need stability at the bottom. Nathan Karns is likely going to miss half the season recovering from surgery. That leaves two spots open for the likes of Jake Junis, Ricky Nolasco, Brad Keller and Trevor Oaks.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:** Life without Eric Hosmer and Lorenzo Cain doesn't begin well.

2018  
prediction

86-76

2017 record:  
80-82  
Second place  
AL West  
Missed  
playoffs

# Los Angeles Angels

**Manager:** Mike Scioscia, 18th season with Angels (1,570-1,346)**Coaches:** Eric Hinske (hitting); Charles Nagy (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Martin Maldonado	43	14	38	0	15	119	.221	.276	.368
1B	Luis Valbuena	43	22	65	0	48	106	.199	.294	.432
2B	Ian Kinsler	90	22	52	14	55	86	.236	.313	.412
3B	Zack Cozart	80	24	63	3	62	78	.297	.385	.548
SS	Andrelton Simmons	77	14	49	19	47	67	.278	.331	.421
LF	Justin Upton	100	35	109	14	74	180	.273	.361	.540
CF	Mike Trout	92	33	72	22	94	90	.306	.442	.629
RF	Kole Calhoun	77	19	71	5	71	134	.244	.333	.392
DH	Albert Pujols	53	23	101	3	37	93	.241	.286	.386

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO
RH	Garrett Richards	0-2	2.28	6	0	27.2	18	7	27
RH	Shohei Ohtani	Played in Japan							
LH	Tyler Skaggs	2-6	4.55	16	0	85.0	90	28	76
RH	Matt Shoemaker	6-3	4.52	14	0	77.2	73	28	69
RH	J.C. Ramirez	11-10	4.15	27	0	147.1	149	49	105
Closer									
RH	Cam Bedrosian	6-5	4.43	48	6	44.2	41	17	53

Mike Trout  
USA TODAY SPORTSGarrett Richards  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Ohtani magic:** Lost amid the hype, excitement and curiosity over two-way player Shohei Ohtani is the fact that the Angels really need him to perform, especially on the mound. A debut season ranging from consistent to dominant would be a significant boost for a team relying on several injury-plagued pitchers. Ohtani's season high for innings came in 2015, when he struck out 196 batters in 160½ innings for Nippon Ham. So 33 starts likely won't happen, but 25 mostly excellent ones would be huge.

**2. Richards' revival:** Garrett Richards went 28-16 in 2014-15, but a litany of injuries — including a successful dodging of Tommy John elbow ligament surgery — limited him to 12 starts the past two seasons. Now entering his walk year, Richards, 29, makes the Angels an entirely different team if he can stay healthy and replicate the 8.8 strikeouts per nine innings he posted in his two best years.

**3. Trout punches the clock:** He's no robot, as a thumb surgery and six-week disabled list proved

last season. So let's just ask this of Mike Trout: Show up and stay healthy. The rest should take care of itself.

**4. Power points:** No one's asking Albert Pujols to be his 21-year-old self or Ohtani to hit 35 homers while also making 30 starts on the mound. But if those two, along with Luis Valbuena, can combine for 40 to 50 home runs with a healthy OPS out of the first base and DH spots, the Angels lineup will be deep and menacing.

Gabe Lacques

**In the end:** Plenty of star power on offense, but any hopes of division title are undone by iffy rotation.

2018  
prediction

86-76

2017 record:  
85-77  
Second place  
AL Central  
Lost in AL wild-  
card game

# Minnesota Twins

**Manager:** Paul Molitor, fourth season with Twins (227-259)**Coaches:** James Rowson (hitting); Garvin Alston (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Jason Castro	49	10	47	0	45	108	.242	.333	.388
1B	Joe Mauer	69	7	71	2	66	83	.305	.384	.417
2B	Brian Dozier	106	34	93	16	78	141	.271	.359	.498
3B	Miguel Sano	75	28	77	0	54	173	.264	.352	.507
SS	Jorge Polanco	60	13	74	13	41	78	.256	.313	.410
LF	Eddie Rosario	79	27	78	9	35	106	.290	.328	.507
CF	Byron Buxton	69	16	51	29	38	150	.253	.314	.413
RF	Max Kepler	67	19	69	6	47	114	.243	.312	.425
DH	Logan Morrison	75	38	85	2	81	149	.246	.353	.516

Joe Mauer  
USA TODAY SPORTSJose Berrios  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO
RH	Lance Lynn	11-8	3.43	33	0	186.1	151	78	153
RH	Jose Berrios	14-8	3.89	26	0	145.2	131	48	139
RH	Jake Odorizzi	10-8	4.14	28	0	143.1	117	61	127
RH	Kyle Gibson	12-10	5.07	29	0	158.0	182	60	121
LH	Adalberto Mejia	4-7	4.50	21	0	98.0	110	44	85
Closer									
RH	Fernando Rodney	5-4	4.23	61	39	55.1	40	26	65

## Keys to victory

**1. Jose Berrios' continued development:** In his first full season, Berrios put up a respectable 3.89 ERA in 145½ innings pitched. However, the right-hander ran out of gas near the end of the regular season, showing fatigue. In 2018, especially with Edwin Santana on the disabled list to begin the season, Berrios needs to take that next step forward.

**2. Finding depth in the back of the rotation:** Pitching was the Twins' biggest weakness last year and could be the reason they fail to make the

playoffs. While Minnesota returns Jose, it still must find production with the back-end starters. Lynn and Jake Odorizzi, giving them some veteran experience in the middle of the rotation. Kyle Gibson will be on the opening day roster, but he must improve upon his 5.07 ERA. Ervin Santana will start the season on the DL. The Twins are also hoping Michael Pineda can help them once he recovers from Tommy John elbow surgery in the second half.

**3. Fernando Rodney and Addison Reed:** The

Twins' biggest moves this offseason were signing Rodney to be their closer and Reed to be the setup man. Both players offer experience in the back of the bullpen, both having extensive playoff, and even World Series, experience.

**4. Byron Buxton:** He finished 2017 with a .253 average, 16 home runs and 51 RBI. While Buxton is a sure thing to play tremendous defense in center field, he can really make a difference at the plate as a five-tool player.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:** Wild-card contenders don't have depth to hang with Cleveland in division race.



2018  
prediction**93-69**2017 record:  
91-71  
Second place  
AL East  
Lost in ALCS

# New York Yankees

**Manager:** Aaron Boone, first season with Yankees**Coaches:** Marcus Thames (hitting); Larry Rothschild (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Gary Sanchez	79	33	90	2	40	120	.278	.345	.531
1B	Neil Walker	59	14	49	0	55	77	.265	.362	.439
2B	Tyler Wade	7	9	2	1	5	19	.155	.222	.224
3B	Brandon Drury	41	13	63	1	28	103	.267	.317	.447
SS	Didi Gregorius	73	25	87	3	25	70	.287	.318	.478
LF	Brett Gardner	96	21	63	23	72	122	.264	.350	.428
CF	Aaron Hicks	54	15	52	10	51	67	.266	.372	.475
RF	Aaron Judge	128	52	114	9	127	208	.284	.422	.627
DH	Giancarlo Stanton	123	59	132	2	85	163	.281	.376	.631

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation								
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO	
RH	Luis Severino	14-6	2.98	31	0	193.1	150	51	230	
RH	Masahiro Tanaka	13-12	4.74	30	0	178.1	180	41	194	
LH	CC Sabathia	14-6	3.69	27	0	148.2	139	50	120	
RH	Sonny Gray	10-12	3.55	27	0	162.1	139	57	153	
LH	Jordan Montgomery	9-7	3.88	29	0	155.1	140	51	144	
Closer										
LH	Aroldis Chapman	4-3	3.22	52	22	50.1	37	20	69	

Didi Gregorius  
USA TODAY SPORTSLuis Severino  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. The rotation:** The Yankees hope Luis Severino can repeat his breakthrough 2017 season and Masahiro Tanaka can return to form after a regular-season ERA that hovered near 5.00. They have a full season of Sonny Gray, but they'll also be hoping CC Sabathia's arthritic right knee will hold out. As injury insurance, Chance Adams is the closest prospect to the majors.

**2. Rookie ball:** Gleyber Torres is coming off Tommy John elbow surgery. He has played only 55 games above Class A but at 21 was the odds-on choice to be the second baseman on a contender before the team determined he needed more seasoning. Eventually, the Yankees might have to find a spot for Miguel Andujar, a third baseman who is a big-league level hitter now, though there's questions about his defense.

**3. Bird out:** First baseman Greg Bird will have ankle surgery and will be unavailable for 6 to 8 weeks. Tyler Austin and Austin Romine are also options at first base. Prospects Gleyber Torres and Miguel Andujar might

also get a shot in the infield at some point.

**4. Giancarlo's health:** Because of injuries and a frightening hit-by-pitch to his face late in the 2014 season, Giancarlo Stanton has averaged 115 games the past five seasons. Stanton, Aaron Judge and Gary Sanchez should be in the designated hitter rotation, giving each a break from the field. Judge and Stanton will split time in right field and could play some in left.

