

## 2008 Team Notes

### Arizona Diamondbacks

I wasn't completely surprised that Orlando Hudson didn't win the Gold Glove at second base in the National League. For one, he missed a lot of playing time, two, Brandon Phillips is pretty good there himself and three, I had heard that Hudson had dropped off in his fielding during the 2008 season. I still picked him for the Gold Glove but I'm not completely unhappy about it since I do have Phillips on one of my teams. Hudson will still hold onto the 2b-1 in my projections but a drop to a 2b-2 by Strat has to be something to keep in the back of your mind if you are thinking of picking up Hudson in a deal. Hudson is still valuable as a 2b-2 but you won't have to pay as much for him if his fielding drops. Conor Jackson has a realistic shot at a lf-4 especially since I'm projecting Adam Dunn as a lf-4 on the same team. Jackson was a lf-5 in the 2007 set but in that season he only had two games in lf. In 2008, Jackson had 77 games in lf and that alone could be enough to get him the lf-4. My first guess was to make Justin Upton a rf-2 but I later switched that to a rf-3. Upton might deserve the rf-2 just based on his speed alone. Chris Young can't be too far from winning a Gold Glove in the National League outfield. Adam Dunn will do great in Strat with his fantastic on-base percentage. Dunn had 40 home runs (again) and 122 total walks. A closer look at his stats show that he only scored 39 runs when he didn't coast around the bases in his home run trot. So, with 122 hits, 7 HBP and 122 walks, he was on base 251 times. If you subtract the 40 home runs, he scored 39 times in 211 chances. OK, we might see his running drop from the 1-12 that I projected to a 1-9 or something that is more worthy of an aging back-up catcher. But, even with that in mind, he'll be a nice lefty bat to have in Strat. Mark Reynolds had a great first half of the 2008 season. His home runs dropped off dramatically in the second half, from 19 to 9, and all of his numbers declined. This was a season in which it looked like he would break out and be a great player to have in Strat. Now, this card will be best if platooned vs LHPing and the only improvement that he made in Strat was to become an \* base stealer. I'd look for Reynolds to keep getting better in 2009 and the areas that he needs to improve in shouldn't be too tough. He'll need to hit better than .226 vs RHPing and he'll need to cut down on his 34 errors! I had to choose between Miguel Montero and JR Towles in the draft last year. I took Towles, which looks bad now, but I thought it was a good move when I did it. Montero had a couple of hot streaks that carried his season stats. Montero is a lefty bat at catcher who can hurt a lop-sided righty pitcher who gives up ball park homeruns! That is still a valuable weapon in Strat.

The D'backs look to have a strong starting rotation in 2009. B. Webb, D. Haren, R. Johnson, D. Davis and M. Scherzer will be a tough group to face for opposing batters. Jon Rauch is a good reliever who gave up 18 runs in 23 innings after the D'Backs acquired him from the Nats. Tony Pena should be a dominating closer yet he allowed 38 runs in 72 innings. Brandon Lyon led the team with 26 saves yet he allowed 34 runs in 59 innings. Yusmeiro Petit has some good numbers but allowing 12 home runs in 56 innings will keep you out of the closer role for sure. Chad Qualls pitched the best of the relievers and 22 'holds' is a nice number. Qualls also blew 8 saves in 17 tries. Qualls was fantastic in the last two months and saved 7 of 8 games in September. These relievers are all better than they showed in 2009. The D'Backs have the potential to have a tough pitching team if just one of these relievers can claim the closer job in spring training.

### Atlanta Braves

The big mystery was the disappearance of Jeff Francoeur as a big bat in the Braves line-up. I've heard that some off season conditioning before the 2008 season bulked up Francoeur too much and it cost him some of his quickness. The result was Francoeur trying too hard on both offense and defense. It seemed on defense that he was trying too hard to prove that he was Gold Glove worthy and was overaggressive, especially with his throwing. I'd look for Francoeur to bounce back and return to his 2007 form, only with more home run power. The guy crushes the ball and if he can get

off to a good start, it could turn into a big season. Kelly Johnson is a legitimate 2b-3 now and it looks like he could develop into a 2b-2 in the near future. Johnson is probably going to top 20 home runs and a .300 BA in the future too. Yunel Escobar is a borderline 2b-2/3 for the future too. The two reasons for this are that he's pretty high up on the Fielding Bible Award list, courtesy of the Bill James Handbook, and two, if Michael Young can win a Gold Glove, well, Escobar is a better defender than Young. Wouldn't it have been funny if both Kotchman and Teixeira co-won the Gold Glove award in the American League for the Angels? These two are both great defensive players and their combined efforts seem more valuable than the total of Carlos Pena. I'm not knocking Pena at all but the other two guys are more impressive to me. Martin Prado is really good at both 2b and 3b. In spring training, he made plays that no one else on the Braves could make and he isn't affected at all with moving around on the infield. The Braves poor season may cost Prado a 3b-2 but he's that good there. Mark Kotsay looked much better by mid-season. Kotsay didn't have a power swing early in the season, due to his back problems or the fact that he wasn't fully recovered, and it seemed like it affected him on defense too. I'll admit that he looked better with the Red Sox but the cf-3 was due to his early play. Josh Anderson will be a nice 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> outfielder for the Braves but I don't see him starting in 2009. Anderson can be a valuable guy to have on your strat bench with his speed, defense and the fact that he can hit RHPing. I just found an error in my projections, Gregor Blanco, should have an A bunting rating. I was looking at the numbers that Blanco put up in 2008 and he really had a good season. He could help out a team needing a lead-off guy vs RHPing but I don't see him having much future value. The Braves will have Blanco on the bench in 2009 and he'll once again have to beat out Matt Diaz, Brandon Jones or whoever else the Braves run out there. I would project Blanco to get 250 at-bats and have about the same type of Strat card. Brian McCann is developing into the Braves new star, after most of the attention was on Francoeur, and now the worry is that the Braves run the risk of burning out their star catcher. The Braves finances seem to have the forever scouring the market for bargains like Greg Norton, Ruben Gotay, etc. They're a sure bet to pick up their back-up catcher that way in 2009.

The Braves pitching plans dissolved early with the loss of John Smoltz. He was followed to the disabled list early during the season by Tom Glavine and later by Tim Hudson. Without Smoltz, the Braves weren't going to have a chance against the Mets or Phillies. The rotation at the end of 2009 could be: Smoltz, Glavine, Hudson, Jurrjens, and Campillo. They're not all signed and they're not all healthy now, but it could happen. Chuck James could come back from his labrum and rotator cuff surgery and be ready late in the season too. All of these injuries could leave a spot open for Charlie Morton who could really benefit from the major league experience. I'm not completely sold on Mike Gonzalez and Rafael Soriano as the closers. I'm hoping that the Braves can sign John Smoltz and put him in the closer role, especially if that is better for his overall pitching health.

Did you guys think that I could write anything on the Braves and not mention Chipper Jones? This could be his best card ever and he's winding down his great career with no real chance at 500 home runs, or 3000 hits. If the Braves are out of it in 2009, could you see him going to a contender at the end of 2009 season to finish his career on a winner or does he have a few seasons left in him? I was expecting him to retire after 2008 if the Braves had won. With Bobby Cox coming back for one year, and with Smoltz and Glavine possibly coming back for 2009, we'll see Chipper back for another great 400 at-bat season.

## Baltimore Orioles

Nick Markakis is projected as a rf-1 and he'll have a hard time cracking the Gold Glove trio of Ichiro, Torii Hunter and Grady Sizemore. I see no reason why he shouldn't be a rf-1 unless you want to factor in the Orioles 93 loss season. Adam Jones gave the Orioles just what they needed in cf, which is, someone who can catch the ball and has the potential to develop into a star player. Jones was just getting comfortable in his full time playing role, and he was on a hot streak when he went down

with the fractured left foot. Jones came back a month later but couldn't regain his batting stroke. Jones should be all recovered in 2009 and I'd expect more of a breakout season from him. These two guys were the good news for the Orioles in 2008.

The shortstop hole was a killer for the Orioles who had five players log more than 200 innings at the position. The team finally had to settle on Juan Castro, who can still catch the ball but he didn't provide any offense when he was in his prime, and now he is 37 years old. Luis Hernandez was a complete bust as he lasted little more than a month. A ss-4 for Hernandez isn't out of the question. Both Brandon Fahey and Freddie Bynum provided little offense or defense. Alex Cintron provided some offense but old arm or shoulder injuries limited him at shortstop. It's a good thing that Brian Roberts was able to handle the changes as he turned 110 double plays at shortstop. That may be more a sign of a large number of base runners than great defense. Roberts is a great defender at 2b and he's a 2b-2 with the Orioles and a borderline 2b-1 on a playoff team in a Strat replay. It wouldn't be shocking to see Melvin Mora drop to a 3b-4e10 even though I projected a 3b-3. The e-rating is still good enough to make him a useful player there, especially vs LHPing.

Ramon Hernandez has dropped off dramatically in the last three seasons with the Orioles. His CS% numbers have dropped from 43% to 23% to 19.5% in those seasons. He's allowed more steal attempts and his offense is dropping off fast. With Matt Wieters waiting in the wings to take over at catcher, it may be time for Hernandez to be a back-up catcher or to move on to another team, if someone will take him which is probably dependant on his contract status.

The starting rotation is a mess, to put it bluntly. Jeremy Guthrie is a solid starter but he's not a staff ace, which he'll have to be on this team unless they sign another big time starter. Daniel Cabrera is going to run out of chances soon with the Orioles. Cabrera is not improving and in fact, his strikeout rate dropped dramatically. Radhames Liz is following the same path as Cabrera. Great arm but the walks are a killer. Both Cabrera and Liz could turn it around fast and have fantastic seasons, they do have that kind of potential, but it seems more likely that they could continue to struggle. Brian Burres and Garrett Olson are two lefties who combined for 48 starts in 2008, and will be in the rotation again in 2009. These kinds of lefties will get punished in Strat and I don't think them as dominant enough to overcome that, even if they have better seasons in 2009.