Pete Caldera, The (Bergen County, N.J.) Record

**In the end:** Bronx Bombers win AL East for first time since 2012 and make deep postseason push.

2018  
prediction**74-88**2017 record:  
75-87  
Fifth place  
AL West  
Missed  
playoffs

# Oakland Athletics

**Manager:** Bob Melvin, seventh full season (537-534)**Coaches:** Darren Bush (hitting); Scott Emerson (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Jonathan Lucroy	45	6	40	1	46	51	.265	.345	.371
1B	Matt Olson	33	24	45	0	22	60	.259	.352	.651
2B	Jed Lowrie	86	14	69	0	73	100	.277	.360	.448
3B	Matt Chapman	39	14	40	0	32	92	.234	.313	.472
SS	Marcus Semien	53	10	40	12	38	85	.249	.325	.398
LF	Matt Joyce	78	25	68	4	66	113	.243	.335	.473
CF	Boog Powell	24	3	12	0	15	30	.282	.358	.402
RF	Stephen Piscotty	40	9	39	3	52	87	.235	.342	.367
DH	Khris Davis	91	43	110	4	73	195	.247	.336	.528

Matt Olson  
USA TODAY SPORTSSean Manaea  
AP

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation								
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO	
RH	Kendall Graveman	6-4	4.19	19	0	105.1	114	32	70	
LH	Sean Manaea	12-10	4.37	29	0	158.2	167	55	140	
RH	Daniel Mengden	3-2	3.14	7	0	43.0	36	9	29	
RH	Daniel Gossett	4-11	6.11	18	0	91.1	116	31	72	
RH	Paul Blackburn	3-1	3.22	10	0	58.2	58	16	22	
Closer										
RH	Blake Treinen	3-6	3.93	72	16	75.2	80	25	74	

## Keys to victory

**1. Young starters emerge:** Kendall Graveman performed fairly well but served two stints on the disabled list while Sean Manaea performed up to expectations. Those two return, and at the back end of the rotation, unproven pitchers including Daniel Mengden, Paul Blackburn and Daniel Gossett will get a shot.

**2. Getting the 2016 Piscotty:** Stephen Piscotty, who had a rough season in St. Louis after signing a six-year, \$33.5 million contract, could prove to be a smart pickup if he can duplicate his numbers

from two years ago, when he had 22 homers and a .800 OPS. Otherwise, Piscotty, 27, could turn into an expensive luxury for a low-budget team.

**3. Cut down the errors:** Oakland led the majors with 121 errors, resulting in 83 unearned runs. That's one every two games. The A's believe Matt Chapman's maturation at third — Gold Glove potential but had 13 errors in 84 games — and Matt Olson's emergence at first base will help pick up the defense. In addition, shortstop Marcus Semien should establish more

continuity after missing nearly three months with a wrist injury.

**4. Catcher production:** The A's added Jonathan Lucroy late in free agency, and he should provide a boost to a team that lost Stephen Vogt last year. However, Lucroy is coming off a down. The catcher still provides stability defensively, as his veteran presence should help navigate a young, inexperienced rotation. Bruce Maxwell may also contend for playing time.

Jorge L. Ortiz

**In the end:** A few bright spots from young hitters, but team not capable of mounting consistent season.

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2018  
prediction**81-81**2017 record:  
78-84  
Third place  
AL West  
Missed  
playoffs

# Seattle Mariners

**Manager:** Scott Servais, third season with Mariners (164-160)**Coaches:** Edgar Martinez (hitting); Mel Stottlemyre (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Mike Zunino	52	25	64	1	39	160	.251	.331	.509
1B	Ryon Healy	66	25	78	0	23	142	.271	.302	.451
2B	Robinson Cano	79	23	97	1	49	85	.280	.338	.453
3B	Kyle Seager	72	27	88	2	58	110	.249	.323	.450
SS	Jean Segura	80	11	45	22	34	83	.300	.349	.427
LF	Ichiro Suzuki	19	3	20	11	17	35	.255	.318	.332
CF	Dee Gordon	114	2	33	60	25	93	.308	.341	.375
RF	Mitch Haniger	58	16	47	5	31	93	.282	.352	.491
DH	Nelson Cruz	91	39	119	1	70	140	.288	.375	.549

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation					IP	H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv					
RH	Felix Hernandez	6-5	4.36	16	0		86.2	86	26	78
LH	James Paxton	12-5	2.98	24	0		136.0	113	37	156
RH	Mike Leake	10-13	3.92	31	0		186.0	201	37	130
RF	Marco Gonzalez	1-1	6.08	11	0		40.0	59	11	32
LH	Ariel Miranda	8-7	5.12	31	0		160.0	140	63	137
Closer										
RH	Edwin Diaz	4-6	3.27	66	34		66.0	44	32	89

Kyle Seager  
USA TODAY SPORTSJames Paxton  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. A healthy King:** Any path to the playoffs for the Mariners involves a healthy Felix Hernandez. While he was limited to a career-low 16 starts and 86 innings in 2017, the rotation listed, posting an overall 4.36 ERA and fading badly down the stretch. While a 200-inning season out of James Paxton would help, King Felix still sets the tone here — and anything less than his career standard of 34 starts would create an uphill climb.

**2. Tenacious Dee:** GM Jerry Dipoto's most intriguing offseason move was the acquisition of Dee Gordon — to play center field. A Gold Glover, two-

time All-Star and batting champ as a second baseman, can Gordon, 29, provide elite defense at a premium position while continuing to hit in a new league? Two answers in the affirmative will plug two significant holes.

**3. No 40-man army:** The Mariners deployed 40 pitchers last season — 17 starters and 23 relievers — as they wrestled with health and inconsistency. Cutting that number by 10 would be nice, and perhaps highly valuable bullpen addition Juan Nicasio will help solidify the back end of games while a healthier rotation steadies the start of them.

**4. Fresh start:** For

teams on the fringes of contending, belief — and persuading management the cause is a worthy one to augment — can be everything. In a division that beefed up considerably, a much better start than last year's 11-15 effort, which put Seattle seven games behind the Houston Astros by May 2, will be essential. The Indians, Twins, Royals and Astros are on Seattle's early-season schedule, so it won't be easy to get off to a hot start.

Gabe Lacques

**In the end:** They'll push for wild-card spot behind Dee Gordon-Jean Segura duo at top of order.

2018  
prediction**76-86**2017 record:  
80-82  
Third place  
AL East  
Missed  
playoffs

# Tampa Bay Rays

**Manager:** Kevin Cash, fourth season with Rays (228-258)**Coaches:** Chad Mottola (hitting); Kyle Snyder (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Wilson Ramos	19	11	35	0	10	36	.260	.290	.447
1B	C.J. Cron	39	16	56	3	22	96	.248	.305	.437
2B	Joey Wendle	3	1	5	0	1	3	.308	.357	.615
3B	Matt Duffy	Minor leagues								
SS	Adeiny Hechavarria	37	8	30	4	13	67	.261	.289	.406
LF	Denard Span	73	12	43	12	40	69	.272	.329	.427
CF	Kevin Kiermaier	56	15	39	16	31	99	.276	.338	.450
RF	Carlos Gomez	51	17	52	13	31	127	.255	.340	.462
DH	Brad Miller	43	9	40	5	63	110	.201	.327	.337

A. Hechavarria  
USA TODAY SPORTSChris Archer  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation					IP	H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv					
RH	Chris Archer	10-12	4.07	34	0	201.0	193	60	249	
LH	Blake Snell	5-7	4.04	24	0	129.1	113	59	119	
RH	Jake Faria	5-4	3.43	16	0	86.2	71	31	84	
RH	Nathan Eovaldi	Injured - Did not play								
Closer										
RH	Alex Colome	2-3	3.24	65	47	66.2	57	23	58	

## Keys to victory

**1. Replace Evan Longoria:** Evan Longoria is the Rays' all-time leader in games played, home runs and RBI, so his departure leaves a hole. After missing the season because of injury, Matt Duffy is penciled in at third. Duffy's best season was in 2015, when he had 12 homers and 77 RBI. It doesn't match Longoria's 2017, with 20 homers and 86 RBI, but it's not bad.

**2. Sorting out second base:** The Rays biggest question mark is at second, where there is no clear-cut starter to withstand the season. Incumbent Daniel Robertson plans to get some of the action but Tampa Bay

will also want to get veteran Joey Wendle some playing time after getting him from Oakland. Additionally, Christian Arroyo, the prize of the Evan Longoria deal, could make a case to be the starter.

**3. Find production at first base:** While the Rays benefited from a Logan Morrison career year and a Lucas Duda midseason trade, they lose both in 2018. As a result, the Rays must replace 51 combined home runs, 102 RBI and 95 runs scored. The Rays acquired C.J. Cron from the Angels late in the offseason, and they hope he can reproduce his 16 home runs and 56 RBI. The Rays

also have Brad Miller as an option, but he had nine home runs and a .201 batting average.