George Sherrill and Chris Ray give the Orioles two options for the closer role. Sherrill could have a better card for set-up relief since he's a lefty closer with 30 on-base chances vs RHBs. Ray is coming back from Tommy John surgery and he could bounce back like BJ Ryan did in 2008. Dennis Sarfate is an interesting option in the draft. Anyone with 86 K's in 79.2 innings has to draw some attention, even with the staggering total of 62 walks.

## Boston Red Sox

Mike Lowell missed about a third of the season with hip trouble and a right oblique injury. It affected his overall production and his fielding dropped from a 3b-1 to a 3b-2. With Adrian Beltre winning the Gold Glove at third and being a sure 3b-1, and Lowell losing his 3b-1, the only other player that I could see with a 3b-1 in the AL is Scott Rolen. Jed Lowrie and Julio Lugo make an interesting platoon in Strat. Lowrie is going to be valuable with a ss-3e4 and a 3b-3e12. Lowrie had 27 walks in the last two months, but he also struck out 42 times in his last 123 at-bats. Lugo has his typical ss-3 high e-rating type card that contributes on-base and speed. Dustin Pedroia has one of the top ten cards in the set. I'm just now thinking about where I would place him on my top 200 draft list. I'm going to try to figure if anyone is better than him. Kevin Youkilis will have an awesome card. Youkilis played well enough at third that he just might be better than the 3b-4e17 that I projected. I was sort of afraid of making Youkilis too good at third base, which could make him the top guy there in a replay. And, we don't want to distort the replays! JD Drew had probably his best season since leaving the

Braves after the 2004 season. Back problems slowed down JD on August 17 and he didn't play much after that. Drew will have a fantastic Strat card even if you have to pick your spots with him to save at-bats. Could it be that Coco Crisp will be worth more in strat than Jacoby Ellsbury? Ellsbury is the future guy but the +2 arm will limit his overall effectiveness in Strat.

## Chicago White Sox

The guy that I picked for the Gold Glove at shortstop was Orlando Cabrera. With Michael Young winning the Gold Glove, there will be no ss-1's in the American League. So, what does that mean for the White Sox. For one, it means that it will be tougher for the team to win in a replay. Two, it could open the door for Alexei Ramirez to be bumped up to a 2b-2 from a 2b-3. I downgraded Cabrera to a ss-2 and left Ramirez as a 2b-3 in the projections. But, since the White Sox did win the division, there is always the chance for upgraded defense. Ramirez had a great season for the White Sox and he's going to move over to shortstop in 2009.

Carlos Quentin had a breakthrough season in left field for the White Sox. I could see Quentin easily getting more walks, more HBP and more steals in 2009. Before he hurt his wrist, Quentin was putting up better OBP numbers in the second half. Looking over his monthly stats, two steals a month looks realistic for him and he only needs 10 to be a sure thing \* base stealer.

The White Sox really need to upgrade the defense. Brian Anderson would be a big improvement in center field if he can hit enough to keep the starting job. Anderson had 8 home runs in 80 at-bats vs LHPing. That was about the extent of his offense. In Strat, you can use Anderson as a defensive replacement and pinch runner. If he has to hit, he could be ok vs LHPing in a reserve role.

Nick Swisher had a disappointing season with the White Sox. After all we had seen Swisher do in Oakland, we all expected Swisher to have a career year in 2008 with the White Sox. After a hot month of June, it looked like Swisher was breaking out of his funk but it was all downhill in the second half as he even struggled with his on-base percentage. The good money is on a return to form in 2009, and he might even be better if he stays at first base for the whole season. I could still see him with a 35 home run, 100 walk season for the White Sox.

## Chicago Cubs

Micah Hoffpauir gets a 1b-2 because he's a good fielder and with Derrek Lee there at 1b for the Cubs, it won't impact the replay at all. Hoffpauir will have an interesting pinch hitting card since he may just be a nice weapon to have vs select LHPing. Ryan Theriot would be fantastic if he could pull out a ss-2 rating. I don't see that happening but the Cubs did win 97 games and that alone might be enough to justify a boost at one of the infield positions. I don't see Mark DeRosa being any better than a 2b-3 again so it leaves only Theriot with a possible chance to benefit from the teams overall finish. Kosuke Fukudome was having a great first half of a year with an OBP over .400 when he fell apart in late July, finishing the season batting under .200 for the last two months. This could make him the best bargain in the upcoming draft or it could expose him as a player who has been figured out by the opposing pitchers. I would bet that he's a bargain and that he can bounce back in 2009. Overall, he's got the potential to have a great card since he's got a long history as a walker. I drafted Felix Pie last year in the second round and was hoping that he'd at least get some decent playing time. Pie really didn't get much of a chance but he didn't do much with the little chance that he did get. I'd say that Pie won't get much of a chance in 2009 either, especially with Reed Johnson there and Piniella as the manager. Jim Edmonds did a surprisingly good job for the Cubs since he was plucked off of the scrap heap. Ryan Theriot has an outside chance for a ss-2 so his value could increase a lot if you have him. I wouldn't trade for him based on that but it is something to keep in mind.

## Cincinnati Reds

Chris Dickerson's season ended about two weeks early due to a stress fracture in his ankle. Dickerson exceeded everyone's expectations with an amazing 102 at-bats. In that short time, he had 17 walks, hit 9 doubles, 2 triples, 6 home runs and stole 5 bases. The 20 runs scored is impressive too. These numbers are much better than anything that he has done in the minors. The Reds have been waiting a few years for Dickerson to arrive, he's 27 years old, and it has been his superior athletic skills that have gotten him so many chances. Dickerson is clearly better than Corey Patterson and Dickerson could take over in cf or lf in 2009 in a platoon role. He could platoon in cf with Ryan Freel, Nate Hopper or Jerry Hairston. Jay Bruce got better the more that he played. Bruce will start in rf for the Reds in 2009 and there is no reason to believe that he won't have a great season. Ryan Freel once again will have a valuable card in a season in which he missed a large amount of playing time due to injuries. Freel could platoon in the outfield vs LHPing for a Strat team. Edwin Encarnacion is hitting more home runs, walking more and scoring more runs. It would seem that Encarnacion is on the verge of a 30 home run and .300 BA season. Ken Griffey looked like he was just about done by the end of the season with the White Sox. The Reds made the right move in trading Griffey since he had a shot at the playoffs with the White Sox. Jerry Hairston may be one of the best utility players in the Strat set. I don't know if Hairston can do this again but one year of a card like this is can help to get you into the playoffs. Hairston had 47 runs scored in 261 at-bats! Paul Janish could pull out a ss-3 rating. Jeff Keppinger has a valuable platoon card vs LHPing, especially if you can use him at 2b where he's a 2b-3e10. Corey Patterson has 366 useless at-bats. The things that you'll use Patterson for, defense and pinch running, would only require about 50 at-bats. It's a good thing that Patterson can bunt. David Ross is projected as a bunting A but that could drop to a B despite his higher number of sac bunts. I can't tell if Edwin Encarnacion is progressing or just staying about the same. His numbers are all over the place but I still believe that he can become much better in a short amount of time. Joey Votto has a shot at a 1b-2 and he is worth more in real life than this strat card will show.

## Cleveland Indians

Andy Marte may finally be ready to take over at 3b. Marte was 29 for his last 99 in 2008 and he'll be able to platoon vs LHPing with this Strat card. Marte is only 25 years old and it is interesting that when he started to hit for a high batting average, he didn't hit any home runs. I wouldn't mind take a chance on him in 2009 but I wouldn't pay a lot for him either. Jhonny Peralta played one game at 3b late in the season. I don't know if the Indians wanted to try him there for a switch in 2009 but the move of Peralta to 3b, Asdrubal Cabrera to shortstop and Josh Barfield back to 2b is very possible. This would all be complicated if Peralta doesn't want to move, and chances are that he wants to stay at ss. Franklin Gutierrez could retain his rf-1 rating. I projected a rf-2 for Gutierrez partly because I wanted to rate both Nick Markakis and Alex Rios as rf-1's. It is very possible that they'll all be 1's. Gutierrez got squeezed for playing time with the emergence of Shin-Soo Choo and Ben Francisco. Choo won the rf job with about a .650 slugging percentage in the final two months. Francisco tailed off a little in September but he was steady for most of the season. Jamey Carroll has had another nice season in which his strat card will be a valuable one to have on the bench. Travis Hafner, who seemed like a sure thing to have a great card ever year, now has a useless card and a maybe questionable future since the Indians may end up with Victor Martinez at dh for the majority of the season. Grady Sizemore just keeps getting better! Sizemore had career highs in home runs, 33, rbi, 90 (a nice total for a leadoff guy) and steals, 38. Has Grady Sizemore become worthy of batting third in the lineup even though all of his 2008 at-bats have been in the leadoff position?

Kelly Shoppach gets the benefit of the Cleveland Indians team CS% and he'll get the better throwing arm of the two Indian catchers. Shoppach is projected with a -1 throwing arm and Victor Martinez is projected with a 0 arm. The actual numbers would really indicate that those arms should be

reversed. I am counting on Victor Martinez not getting the better throwing arm even though he's had better CS% numbers for the last two seasons. Shoppach is also the full time catcher, with a better reputation for defense, and he'll have more of an effect on the overall team numbers.

If the Indians don't give Jensen Lewis the closer job in 2009 I'll be shocked. There is talk of the Indians looking for a closer like Trevor Hoffman and I can't imagine that a pitcher like that could do anything but help with the coaching of a pitcher like Jensen Lewis. Hoffman may be just what that teams needs to show them all (R. Betancourt & R. Perez) just what closing is all about.

## Colorado Rockies

The Rockies may have struck it rich with the trade of Matt Holliday to the A's. The three players that the Rockies got were Carlos Gonzalez, Greg Smith and Huston Street. Gonzalez takes over in lf and he has all the potential to replace Holliday in that lineup. Smith moves right into the rotation and gives them another big inning guy. Street takes over at closer for Brian Fuentes and he has a nice supporting cast in Manny Corpas and Taylor Buchholz. You have to go along with the Rockies logic here and realize that they have done well with outfielders hitting well in their ball park. Replacing a guy like Holliday seems like a major task until you think back on all the guys like Jay Payton (2002-2003) who had career years there. Clint Barmes appears ready to take over at 2b in 2009. Barmes, who always seems to get hurt when he's hitting well, came back nicely in September after returning from a right knee sprain. Omar Quintanilla will be there to provide late inning defense at 2b. Ian Stewart creates a nice problem at third base for the Rockies who also have to find playing time for Garrett Atkins at first or third base. Todd Helton will be back at first base. I don't see Stewart winning the 2b job. Maybe someone will be tried in lf or maybe the team will have to move a player like Atkins, even though it would seem the Helton may be the player that really needs to move. The questions of have to get Troy Tulowitzki off to a strong start are interesting. I might try sandwiching him between two strong left handed batters like Helton and Hawpe just because he hits so well versus the lefties. It might help a little but maybe they'll just have to live with the fact that he's a second half player.