**4. What will Brent Honeywell's absence mean?** Honeywell, 22, is the Rays' top prospect, and the righty has the potential to excel at the top of the rotation. However, he tore his ulnar collateral ligament and had elbow surgery. He is a bright spot for the future but his presence will be missed this season. He had a good chance to make the team in spring training before getting hurt.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:** Stripped-down team parts ways with even more pieces ahead of trade deadline.



2018  
prediction

80-82

2017 record:  
78-84  
Third place  
AL West;  
Missed  
playoffs

# Texas Rangers

**Manager:** Jeff Banister, fourth season with Rangers (261-225)**Coaches:** Anthony Iapoce (hitting); Doug Brocail (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Robinson Chirinos	46	17	38	1	34	79	.255	.360	.506
1B	Joey Gallo	85	41	80	7	75	196	.209	.333	.537
2B	Rougned Odor	79	30	75	15	32	162	.204	.252	.397
3B	Adrian Beltre	47	17	71	1	39	52	.312	.383	.532
SS	Elvis Andrus	100	20	88	25	38	101	.297	.337	.471
LF	Ryan Rua	17	3	12	2	14	52	.217	.294	.333
CF	Delino DeShields Jr.	75	22	44	29	44	109	.269	.347	.367
RF	Nomar Mazara	64	20	10	12	55	127	.253	.323	.422
DH	Shin-Soo Choo	96	22	78	12	77	134	.261	.357	.423

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
LH	Cole Hamels	11-6	4.20	24	0	148.0	125	53	105	
LH	Matt Moore	6-15	5.52	32	0	174.1	200	67	148	
LH	Mike Minor	6-6	2.55	65	6	77.2	57	22	88	
RH	Doug Fister	5-9	4.88	18	0	90.1	87	38	83	
LH	Martin Perez*	13-12	4.82	32	0	185.0	221	63	115	

### Closer

RH	Alex Claudio	4-2	2.50	70	11	82.2	71	15	56	
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\*check status at the bottom of the table.

Elvis Andrus  
USA TODAY SPORTSCole Hamels  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Rotation experience:** Matt Moore, Mike Minor and Doug Fister — all reclamation projects — join Cole Hamels in the rotation. All four have won at least 10 games and made at least 30 starts in multiple seasons. From there, the Rangers plan to go with a four-man rotation until Martin Perez is healthy in mid-April. The team also hopes to stash Bartolo Colon in AAA, Diekmann to Tony Barnett despite the veteran not making the team out of spring training. Tim Lincecum could get moved to the rotation if things go bad.

**2. Ageless Adrian:** In-

juries plagued Adrian Beltre for much of the 2017 season. But don't expect the aging All-Star, who turns 39 in April, to slow down. He was on pace to hit 30 homers and drive in over 120 RBI in 2017.

**3. Dynamic bullpen:** There is a chance of going to a six-man rotation, and the bullpen is full of multiple-inning relievers, from Matt Bush to Jake Diekmann to Tony Barnett to Jesse Chavez to Chris Martin to Keone Kela. Lincecum, a two-time Cy Young winner, is also in the mix. He will likely be used in the bullpen rather than as a starter and could

compete with Alex Claudio for the closer Lincecum, 33, hasn't pitched in the major leagues since 2016, when he struggled, so it's questionable what he has left.

**4. Nice Odor:** Rougned Odor, despite slugging 30 home runs in back-to-back seasons, had career lows in batting average (.204), on-base percentage (.252) and slugging percentage (.397). His strikeout issues increased down the stretch. Still, at 24, Odor has plenty of upside.

Scott Boeck

## In the end:

Rangers could push 80 wins and still finish fourth in division.

2018  
prediction

79-83

2017 record:  
76-86  
Fourth place  
AL East  
Missed  
playoffs

# Toronto Blue Jays

**Manager:** John Gibbons, fifth consecutive season (10th overall) with Blue Jays (720-700)**Coaches:** Brook Jacoby (hitting); Pete Walker (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Russell Martin	49	13	35	1	50	83	.221	.343	.388
1B	Justin Smoak	85	38	90	0	73	128	.270	.355	.529
2B	Devon Travis	22	5	24	4	7	38	.259	.291	.438
3B	Josh Donaldson	65	33	78	2	76	111	.270	.385	.559
SS	Aledmys Diaz	31	7	20	4	13	42	.259	.290	.392
LF	Curtis Granderson	74	26	64	6	71	123	.212	.323	.452
CF	Kevin Pillar	72	16	42	15	33	95	.256	.300	.404
RF	Randal Grichuk	53	22	59	6	26	133	.238	.285	.473
DH	Kendrys Morales	67	28	85	0	43	132	.250	.308	.445

Josh Donaldson  
USA TODAY SPORTSJ.A. Happ  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
RH	Marcus Stroman	13-9	3.09	33	0	201.0	201	62	164	
RH	Aaron Sanchez	1-3	4.25	8	0	36.0	42	20	24	
LH	J.A. Happ	10-11	3.53	25	0	145.1	145	46	142	
RH	Marco Estrada	10-9	4.98	33	0	186.0	186	71	176	
LH	Jaime Garcia	5-10	4.41	27	0	157.0	157	64	129	

### Closer

RH	Roberto Osuna	3-4	3.38	66	39	64.0	46	9	83	
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## Keys to victory

**1. Replace Jose Bautista:** Randal Grichuk is slotted to replace Bautista in right field, and the former Cardinals player out-produced Bautista in 2017. If Toronto wants to contend, Grichuk likely has to approach Bautista's 2016 production.

**2. Aaron Sanchez's health:** Sanchez broke out in 2016, going 15-2 with a 3.00 ERA in 192 innings pitched, but struggled to stay on the field in 2017. The righty starter pitched 36 innings last season, totaling a 4.25 ERA in that span. When healthy, Sanchez repre-

sents one of the best young pitchers in baseball, and he proved his value based off how far Toronto fell without him.

**3. Find reliable relievers:** After Roberto Osuna, the Blue Jays don't have much reliability in their bullpen. The pressure is on Ryan Tepera and Danny Barnes, two pitchers who had an ERA around 3.50 last year, to not only repeat their performances but elevate it to replace Dominic Leone's effectiveness in the bullpen.

**4. Sorting out the depth chart:** While Devon Travis, Troy Tulowitzki and

Curtis Granderson are all set to start, none of the three are guaranteed anything. Toronto acquired Yangervis Solarte, a reliable infielder with versatility, and Aledmys Diaz, a talented middle infielder coming off a down year. Tulowitzki starts the season on the disabled list with a heel injury. Granderson must fight off Steve Pearce, Anthony Alford and Teoscar Hernandez for playing time. Tulowitzki is likely to be out at least two months.

Daniel Chavkin

## In the end:

Aging club will struggle during Josh Donaldson's contract year.

# NATIONAL LEAGUE PREVIEW

USA TODAY's projections:

East	W-L
Washington Nationals	94-68
New York Mets	82-80
Atlanta Braves	76-86
Philadelphia Phillies	76-86
Miami Marlins	60-102

## Central

Chicago Cubs	92-70
Milwaukee Brewers	86-76
St. Louis Cardinals	85-77
Pittsburgh Pirates	72-90
Cincinnati Reds	68-94

## West

Los Angeles Dodgers	95-67
Colorado Rockies	85-77
Arizona Diamondbacks	84-78
San Francisco Giants	82-80
San Diego Padres	71-91

## PLAYOFF PROJECTIONS

NL wild cards: Brewers, Cardinals  
 NL Division Series winners:  
 Nationals, Dodgers  
 NLCS winner: Nationals  
 World Series: Indians over Nationals

2018  
prediction

**84-78**

2017 record:  
93-69  
Second place  
NL West  
Lost in NLDS

# Arizona Diamondbacks

**Manager:** Torey Lovullo, second season with Diamondbacks (93-69)

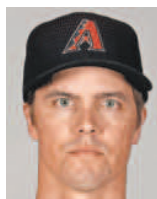
**Coaches:** Dave Magadan (hitting); Mike Butcher (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Alex Avila	41	14	49	0	62	120	.264	.387	.447
1B	Paul Goldschmidt	117	36	120	18	94	147	.297	.404	.563
2B	Ketel Marte	30	5	18	3	29	37	.260	.345	.395
3B	Jake Lamb	89	30	105	6	87	152	.248	.357	.487
SS	Nick Ahmed	24	6	21	3	10	39	.251	.298	.419
LF	David Peralta	82	14	57	8	43	94	.293	.352	.444
CF	A.J. Pollack	73	14	49	20	35	71	.266	.330	.471
RF	Jarrod Dyson	56	5	30	28	28	55	.251	.324	.350



P. Goldschmidt  
USA TODAY SPORTS



Zack Greinke  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation				IP	H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv				
RH	Zack Greinke	17-7	3.20	32	0	202.1	172	45	215
LH	Robbie Ray	15-5	2.89	28	0	162.0	116	71	218
RH	Taijuan Walker	9-9	3.49	28	0	157.1	148	61	146
LH	Patrick Corbin	14-13	4.03	33	0	189.2	208	61	178
RH	Zack Godley	8-9	3.37	26	0	155.0	124	53	165
Closer									
RH	Archie Bradley	3-3	1.73	63	1	73.0	55	21	79

## Keys to victory

**1. Replace J.D. Martinez's production:** Martinez was instrumental in Arizona's playoff run, with 29 home runs and a 1.107 OPS in 62 games. To replace him, Arizona traded for Steven Souza Jr. and will put him in right field, but Souza will begin the season on the DL with a pectoral injury. If he can repeat his .810 OPS when he returns, he'll be a nice replacement for the second half of the season.