## Detroit Tigers

Miguel Cabrera could end up with a 1b-5 to go along with his 3b-5. The Tigers have an interesting problem with so many of their players best suited for the dh spot. Cabrera, Gary Sheffield and Magglio Ordonez could all be better off at the dh spot. Sheffield, at 499 home runs, is nearing the end of a great career and could end up being a cut for a lot of Strat teams. Sheffield is no sure thing to comeback to his old form and he's more likely to be injured again in 2009. Mags had a strong finish in September and showed that he's more like the hitter from 2006, than the career year he had in 2007. Brandon Inge doesn't supply a whole lot of offense and his value may be best as a backup catcher, defensive replacement at third and he could start at third base in 2009. Matt Joyce will start in lf in 2009 and I still have faith in him even though he finished with just 3 hits in his last 29 at-bats. Someone asked me what I thought of Edgar Renteria's chances of being a ss-3. I put those at 25% chance and also said that it wasn't likely. Clete Thomas will have a nice card but he'll miss all of the 2009 season after elbow surgery so he's not really much of a future pick.

There seems to be a solid starting rotation in Justin Verlander, Armando Galarraga, Jeremy Bonderman and Zach Miner. Verlander is a great pitcher who may have had his worst season in 2008 and that could be partly due to the defense behind him. Galarraga could get pounded by LHBs in Strat but he's much better in real life. Bonderman is minus one rib after 2008 and he's motivated to return to his 2006 form in 2009. Miner was solid in 13 starts in 2008 and it looks like he's going to be a solid 4<sup>th</sup> starter for the Tigers. The 5<sup>th</sup> starter job is open to guys like Dontrelle Willis, Nate

Robertson or maybe a rookie. Joel Zumaya and Fernando Rodney will compete for the closer job in 2008, and those guys could be fine if they can cut down on their walks allowed.

## Florida Marlins

If this were my team I'd really have to make some changes to address the defense. Hanley Ramirez is a great fantasy player but he's going to be more valuable as a dh in Strat than as a starting ss-4. I just don't see Ramirez getting a ss-3 in the short term. The Marlins are probably not going to move Ramirez to the outfield since I don't see a great replacement for him at ss. It would be the smarter move to give the 2b job to the defensive minded Emilio Bonifacio and move Dan Uggla to third base where he's less of a defensive liability. Alfredo Amezaga could be a ss-2 on a team that had a good defensive shortstop but I doubt that he'll get that rating with the Marlins. Jorge Cantu should be less of a defensive liability at first base than he was at third base. It was good to see Cantu have his best season with the Marlins who picked him up off of the scrap heap as a non-roster invitee this spring. Cameron Maybin, playing full time in center field in 2009, should improve the defense tremendously in 2009. I'm not sure that Maybin will hit as great as he did with the Marlins in 2008 (he batted .500 in 8 games) but he's more likely to do what he did in the Southern League in 2008. Maybin provided power, speed and walks in AA and he's likely to do the same with the Marlins in 2009. John Baker is going to be a valuable strat catcher and the fact that he's a lefty on-base machine could make him go earlier in the strat drafts than most people will expect. I like the platoon of Cody Ross and Jeremy Hermida in rf for the Marlins. Ross is the overachiever and Hermida is a bit of a strat disappointment, but together, they'll get the job done. The trade of Josh Willingham creates a void in leftfield but the Marlins can pick up some guy like Luis Gonzalez to fill in for a year or two.

I like the rotation of Ricky Nolasco, Josh Johnson, Chris Volstad, Anibel Sanchez and Andrew Miller. The team is still looking for a closer but there could be a chance that Matt Lindstrom gets a shot at the closer job.

## Houston Astros

Miguel Tejada has to be considered a bust for the Astros. He only hit three home runs in his last 343 at-bats and they didn't exactly get him for his defensive skills. Not that he's terrible at shortstop, but Tejada will never be a ss-2 again. Kaz Matsui put together a nice season for the Astros at second base but it is doubtful that he'll be a 2b-2 again. That 2b-2 last year had a lot to do with the success of the Rockies and his rating got pushed up with the entire Rockies team. Lance Berkman had a career high of 18 steals and that combined with a possible 1b-2 could boost his value even more. A drop off in the second half in his offensive numbers is really due to a poor September, which is probably due to the fact that the Astros finished without the big bat of Carlos Lee in the line-up. Michael Bourn had a disappointing season and he needs to get on more to be able to stay at the top of the batting order. JR Towles could salvage a horrible season with a good Strat card vs LHPing. Ty Wigginton had an awesome August and that carried his stats for 2008. That one month pretty much sealed up a starting job for him at 3b in 2009. Some notes on the Astros defense: Wigginton is a sure 3b-4 but he seemed to do ok in lf filling in for Lee; Lee could be a lf-4 or a 5; Erstad always gets great defensive ratings from Strat so I don't expect this year to be any different; Pence could be a rf 2 or 3; is it just a matter of time before Tejada is a ss-4; could Brad Ausmus get a c-1 in his last season from Strat?

Roy Oswalt was 10-2 in his last 13 starts. The numbers really are something else. I watched some of those games since he's been on one of my teams since his rookie season. The thing is, when he was out there during that stretch, there was almost no doubt that the Astros were going to win. Even if he gave up some runs early, he had the confidence of the whole team (and me) and in that stretch, he defined exactly what an ace is. Now, if he can do it for an entire season, he'll turn in one of those

great years like Greg Maddux had in 1997 or 1998. Wandy Rodriguez seems like he's close to having the big season but he's been plagued by inconsistency. The rotation is in trouble after you get past these two guys. Jose Valverde was great for the Astros and the things that will hurt him in strat are the home runs and +9 hold on rating. LaTroy Hawkins was almost perfect after the Astros got him from the Yankees.

#### Kansas City Royals

I really went back and forth on the fielding rating for Mike Aviles. He is still on the bubble between a ss-3 or a ss-4. I went with the ss-3 in my projections since I gave him the benefit of a doubt in his first season. Aviles had a .325 rookie season with the Royals after three seasons at AAA in which he just kept getting better. I'd say that Aviles is perfect for some team that needs ss help now and really needs help vs LHPing. Aviles is going to have the shortstop job for the Royals in 2009 and if he can keep playing like he did in 2008, he could be there for a while. Alex Gordon could have a shot at a 3b-2. I'd say that he's still a solid 3b-3 now but if the Royals can improve, Gordon will be one to reap the benefit with improved fielding in Strat. Gordon had a five walk game in 2008 and doesn't just happen, he's going to rack up some impressive offensive seasons in a few years. Alberto Callaspo is almost a sure thing to start at second base. Callaspo batted .305 and with just 14 K's in 213 at-bats he may be a perfect #2 batter for the Royals. Callaspo had most of his success batting in the #2, 7 and 9 spots in the batting order. If Tony Pena is a ss-2, Aviles will be a ss-3; and if Pena is a ss-3, Aviles will be a ss-4. Mark Teahen, primarily an outfielder, isn't going to get the cf rating with just one inning out there. Teahen plays good defense everywhere and he'd be a cf-4 if he were to get rated in cf. Mark Teahen should get most of his playing time in rf. If Ryan Shealy is for real and if he can maintain the home run pace that he had in September, the Royals could use that to make a big improvement on their 73 wins in 2008.

Gil Meche is solid as the number one starter. Zack Greinke is a good number two starter and improving. Kyle Davies showed in a hot September that he's improved to the point where he can be counted on to provide solid starts. Brian Bannister had 7 starts in which he gave up more than 7 runs. That doesn't sound too lucky to me but I don't see him as that bad. Bannister is much better than the guy who gave up 9 home runs in 26.2 innings in August. He was too good in 2007 to have dropped off like this. There are a lot of teams that wished they had a guy as good as Luke Hochevar as their number 5 starter. Jorge Soria is fantastic in the bullpen. Ramon Ramirez is a tough loss because he was a nice setup guy for Soria.

#### Los Angeles Angels

For Vladimir Guerrero the .365 OBP was his lowest OBP since 1997, when he had an OBP of .350. You can see Guerrero as the full time dh in 2009 even though he's fighting it. This was the 12<sup>th</sup> season in a row that Vlad has batted over .300. The Angels would love to sign Mark Teixeira to be their first baseman after he batted .358 for the Angels in 54 games in 2008. It looks like Teixeira is going to get himself in the middle of a bidding war and sign with the team that can pile on the most years at the highest price which may just leave the Angels short of the Yankees or the Red Sox. Garret Anderson could be a lf-3 or 4. Chone Figgins is always a borderline 3b-3 or 4, but should benefit from the Angels 100 win season. Brandon Wood would appear to be the odd man out unless of course he can move Chone Figgins off of third base. Figgins could always move back to the outfield. Gary Matthews is a disappointment for the Angels as he has reverted to his old self after he appeared to have become an improved hitter with Texas. Reggie Willits only needs to get some playing time to have a valuable Strat card since he's the kind of hitter who can rack up the walks. Mike Napoli has become one of the more valuable Strat catchers in the set. Napoli can hit with power, draw walks, provide base stealing speed and play some decent defense. I'd still like to see what Howie Kendrick can do with 600 at-bats.

The top four starting pitchers are going to be very solid for the Angels. John Lackey started slow due to an injury but he's a sure bet to be back in form in 2009. Ervin Santana has developed into the teams' ace. Joe Saunders has been a pleasant surprise and he's got 198 innings, which wasn't expected. Jered Weaver is coming along slower than expected but he keeps improving so he's got to be a great pitcher to pick up in a deal. Losing K-Rod will be a tough blow for the team. Scot Shields may or may not be able to handle the closer job. Jose Arredondo was 0 for 7 in save opportunities in 2008 and he's got to be considered as the closer too. Maybe the Angels will sign a closer in the free agent market.