**2. Can the starting rotation repeat its excellent 2017?** Five pitchers started at least 25 games, and all had better than a

4.05 ERA. They need that kind of production again. Zack Greinke will be 34 this season, and Taijuan Walker, Zack Godley and Robbie Ray are trying to build off breakout seasons. Finally, Patrick Corbin should perform well and get his ERA down in a contract season.

**3. Find consistency in a reshuffled bullpen:** Archie Bradley returns as the best reliever and will likely start the season as the closer. Brad Boxberger arrives from Tampa Bay. If he can stay healthy, he provides solid depth in the back end. The D'backs

also added Yoshihisa Hirano, a righty reliever who had a 2.67 ERA in Japan last year.

**4. Get middle infield production:** After the team traded Brandon Drury, Ketel Marte, Chris Owings and Nick Ahmed will man second base and shortstop. Marte struggled to begin 2017 but had a strong finish and is primed for a big season. Owings had a strong start last year, but injuries slowed him near the end. Ahmed played 53 games and needs a solid season to prove he belongs.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:** Steven Souza's banner year makes up for J.D. Martinez's loss, gives Paul Goldschmidt a running mate.



2018  
prediction

76-86

2017 record:  
72-90  
Third place  
NL East  
Missed  
playoffs

# Atlanta Braves

Manager: Brian Snitker, second full season (131-155)

Coaches: Kevin Seitzer (hitting); Chuck Hernandez (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Tyler Flowers	41	12	49	0	31	82	.281	.378	.445
1B	Freddie Freeman	84	28	71	8	65	95	.307	.403	.586
2B	Ozzie Albies	34	6	28	8	21	36	.286	.354	.456
3B	Johan Camargo*	30	4	27	0	12	51	.299	.331	.452
SS	Dansby Swanson	59	6	51	3	59	120	.232	.312	.324
LF	Preston Tucker	46	17	41	0	8	40	.164	.222	.328
CF	Ender Inciarte	93	11	57	22	49	94	.304	.350	.409
RF	Nick Markakis	76	8	76	0	68	110	.275	.354	.384

\*check status

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation	W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO
RH	Julio Teheran	11-13	4.49	32	0	188.1	186	72	151	
RH	Mike Foltynewicz	10-13	4.79	29	0	154.0	169	59	143	
RH	Brandon McCarthy	6-4	3.98	19	0	92.2	89	27	72	
RH	Anibal Sanchez	3-7	6.41	28	0	105.1	139	29	104	
LH	Sean Newcomb	4-9	4.32	19	0	100.0	100	57	108	
		Closer								
RH	Arodys Vizcaino	5-3	2.83	62	14	57.1	42	21	64	

Ender Inciarte  
USA TODAY SPORTSM. Foltynewicz  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Ronald Acuna's impact:** At 20 years old, Acuna gives Atlanta a five-tool prospect in the outfield who has all the makings of being a potential superstar. His addition to the lineup will change how pitchers game plan. Despite starting the season in AAA, he should make the jump quickly.

**2. Mobile infield production:** Shortstop Dansby Swanson struggled, totaling six home runs and 51 RBI with a .636 OPS in 144 games. This led to him losing his starting spot and, eventually, a brief minor league stint after

the All-Star break. Second baseman Ozzie Albies had six home runs and 28 RBI with a .810 OPS and could be in store for a breakout year.

**3. Brandon McCarthy's health:** McCarthy missed some of 2017, failing to reach 100 innings for the third consecutive season. Atlanta needs him to be healthy if it wants to make a surprise playoff run, but it has starters waiting in case McCarthy falters. Luiz Gohara, Lucas Sims and Max Fried are ready to take advantage if the opportunity presents itself. The Brave's young ar-

ms should give them lots of hope for the future even if the team doesn't contend this year.

**4. Bullpen questions:** While Arodys Vizcaino is set as closer, Atlanta still must get production from its setup men to succeed. Jose Ramirez and Sam Freeman were solid in 2017, but there isn't a guarantee they will be able to repeat their performances. A.J. Minter and Dan Winkler excelled in 32 combined games but now must excel over the course of a full season.

Daniel Chavkin

## In the end:

Revamping process continues apace with likely arrival of Ronald Acuna and some prized arms.

2018  
prediction

92-70

2017 record:  
92-70  
First place  
NL Central  
Lost in NLCS

# Chicago Cubs

Manager: Joe Maddon, fourth season with Cubs (292-193)

Coaches: Chili Davis (hitting); Jim Hickey (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Willson Contreras	50	21	74	5	45	98	.276	.356	.499
1B	Anthony Rizzo	99	32	109	10	91	90	.273	.392	.507
2B	Javier Baez	75	23	75	12	15	108	.273	.317	.480
3B	Kris Bryant	111	29	73	7	95	128	.295	.409	.537
SS	Addison Russell	52	12	43	2	29	91	.239	.304	.418
LF	Kyle Schwarber	67	30	59	1	59	150	.211	.315	.467
CF	Ian Happ	62	24	68	8	39	129	.253	.328	.514
RF	Jason Heyward	59	11	59	4	41	67	.259	.326	.389

Javier Baez  
USA TODAY SPORTSYu Darvish  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation	W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO
LH	Jon Lester	13-8	4.33	32	0	180.2	179	60	180	
RH	Yu Darvish	10-12	3.86	31	0	186.2	159	58	209	
RH	Kyle Hendricks	7-5	3.03	24	0	139.2	126	40	123	
LH	Jose Quintana	11-11	4.15	32	0	188.2	170	61	207	
RH	Tyler Chatwood	8-15	4.69	33	1	147.2	136	77	120	
		Closer								
RH	Brandon Morrow	6-0	2.06	45	2	43.2	31	9	50	

## Keys to victory

**1. Bullpen production:** The Cubs' big additions are Brandon Morrow, who was tremendous for the Dodgers last season, and Steve Cishek, who split time between Seattle and Tampa Bay. Justin Wilson needs to bounce back from his rough second half, and Carl Edwards Jr. needs to build off a promising 2017 season.

**2. Jason Heyward:** For the second season in a row, Heyward disappointed as the primary right fielder. While he sports great defense, his offense struggled, hitting .259 with 11 home runs and 59

RBI. Kyle Schwarber might have had a major slump last year, but he finished with 30 home runs, and Albert Almora and Ian Happ proved they belonged. The more Heyward struggles at the plate, the less likely it is he remains in the lineup.

**3. Full season of Jose Quintana and Yu Darvish:** The Cubs lost Jake Arrietta but signed Darvish to replace him in the rotation plus get Quintana for the season after trading for him in July. With Jon Lester coming off a poor season by his standards, one with a 4.33

ERA, and Kyle Hendricks having dealt with injuries last year, Chicago needs Quintana and Darvish to live up to the hype.

**4. Addison Russell:** The Cubs shortstop struggled last year, finishing with 12 home runs and 43 RBI with a .239 batting average. His regression was especially present as second baseman Javier Baez outperformed him in every category. Chicago needs Russell to take that next step as a player, or else Baez could shift to shortstop to replace him.

Daniel Chavkin

## In the end:

Unparalleled depth, improved rotation headed by Yu Darvish propel Cubs to third consecutive division crown.

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2018  
prediction**68-94**2017 record:  
68-94  
Fifth place  
NL Central  
Missed  
playoffs

# Cincinnati Reds

**Manager:** Bryan Price, fifth season with Reds (276-372)**Coaches:** Don Long (hitting); Mack Jenkins (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Tucker Barnhart	26	7	44	1	36	72	.270	.347	.403
1B	Joey Votto	106	36	100	5	134	83	.320	.454	.578
2B	Scooter Gennett	80	27	97	3	30	114	.295	.342	.531
3B	Eugenio Suarez	87	26	82	4	84	147	.260	.367	.461
SS	Jose Peraza	50	5	37	23	20	70	.259	.297	.324
LF	Adam Duvall	78	31	99	5	39	170	.249	.301	.480
CF	Billy Hamilton	85	4	38	59	44	133	.247	.299	.335
RF	Scott Schebler	63	30	67	5	39	125	.233	.307	.484

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation							H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP					
RH	Homer Bailey	6-9	6.43	18	0	91.0			112	42	67
RH	Tyler Mahle	1-2	2.70	4	0	20.0			19	11	14
LH	Brandon Finnegan*	1-1	4.15	4	0	13.0			9	13	16
RH	Luis Castillo	3-7	3.12	15	0	89.1			64	32	98
RH	Sal Romano	5-8	4.45	16	0	87.0			91	37	73
Closer											
RH	Raisel Iglesias	3-3	2.49	63	28	76.0			57	27	92

\*check status

Scooter Gennett  
USA TODAY SPORTSRaisel Iglesias  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Rotation stays healthy:** The Reds season was ruined when Homer Bailey, Anthony DeSclafani and Brandon Finnegan, nominally the No. 1, 2, 3 starters, got hurt and spent most of the season on the disabled list — or in DeSclafani's case all of the season. Bailey is now healthy, while Finnegan and DeSclafani will start the season on the DL. The good news is the depth is better because a lot of young pitchers got a chance because Bailey, DeSclafani and Finnegan were hurt. Tyler Mahle went 10-7 with a 2.06 ERA in the minor leagues last season.