## Los Angeles Dodgers

Rafael Furcal showed in the post season that his back is fine and he scored 9 runs in 8 games. Now, he didn't steal any bases but that may have just been as a precaution. Furcal, who only had 30 regular season at-bats after April, had an interesting 3 year run with the Dodgers. Furcal has always been a streaky player on both offense and defense, and it looks like he'll take that to Oakland in 2009.

Manny Ramirez was fantastic for the Dodgers who haven't had a hitter like this ever. Ramirez blew away the hitting feats of Reggie Smith, Kirk Gibson and Pedro Guerrero, who were all big guns in the Dodger line-up in past years. Andruw Jones was a complete bust for the Dodgers. There were a few spring training years in which Andruw seemed to gain a lot of weight in the off season but he always seemed to be able to get control of it during the spring. This year, he just gained too much and it cost him. If Andruw doesn't show up this spring in great shape, I'd trade him for whatever I could get. And remember, I'm a big Andruw fan. Matt Kemp could easily pull out a cf-2 with this card. Kemp peaked out in July with walks (14), steals (10) and OBP (.402). Kemp just murders LHPing with 45 hits on his card on that side. I wouldn't mind having Nomar Garciaparra to platoon vs LHPing either. Nomar would be a nice bat to have as a platoon at 1b, and to backup at ss and 3b. Russell Martin is just about a perfect strat catcher. His CS% numbers were his worst so far but he should still get a -1 arm based on reputation and the finish of the Dodgers. Martin is great offensively, especially vs RHPing, and I can't imagine moving him to 3b from catcher, which is what I read recently. Juan Pierre may not be this good vs LHPing, as I have projected but his stats support it. That card could be toned down a bit to keep Pierre from getting every at-bat possible vs LHPing. Pierre is a nice insurance policy in case Andruw Jones isn't back in form in 2009.

With Greg Maddux (retiring), Derek Lowe (probably moving on) and Brad Penny (free agent) all leaving, the Dodgers rotation has a couple of openings in it. Chad Billingsley had a great season and you expect even bigger things from him in 2009 since he's made dramatic improvements in these last three seasons. Hiroki Kuroda is a solid #2 starter and he should be able the same in 2009. Kuroda had a slump in July but came back strong in the last two months, and during the post season. Clayton Kershaw has a card that can win for a really good team but he's a great future pick. Jason Schmidt isn't someone that I would count on for much in 2009. Hong-Chih Kuo had a fantastic season out of the bullpen and the Dodgers may be reluctant to place him back in a starter role. I'd probably keep Kuo in the bullpen and try to find someone else to start. The bullpen is in good hands with Takashi Saito, Jonathan Broxton and Cory Wade.

## Milwaukee Brewers

One of the big stories with the Brewers has to be the defensive comeback of Jason Kendall. I thought that Kendall was done after the 2007 season in which he couldn't have thrown out Rusty Staub on delayed steal. Kendall was a mess and his mechanics were all off in 2007. With a 42.7 CS% in 2008, the -2 arm that I projected seems a little weak and I agree. I just don't see him getting a better arm than that after his past history. A -3 arm wouldn't be out of the question but I'll stick with

my -2 projection. Rickie Weeks has to play better defense for the Brewers to improve in 2009. Once again, Weeks was much better in the second half but he's got the potential to have a much better season. Ryan Braun didn't make a single error in left field. He'll still have a lf-4 rating but he played better than expected out there. Braun's Strat card doesn't represent how valuable he is in real life. Braun had his worst month in September and his walks were up in that month. Maybe they were pitching around him a bit or maybe he was just tired from the long season. JJ Hardy kills LHPing and he's got great offensive numbers for a shortstop. He's the kind of a hitter that can be used to protect some of your LHBs in the line-up. Prince Fielder had a consistent season and the stats don't show any month in which he was in a slump. He did have a 2 for 36 run at the end of June when they played the Braves but other than that, he was consistent. Corey Hart was having a great season and it all fell apart in September. Hart hit just .173 in Sept with an OBP of .192. Hart should be fine in 2009 but the OBP drop from 2007 (.353 to .300) is a bit of a concern. There is a chance for Hart to pull out a rf-2 but I'd say it's about a 20% chance.

The starting pitching is average with Jeff Suppan, Manny Parra, David Bush and Yovani Gallardo. The Brewers won't go anywhere in 2009 without an ace in the starting rotation.

### Minnesota Twins

The Twins used the 2008 season to develop a solid starting rotation and it put them into a playoff for the division title with the Chicago White Sox. There were plenty of pitching question marks after the trade of Johan Santana to the New York Mets. Francisco Liriano erased all doubts about his comeback after he was called up for the second time and 9 of his last 11 starts in Aug/Sept were solid. Nick Blackburn showed a ton of character with his showdown game versus the Chicago White Sox. That one game topped off a solid season with a great performance and maybe it was a sign of things to come. Kevin Slowey made 27 starts and turned in a solid season. With only 24 walks in 160 innings, he has shown that he'll be someone that they can count on to keep them in the game. Scott Baker pitched well enough in the second half that you could call him the ace of the staff. Baker made 28 starts and his 11-4 record could have been much better. Glen Perkins was 10-1 in 13 starts between late June and through August. There aren't many teams that have five starters in place who have already had this kind of success.