**2. Votto repeats his**

**2017:** Joey Votto had a historic year. He became one of only three players to have at least 179 hits, 36 home runs, 134 walks and 83 or fewer strikeouts in a season. The other two: Babe Ruth and Ted Williams. Votto doesn't have to be as good as he was in 2017, but he has to close for the offense to work.

**3. Setup men step up:** The Reds' two biggest free agent acquisitions were right-hander relievers Jared Hughes and David Hernandez. If they can get the game from starter to closer Raisel Iglesias, the bullpen will be much better than last year.

**4. Peraza is OK:** The

Reds are counting on Jose Peraza to replace Zack Cozart at shortstop. That's tall order, considering Peraza lost the second baseman's job to Scooter Gennett last year. "You don't just go get Zack Cozart and put him in there," Reds manager Bryan Price said. "However, we acquired Jose because we felt like he had a really high ceiling as a player and as a shortstop. I think there's a much better player in there than we saw in the first half from Jose and we got a glimpse of that the year before."

John Fay, Cincinnati Enquirer

**In the end:**

Luis Castillo's evolution might presage arrival of other talented youngsters, but process takes time, patience.

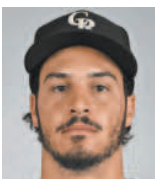
2018  
prediction**85-77**2017 record:  
87-75  
Third place  
NL West  
Lost in NL wild-card game

# Colorado Rockies

**Manager:** Bud Black, second season with Rockies (87-75)**Coaches:** Duane Espy (hitting); Steve Foster (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Chris Iannetta	38	17	43	0	37	87	.254	.354	.511
1B	Ian Desmond	47	7	40	15	24	87	.274	.326	.375
2B	D.J. LeMahieu	95	8	64	6	59	90	.310	.374	.409
3B	Nolan Arenado	100	37	130	3	62	106	.309	.373	.586
SS	Trevor Story	68	24	82	7	49	191	.239	.308	.457
LF	Gerardo Parra	56	10	71	2	20	67	.309	.341	.452
CF	Charlie Blackmon	137	37	104	14	65	135	.331	.399	.601
RF	Carlos Gonzalez	72	14	57	3	56	119	.262	.339	.423

Nolan Arenado  
USA TODAY SPORTSWade Davis  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation							H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP					
RH	Jon Gray	10-4	3.67	20	0	110.1			113	30	112
RH	German Marquez	11-7	4.39	29	0	162.0			174	49	147
LH	Kyle Freeland	11-11	4.10	33	0	156.0			169	63	107
LH	Tyler Anderson	6-6	4.81	17	0	86.0			88	26	81
RH	Chad Bettis	2-4	5.05	9	9	46.1			52	11	30
Closer											
RH	Wade Davis	4-2	2.30	59	32	58.2			39	28	79

## Keys to victory

**1. Bullpen upgrade:** After the bullpen faltered down the stretch last year, the Rockies spent money to upgrade, starting with Wade Davis, a closer who was great for the Cubs and has playoff and World Series experience. They also signed Cleveland free agent reliever Bryan Shaw, who has appeared in at least 70 games each year since 2013, and re-signed Jake McGee, who had a 3.61 ERA in 62 games last season.

**2. First base production:** With Mark Reynolds gone, Ian Desmond and Ryan McMahon step in. Desmond signed with the team to play first last year,

but injuries and a .701 OPS hurt his playing time. McMahon is a top prospect who had a 1.023 OPS in 189 Class AAA at-bats. Desmond's ability to play left field might put both in the lineup.

**3. Starting pitching:** Jon Gray is their most talented starter, but he has battled injuries over the course of his career. He had a 3.67 ERA in 20 starts last year and showed the potential of a top-end starter. In his rookie season, Kyle Freeland had a 4.10 ERA, which was second to that of Gray among starters. German Marquez and Tyler Anderson each struggled at times last

year and need to improve. Chad Bettis is back for a full year.

**4. Corner outfield positions:** Gerardo Parra will likely get to keep his job, but he must fight off the injuries that have bugged him over the past two years. Carlos Gonzalez likely begins the season in right, but if he struggles like he did last year, it opens the door for prospects Raimel Tapia or David Dahl. Gonzalez's .762 OPS is the worst of his career in a season in which he has played at least 110 games.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:**

Return trip to playoffs comes down to final days, but youthful rotation can't get Rockies back to October.



2018  
prediction

95-67

2017 record:  
104-58  
First place  
NL West  
Lost World  
Series

# Los Angeles Dodgers

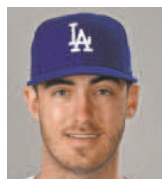
**Manager:** Dave Roberts, third season with Dodgers (195-129)**Coaches:** Turner Ward (hitting); Rick Honeycutt (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Yasmani Grandal	50	22	58	0	40	130	.247	.308	.459
1B	Cody Bellinger	87	39	97	10	64	146	.267	.352	.581
2B	Chase Utley	43	8	34	6	32	57	.236	.324	.405
3B	Logan Forsythe	56	36	69	3	69	109	.224	.351	.327
SS	Corey Seager	85	22	77	4	67	131	.295	.375	.479
LF	Joc Pederson	44	11	35	4	39	68	.212	.331	.407
CF	Chris Taylor	85	21	72	17	50	142	.288	.354	.496
RF	Yasiel Puig	72	28	74	15	63	100	.263	.346	.487

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation	W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO
LH	Clayton Kershaw	18-4	2.31	27	0	175.0	136	30	202	
LH	Rich Hill	12-8	3.32	25	0	135.2	99	49	166	
LH	Alex Wood	16-3	2.72	27	0	152.1	133	38	151	
RH	Kenta Maeda	13-6	4.22	29	1	134.1	121	34	140	
LH	Hyun-Jin Ryu	5-9	3.77	25	1	126.2	128	45	116	
Closer										
RH	Kenley Jansen	5-0	1.32	65	41	68.1	44	7	109	

Cody Bellinger  
USA TODAY SPORTSKenley Jansen  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Settling left field:** over after the Dodgers fell one win short of the title and logged the majors' best record at 104-58. The Dodgers know they're good, but the hunger for a title must remain.

**3. Quieting Seager's elbow:** Shortstop Corey Seager began the spring slowly as he rebuilt arm strength after rehabbing an elbow injury that hampered him late last season and kept him out of the NLCS. The elbow issues flared up when throwing. Seager's defensive metrics improved markedly last season, when he ranked second among NL shortstops with 10 defensive runs saved. He also contributed 22 homers

and a .854 OPS.

**4. Building bridge to Jansen:** Josh Fields excelled at setup man for much of last season and might take over eighth-inning duties, although the club will also consider Pedro Baez; Yimi Garcia, who is coming back from Tommy John surgery; Tony Cingrani; and Scott Alexander. Kenley Jansen has proven to be the best closer in the game over the last several years.

Jorge L. Ortiz

**In the end:** While road to division title isn't as smooth as in 2017, Dodgers still reign atop rugged NL West.

2018  
prediction

60-102

2017 record:  
77-85  
Second place  
NL East  
Missed  
playoffs

# Miami Marlins

**Manager:** Don Mattingly, third season with Marlins (156-167)**Coaches:** Mike Pagliarulo (hitting); Juan Nieves (pitching)

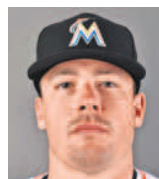
## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	J.T. Realmuto*	68	17	65	8	36	106	.278	.332	.451
1B	Justin Bour	52	25	83	1	47	95	.289	.366	.536
2B	Starlin Castro	66	16	63	2	23	93	.300	.338	.454
3B	Brian Anderson	11	0	8	0	10	28	.262	.337	.369
SS	Miguel Rojas	37	1	26	2	27	32	.290	.361	.375
LF	Derek Dietrich	56	13	53	0	36	98	.249	.334	.424
CF	Lewis Brinson	2	2	3	1	7	17	.106	.236	.277
RF	Cameron Maybin	63	10	35	33	51	94	.228	.318	.365

\*check status

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation	W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP	H	BB	SO
RH	Jose Urena	14-7	3.82	34	0	169.2	152	64	113	
RH	Odrisamer Despaigne	2-3	4.01	18	1	58.1	57	24	31	
LH	Dillon Peters	1-2	5.17	6	0	31.1	32	19	27	
LH	Jarlin Garcia	1-2	4.73	68	0	53.1	47	17	42	
RH	Caleb Smith	0-1	7.71	9	0	18.2	21	10	18	
Closer										
RH	Brad Ziegler	1-4	4.79	53	10	47.0	57	16	26	

Justin Bour  
USA TODAY SPORTSDan Straily  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. An underdog mentality:** There's no question the Marlins don't look as strong on paper as they did last season. The first step in rebuilding will be a recognition the Marlins need to do things differently. The offense will likely need to manufacture runs by stringing hits together instead of relying on homers to score them in bunches.

**2. Good health:** With several projected starters recovering from injuries, the Marlins start off with depth issues. Third baseman Martin Prado missed the first part of last season with a hamstring tear and a sprained knee, and he is still recovering from off-

season knee surgery. Shortstop J.T. Realmuto had shoulder surgery in August and will miss the start of the season, while catcher J.T. Realmuto is recovering from a lower back injury. Left-hander Wei-Yin Chen made eight starts before partially tearing a ligament in his elbow, while Dan righty Straily is dealing with forearm tightness.

**3. Youth movement:** Outfielder Lewis Brinson, 23, has shown extra-base power and speed in the minors. Speedy outfielder Magneuris Sierra, 21, and hard-throwing right-hander Sandy Alcantara, 22, could see time in the majors this season. And sec-

ond baseman Starlin Castro, despite eight MLB seasons under his belt, will be just 28 on opening day.

**4. Pitching, from somewhere:** Despite playing in one of the most pitcher-friendly parks in the majors, the Marlins had the fifth-worst ERA. With no significant additions to the major league roster, individual improvement is essential. Given the inexperience on the roster, that will be difficult for everyone to do.

Steve Gardner

**In the end:** New owners Bruce Sherman and Derek Jeter get exactly what they're paying for – a hopeless, last-place team.

2018  
prediction**86-76**2017 record:  
86-76  
Second place  
NL Central  
Missed  
playoffs

# Milwaukee Brewers

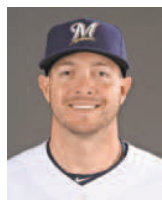
**Manager:** Craig Counsell, third full season with Brewers (220-241)**Coaches:** Darnell Coles (hitting); Derek Johnson (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Manny Pina	45	9	43	2	20	79	.279	.327	.424
1B	Eric Thames	83	31	63	4	75	163	.247	.359	.518
2B	Jonathan Villar	49	11	40	23	30	132	.241	.293	.372
3B	Travis Shaw	84	31	101	10	60	138	.273	.349	.513
SS	Orlando Arcia	56	15	53	14	36	100	.277	.324	.407
LF	Ryan Braun	58	17	52	12	38	76	.268	.336	.487
CF	Lorenzo Cain	86	15	49	26	54	100	.300	.363	.440
RF	Christian Yelich	100	18	18	16	80	137	.282	.369	.439

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
RH	Chase Anderson	12-4	2.74	25	0	141.1		113	41	133
RH	Zach Davies	17-9	3.90	33	0	191.1		204	55	124
RH	Jhoulys Chacin	13-10	3.89	32	0	180.1		157	72	153
LH	Brent Suter	3-2	3.42	22	0	81.2		83	22	64
RH	Brandon Woodruff	2-3	4.81	8	0	43.0		43	14	32
Closer										
RH	Corey Knebel	1-4	1.78	76	39	76.0		48	40	126

Eric Thames  
USA TODAY SPORTSCorey Knebel  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Figuring out outfield:** After trading for Christian Yelich and signing free agent Lorenzo Cain in the offseason, the Brewers had more outfielders than places to play them. Left fielder Ryan Braun, center fielder Keon Broxton and right fielder Domingo Santana all returned. One solution is to allow Braun to see some action at first base. Cain and Yelich are expected to play every day, leaving the others to forage for playing time.

**2. Waiting for Nelson:** Right-hander Jimmy Nelson took a big step forward

in 2017 and was having his best season when he suffered a shoulder injury with three weeks to go. The hope is that he is back before or by the all-star break, adding a valuable arm to the rotation.

**3. Time share at second:** Jonathan Villar had a breakthrough 2016, followed by a disappointing 2017, leaving second base up for grabs. The switch-hitting Villar is still in the mix but so are two versatile utility players, Eric Sogard and Hernan Perez. Sogard, a left-handed hitter, and Perez, who bats right-handed, have been

productive off the bench.

**4. Filling the pen:** Closer Corey Knebel, one of the top strikeout pitchers in the game last season, is back to handle the ninth inning. The Brewers must align the pitchers in front of him, and have added a pair of veterans, lefty Boone Logan and righty Matt Albers to the mix. Left-hander Josh Hader, a revelation as a rookie in 2017, and right-handers Jacob Barnes and Jeremy Jeffress figure to see plenty of action.

Tom Haudricourt, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

**In the end:** Lorenzo Cain, Christian Yelich make outfield formidable; rotation lacks horses to mount serious challenge to Cubs.

2018  
prediction**82-80**2017 record:  
70-92  
Fourth place  
NL East  
Missed  
playoffs

# New York Mets

**Manager:** Mickey Callaway, first season with Mets**Coaches:** Pat Roessler (hitting); Dave Eiland (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Travis d'Arnaud	39	16	57	0	23	59	.244	.293	.443
1B	Adrian Gonzalez	14	3	30	0	16	43	.242	.287	.355
2B	Asdrubal Cabrera	66	14	59	3	50	83	.280	.351	.434
3B	Todd Frazier	74	27	76	4	83	125	.213	.344	.428
SS	Amed Rosario	16	4	10	7	3	49	.248	.271	.394
LF	Yoenis Cespedes	46	17	42	0	26	61	.292	.352	.540
CF	Brandon Nimmo	26	5	21	2	33	60	.260	.379	.418
RF	Jay Bruce	82	36	101	1	57	139	.254	.324	.508

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
RH	Jacob deGrom	15-10	3.53	31	0	201.1		180	59	239
RH	Noah Syndergaard	1-2	2.97	7	0	30.1		29	3	34
LH	Jason Vargas*	18-11	4.16	32	0	179.2		181	58	134
RH	Matt Harvey	5-7	6.70	19	0	92.2		110	47	67
LH	Steven Matz	2-7	6.08	13	0	66.2		83	19	48
Closer										
RH	Jeurys Familia	2-2	4.38	26	6	24.2		21	15	25

Jay Bruce  
USA TODAY SPORTSJeurys Familia  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## A closer look

**1. Keep the pitchers healthy:** The Mets have what manager Mickey Callaway calls the "the best group of arms" he has ever seen, but their fireballing starters have suffered a slew of arm injuries. The club fired its longtime trainer in the offseason and hired a director of sports science in the hopes of better preventing injuries, and Callaway will work to limit workloads to keep his pitchers effective.

**2. Figure out the outfield:** The Mets already had a crowded corner-outfield picture when they

signed Jay Bruce to a three-year free agent deal in the offseason. Having Bruce in right field with Yoenis Cespedes in left might force Michael Conforto back to center, but Conforto will open the year on the DL after having shoulder surgery. Until he returns, the team will use some combination of Brandon Nimmo and Juan Lagares.

**3. Relying on Rosario:** Long one of the Mets' top prospects, shortstop Amed Rosario earned his big-league promotion in early August but did not hit well in his first 46 ma-

jor league games. Rosario's glove is so superior to those of any of the Mets' other shortstop options that they'll likely ride him no matter how he hits.

**4. Who's on first?** The Mets took a flyer on veteran Adrian Gonzalez in the offseason, and Gonzalez appears to have the leg up to start the season as their regular first baseman. But Gonzalez, 35, had an awful year for the Dodgers in 2017, and the Mets' long-term plan at the position is likely still 22-year-old Dom Smith.

Ted Berg

**In the end:** Improved health, boost from new corner infielders Todd Frazier, Adrian Gonzalez carry Mets to playoff contention.

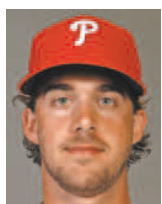
2018  
prediction**76-86**2017 record:  
66-96  
Fifth place  
NL East  
Missed  
playoffs

# Philadelphia Phillies

**Manager:** Gabe Kapler, first season with Phillies**Coaches:** John Mallee (hitting); Bob McClure (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Jorge Alfaro	12	5	14	0	3	33	.318	.360	.514
1B	Carlos Santana	90	23	79	5	88	94	.259	.363	.455
2B	Cesar Hernandez	85	9	34	15	61	104	.294	.373	.421
3B	Maikel Franco	66	24	76	0	41	95	.230	.281	.409
SS	J.P. Crawford	8	0	6	1	16	22	.214	.356	.300
LF	Rhys Hoskins	37	18	48	2	37	46	.259	.396	.618
CF	Odubel Herrera	67	14	56	8	31	126	.281	.325	.452
RF	Nick Williams	45	12	55	1	20	97	.288	.338	.473

Carlos Santana  
USA TODAY SPORTSAaron Nola  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation					H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP			
RH	Aaron Nola	12-11	3.54	27	0	168.0	154	49	184
RH	Jake Arrieta	14-10	3.53	30	0	168.1	150	55	163
RH	Vince Velasquez	2-7	5.13	15	0	72.0	74	34	68
RH	Ben Lively	4-7	4.26	15	0	88.2	90	24	52
RH	Nick Pivetta	8-10	6.02	26	0	133.0	144	57	140
Closer									
RH	Hector Neris	4-5	3.01	74	26	74.2	68	26	86

## Keys to victory

**1. Rhys Hoskins' transition to left field:** Hoskins broke out in the second half last year with 18 homers and 48 RBI in 50 games. However, after splitting time in the outfield and at first base, he will move full time to left thanks to the Carlos Santana signing. Therefore, the Phillies might need to handle some of Hoskins' growing pains as the righty adjusts to playing out of position for the first time.

**2. J.P. Crawford's and Jorge Alfaro's adjustment:** Last season, Crawford and Alfaro combined

for five home runs and 20 RBI in 52 total games, but Alfaro looked a lot more comfortable at catcher than Crawford did at shortstop. Both taking that next step would be huge for a young team.

**3. Aaron Nola's health:** Nola is the best starter on the team and coming off a strong 2017, when he finished with a 3.54 ERA, but he must find a way to stay healthy. The righty's 168 innings last year were a career high, but he spent time on the DL for the second consecutive season. If healthy for a full season, Nola could

approach 200 innings and provide stability in a shaky rotation.

**4. Finding production in the back of the rotation:** The Phillies' last two rotation spots are Ben Lively, who had a 4.26 ERA in 88½ innings, and Nick Pivetta, who had a 6.02 ERA in 133 innings over 26 starts. If Lively can't build off last season and Pivetta can't improve, then the Phillies will need to dig for depth in their rotation, looking at options such as Jake Thompson and Zach Efflin.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:** Manager Gabe Kapler brings energy, innovative thinking, but it will take more than that to solve pitching woes.

2018  
prediction**72-90**2017 record:  
75-87  
Fourth place  
NL Central  
Missed  
playoffs

# Pittsburgh Pirates

**Manager:** Clint Hurdle, eighth season (584-549)**Coaches:** Jeff Branson (hitting); Ray Searage (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Francisco Cervelli	31	5	31	0	32	65	.249	.342	.370
1B	Josh Bell	75	26	90	2	66	117	.255	.334	.466
2B	Josh Harrison	66	16	47	12	28	90	.272	.339	.432
3B	Colin Moran	3	1	3	0	1	1	.364	.417	.818
SS	Jordy Mercer	52	14	58	0	51	88	.255	.326	.406
LF	Corey Dickerson	84	27	62	4	35	152	.282	.325	.490
CF	Starling Marte	48	7	31	21	20	63	.275	.333	.379
RF	Gregory Polanco	39	11	35	8	27	60	.251	.305	.391

Starling Marte  
USA TODAY SPORTSJameson Taillon  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation					H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP			
RH	Jameson Taillon	8-7	4.44	25	0	133.2	152	46	125
RH	Ivan Nova	11-14	4.14	31	0	187.0	203	36	131
RH	Chad Kuhl	8-11	4.35	31	0	157.1	159	72	142
RH	Joe Musgrove	7-8	4.77	38	2	109.1	117	28	98
RH	Trevor Williams	7-9	4.07	31	0	150.1	145	52	117
Closer									
RH	Felipe Rivero	5-3	1.67	73	21	75.1	47	20	88

## Keys to victory

**1. Bounce-back seasons from Marte, Polanco:** Last season, Starling Marte was suspended for 80 games for failing a drug test and Gregory Polanco spent several stints on the disabled list. With Andrew McCutchen traded to San Francisco, Marte, 29, and Polanco, 26, will be asked to lead the way.

**2. Find a No. 1 starter:** By trading Gerrit Cole this offseason, a major hole in the rotation will need to be filled. The most likely successor is Jameson Taillon. The right-hander missed time last season to be treated for testicular

cancer, but he returned to make 25 starts. His 4.44 ERA might not appear ace-like, but his Fielding Independent Pitching was nearly a run lower.

**3. Development of top prospects:** Pitchers Tyler Glasnow, 24, and Steven Brault, 25, had sub-2.00 ERAs at Class AAA last season but struggled after being promoted to the major leagues. Outfielder Austin Meadows, 22, has had injuries stall his progress at Class AAA. Even if all three start the 2017 regular season in the minors, they could be significant contributors in Pittsburgh

by season's end.  
**4. Unify the clubhouse:** Veteran David Freese made headlines in spring training when he said "the demand to win just hasn't been in the air" the past two seasons. The Pirates trading their two best players did nothing to dispel that sentiment. Veteran Josh Harrison expressed a desire to be traded. However, things might have begun to turn with the acquisition of outfielder Corey Dickerson, a move Harrison and others welcomed.

Steve Gardner

**In the end:** Downward trend continues as postseason streak of 2013-15 increasingly seems like a distant memory.

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2018  
prediction**85-77**2017 record:  
83-79Third place  
NL Central  
Missed playoffs

# St. Louis Cardinals

**Manager:** Mike Matheny, seventh season with Cardinals (544-428)**Coaches:** John Mabry (hitting); Mike Maddux (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Yadier Molina	60	18	82	9	28	74	.273	.312	.439
1B	Matt Carpenter	91	23	69	2	109	125	.241	.384	.451
2B	Kolten Wong	55	4	42	8	41	60	.285	.376	.412
3B	Jedd Gyorko	52	20	67	6	47	105	.272	.341	.472
SS	Paul DeJong	55	25	65	1	21	124	.285	.325	.532
LF	Marcell Ozuna	93	37	124	1	64	144	.312	.376	.548
CF	Tommy Pham	95	23	73	25	71	117	.306	.411	.520
RF	Dexter Fowler	68	18	64	7	63	101	.264	.363	.488

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation							H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP					
RH	Carlos Martinez	12-11	3.64	32	0	205.0			179	71	217
LH	Jack Flaherty	0-2	6.33	6	0	21.1			23	10	20
RH	Michael Wacha	12-9	4.13	30	0	165.2			170	55	158
RH	Luke Weaver	7-2	3.88	13	0	60.1			59	17	72
RH	Miles Mikolas	Played in Japan									

Closer											
RH	Luke Gregerson*	2-3	4.57	6	5	161.0			62	20	70

\*check status

Carlos Martinez  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Find a closer:** The Cardinals are going with a closer committee to start the season. After being unable to swing a trade for Alex Colome or sign Wade Davis, and with Luke Gregerson opening the year on the DL, the Cardinals are using Dominic Leone and Tyler Lyons to fill the void. St. Louis expects Gregerson to make an impact when he returns, but he struggled last year in Houston, losing his closer's job because of a 4.57 ERA with 13 homers allowed in 61 innings.

**2. Tommy Pham to live up to expectations:** The Cardinals have one of

the most gifted outfielders in baseball with the acquisition of slugger Marcell Ozuna, the emergence of center fielder Tommy Pham and the résumé of Dexter Fowler. The key might be Pham, who has never had a full season in the big leagues but if he has a 30-30 season like he hopes, he could be the key to the offense.

**3. Return to glory for Adam Wainwright:** One of the game's elite pitchers for a five-year stretch, winning at least 19 games in four of those, Wainwright is being counted on to at least be a solid No. 3 starter. He has struggled for consistency the past

two years, going 25-14, with an alarming 4.81 ERA, yielding 360 hits in 322 innings, and will open the season on the DL with a hamstring injury.

**4. Matt Carpenter to be dangerous again:** The three-time All-Star had his worst offensive season last year, hitting a career-low .241 with a .384 on-base percentage and .451 slugging percentage. The Cardinals are keeping him at first base for now but could always move him back to third base or even as a utility player. He also is being moved from his leadoff spot to third.

Bob Nightengale

**In the end:** Marcell Ozuna's offensive exploits negated by shaky pitching, which keeps Cardinals out of playoffs again.

2018  
prediction**71-91**2017 record:  
71-91Fourth place  
NL West  
Missed playoffs

# San Diego Padres

**Manager:** Andy Green, third season with Padres (139-185)**Coaches:** Matt Stairs (hitting); Darren Balsley (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Austin Hedges	36	18	55	4	23	122	.214	.262	.398
1B	Eric Hosmer	98	25	94	6	66	104	.318	.385	.498
2B	Carlos Asuaje	28	4	21	0	28	76	.270	.334	.362
3B	Chase Headley	77	12	61	9	60	132	.273	.352	.406
SS	Freddy Galvis	71	12	61	14	45	111	.255	.309	.382
LF	Jose Pirela	43	10	40	4	27	71	.288	.347	.490
CF	Manuel Margot	53	13	39	17	35	106	.263	.313	.409
RF	Wil Myers	80	30	74	20	70	180	.243	.328	.464

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation							H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP					
LH	Clayton Richard	8-15	4.79	32	0	197.1			240	59	151
RH	Dinelson Lamet	7-8	4.57	21	0	114.1			88	54	139
RH	Luis Perdomo	8-11	4.67	29	0	163.2			182	65	118
RH	Tyson Ross	3-3	7.71	12	0	49			53	37	36
RH	Bryan Mitchell	1-1	5.79	20	1	32.2			42	13	17

Closer											
LH	Brad Hand	3-4	2.16	72	21	79.1			54	20	104

Eric Hosmer  
USA TODAY SPORTSClayton Richard  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Wil Myers' move to right field:** By adding Eric Hosmer, the Padres must make room for him by moving Myers back to the outfield after a year at first base. Offensively, Myers is solid, but the Padres need him to improve defensively in the outfield with Hosmer taking up first base for the next eight years.

**2. Who will keep rotation jobs?** After Clayton Richard and Dinelson Lamet, the rotation is full of questions. Luis Perdomo struggled for a second consecutive season, but little competition means he'll have another chance. The next two spots are

open, with Tyson Ross, Robbie Erlin and Bryan Mitchell the favorites. Colin Rea and Erlin were injured and didn't pitch last year. Mitchell comes over from the Yankees, and there is a clear rotation spot for him to keep if he produces.

**3. Manuel Margot's, Hunter Renfroe's and Jose Pirela's play:** In his first full season, Margot was inconsistent with injuries but showed upside with 13 home runs and 17 stolen bases. Pirela surprised in 83 games with a .837 OPS, while Renfroe finished the year with 26 home runs and 58 RBI. The two will fight for the

starting left field job but must keep producing to stay on the field.

**4. Which prospects can earn playing time?** Infielder Luis Urias might be 20, but a strong start to the season could get him time at the MLB level. Right-handed pitcher Cal Quantrill spent most of last year in Class AA, but a strong start could fast-track him to the big leagues. Urias hit .296 in 118 Class AA games last year. Quantrill was 7-10 with a 3.80 ERA between the high-A and Class AA levels.

Daniel Chavkin

**In the end:** Eric Hosmer era begins with thud as opponents beat up on vulnerable Padres pitching staff.

2018  
prediction**82-80**2017 record:  
64-98  
Fifth place  
NL West  
Missed  
playoffs

# San Francisco Giants

**Manager:** Bruce Bochy, 12th season (902-880)**Coaches:** Alonzo Powell (hitting); Curt Young (pitching)

## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Buster Posey	62	12	67	6	61	66	.320	.400	.462
1B	Brandon Belt	63	18	51	3	66	104	.241	.355	.469
2B	Joe Panik	60	10	53	4	46	54	.288	.347	.421
3B	Evan Longoria	71	20	86	6	46	109	.261	.313	.424
SS	Brandon Crawford	58	14	77	3	42	113	.253	.305	.403
LF	Hunter Pence	55	13	67	2	40	102	.260	.315	.385
CF	Austin Jackson	46	7	35	3	33	64	.318	.387	.482
RF	Andrew McCutchen	94	28	88	11	73	116	.279	.363	.486

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
LH	Derek Holland	7-14	6.20	29	0	135		156	75	104
RH	Johnny Cueto	8-8	4.52	25	0	147.1		160	53	136
LH	Andrew Suarez	Rookie								
RH	Chris Stratton	4-4	3.68	13	1	58.2		59	28	51
LH	Ty Blach	8-12	4.78	24	0	163.2		179	43	73
		Closer								
RH	Mark Melancon	1-2	4.50	32	11	30.0		37	6	29

Buster Posey  
USA TODAY SPORTSJohnny Cueto  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Rotation stepping up:** Last season the staff ERA rose from 3.65 to 4.50, and this year there are questions about the two spots behind Madison Bumgarner, Johnny Cueto and Jeff Samardzija. Lefty Ty Blach doesn't miss many bats, so his command must be pin-point for him to succeed. Chris Stratton excelled in the final two months but remains untested. Bumgarner and Samardzija will begin the year on the DL.

**2. Getting value from newcomers:** The Giants have been rejuvenated by the acquisition of third baseman Evan Longoria, outfielders Andrew Mc-

Cutchen and Austin Jackson and reliever Tony Watson. The quartet has shown signs of decline, although McCutchen and Jackson are coming off strong seasons.

**3. Enjoying bounce-back years:** Hunter Pence's OPS plummeted more than 100 points to a career-low .701 last season. Brandon Belt and Brandon Crawford endured rough years for different reasons. Johnny Cueto's ERA gained nearly two runs. Madison Bumgarner made just 17 starts. San Francisco has lots of candidates for improved seasons, with only Pence (34) being older than 32.

**4. Bullpen stabilizes:**

Mark Melancon's ineffectiveness, possibly because of a forearm injury that required surgery, sent the bullpen into a tailspin. Sam Dyson had 14 saves, but the Giants need Melancon to be the anchor. If he does, the relievers could turn into an asset, with Dyson joining Watson, Hunter Strickland and Will Smith (once he returns from Tommy John surgery) as part of an improved group.

Jorge L. Ortiz

**In the end:** Without much help from Madison Bumgarner, it is hard for the aging roster to keep the team in wild-card contention.

2018  
prediction**94-68**2017 record:  
97-65  
first place  
NL East  
Lost in NLDS

# Washington Nationals

**Manager:** Dave Martinez, first season with Nationals**Coaches:** Kevin Long (hitting); Derek Lilliquist (pitching)

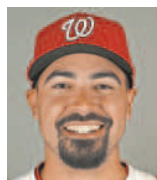
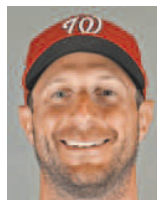
## Projected lineup

Pos.	Player	R	HR	RBI	SB	BB	SO	Avg.	OBP	Slg.
C	Matt Wieters	43	10	52	1	38	94	.225	.288	.344
1B	Ryan Zimmerman	90	36	108	1	44	126	.303	.358	.573
2B	Daniel Murphy*	94	23	93	2	52	77	.322	.384	.543
3B	Anthony Rendon	81	25	100	7	84	82	.301	.403	.522
SS	Trea Turner	75	11	45	46	30	80	.284	.338	.451
LF	Adam Eaton	24	2	13	3	14	18	.297	.393	.462
CF	Michael Taylor	55	19	53	17	29	137	.271	.320	.486
RF	Bryce Harper	95	29	87	4	68	99	.319	.413	.595

\*check status

## Pitching

Thr.	Player	Rotation						H	BB	SO
		W-L	ERA	G	Sv	IP				
RH	Max Scherzer	16-6	2.51	31	0	200.2		126	55	268
RH	Stephen Strasburg	15-4	2.52	28	0	175.1		131	47	204
LH	Gio Gonzalez	15-9	2.96	32	0	201.0		158	79	188
RH	Tanner Roark	13-11	4.67	32	0	181.1		178	64	166
RH	A.J. Cole	3-5	3.81	11	0	52.0		51	27	44
		Closer								
LH	Sean Doolittle	2-0	2.81	53	24	51.1		34	10	62

Anthony Rendon  
USA TODAY SPORTSMax Scherzer  
USA TODAY SPORTS

## Keys to victory

**1. Transition:** Washington fired manager Dusty Baker, who averaged 96 wins over two seasons after taking over an 83-79 team. New manager Dave Martinez has established a reputation as a players coach under Joe Maddon. Noted pitching coach Mike Maddox is also gone, but he is replaced by Derek Lilliquist, who had a successful five-plus-year run with the Cardinals. There is also a new hitting coach (Kevin Long). The core players remain, but they are adjusting to new voices.

**2. Pressure:** Ownership has made it clear two first-place finishes and five-game first-round

playoff exits are not enough. The expectation is a World Series run, and the pressure is ramped up on a club that could lose core players Bryce Harper and Daniel Murphy in free agency after the season.

**3. Reserve play:** Murphy, the second baseman, is recovering from offseason knee surgery, and left fielder Adam Eaton is coming off a torn anterior cruciate ligament. The team has strong depth, including infielders Howie Kendrick and Wilmer Difo in the infield and outfielders Brian Goodwin and perhaps prospect Victor Robles, that will be called on if Murphy and Eaton aren't 100%. Murphy star-

ts the season on the disabled list but Kendrick is a veteran who can still be productive, especially in shorter spurts. He hit .315 RBI in 91 games last year.

**4. The Mets:** They look to be the only NL East team that could challenge the Nationals. This status depends on a healthy rotation. If Mets starters approach their 2016 form, which led to a World Series run, the Nats could be in for a draining division race. If New York is hit by injuries like last year, the Nats should coast.

Stephen Borelli

**In the end:** Easily claim title in weak division in what might be Bryce Harper's final season, but year will be judged on October.



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