There were quite a few people who told me to make Delmon Young a lf-4. I didn't see him play that bad so I held out and kept him as a lf-3. You have to be prepared for the lf-4 though I had some faith in the Twins finish helping Young out. Carlos Gomez can't be too far from a cf-1. If Denard Span really gets the cf-2, he'll be one of the more balanced offensive players in the rookie draft. Justin Morneau was on the bubble between a 1b-2 and a 1b-3, and I went with the 1b-2 because the Twins tied for the division lead. Alexi Casilla should pull out the 2b-2 rating since I thought that he might get that rating last year. There is no way that the Twins will go with Brendan Harris at shortstop since they weren't thrilled with his defense. I wouldn't be shocked to see Harris with a 4 at every position. This is a team that really needs to get Nick Punto back. Punto is like the perfect Twin.

### New York Mets

The Mets have three great players in Jose Reyes, David Wright and Carlos Beltran. Reyes has almost no chance for a ss-1 with the Mets slumping at the end of the season. David Wright has to get a 3b-1 this time since he really has improved at 3b. Beltran could be a little better vs RHPing in Strat but in real life he's a great player.

Luis Castillo missed half the season with a left hip flexor injury. Castillo batted just .245 and that's his lowest batting average since 1998. The Mets could still get some use out of Castillo in 2009 but I would say that he'll get no more than 400 at-bats. I could be that Castillo's walk total will be the main

reason that you'll want him in Strat. Carlos Delgado had an impressive second half and I thought that he was done after the 2007 season. Delgado may be motivated to have one great season left in him as he is 31 home runs short of 500. I'd say that he's 36 years old and it may be a great time to trade him. Ryan Church and Fernando Tatis make a nice platoon in rf. You can win with that. Daniel Murphy and Nick Evans will be a fine platoon in Strat but I'm not sure that the Mets can win with that in real baseball. The Mets may have to go out and find a veteran left fielder just in case those rookies struggle in spring training or at the start of the season.

Johan Santana wasn't invincible but he was pretty darn good, especially down the stretch. Mike Pelfrey can get hurt by the LHBs but his -6 hold on rating is a nice extra feature. Pelfrey allowed only 5 steals in 11 chances and he picked off 4 guys. John Maine was shut down in August and has since had right shoulder surgery. Maine is recovering on schedule and it sounds like he'll be ready for spring training. Jonathon Niese only made 7 starts at the AAA level and 3 with the Mets. With one good game for the Mets, it's hard to tell if he'll be ready for the 2009 season or if he might need some more time at the AAA level. Billy Wagner is a tough loss for the Mets in 2009 but he'll have a great card now. Aaron Heilman has been mentioned as a starter and that could be a good thing because he was terrible for all but one month, June, while he pitched out of the Mets bullpen.

## New York Yankees

There's nothing wrong with the card that Alex Rodriguez will get in strat. Arod won't have the card that he had in the 2007 set but he'll still be one of the best hitters in the set. Arod is closing in on 600 home runs and 300 stolen bases, and with a great season he could reach both of those numbers in 2009. Derek Jeter has no chance for a ss-2 and I projected a ss-3, which has been coming for a long time but with the Yankees winning, it was important to leave him as a ss-2. Jeter should top 3000 hits in three seasons and Arod in four seasons. Robinson Cano was hitting .160 with a .216 OBP through May 7<sup>th</sup>. He batted .301 the rest of the way, which is nice, but with his low walk totals, that's just not going to get it done for the Yankees. I could see the Yankees giving up on him and going after a more complete player like Orlando Hudson, but I also believe that they'll regret giving up on Cano. The trade to get Nick Swisher is a nice move by the Yankees. Swisher just isn't good enough to play cf full time and he's an excellent defensive first baseman who will fit well into the Yankees line-up. Jason Giambi would have been nice to keep as a dh but the team is loaded with dh's. Giambi played 113 games at 1b in 2008 and he really deserves the 1b-5. Jose Molina threw out 44% of the base stealers who tried to run on him, and the -2 that I projected could get bumped up to a -3. There would have been a better chance for that if the Yankees had made it to the playoffs. Jorge Posada is probably the key to the Yankees season. If his throwing shoulder is not ready by spring training, the Yankees are going to be in big trouble. Johnny Damon is one of the better leadoff cards in the new strat set. Melky Cabrera probably won't start for the Yankees in 2009 since they were too disappointed in him in 2008. It looks like Brett Gardner will be given every chance to win the cf job and provide the Yankees with some much needed speed in the batting order. Xavier Nady was much better with the Pirates than with the Yankees in 2008. In NY, Nady batted .268 with a .320 OBP. Since he batted .330 with the Pirates, the Yankees are counting on him for that type of production. Hideki Matsui will be in the dh spot as long as his knees hold out.

The Yankees starting rotation is a mess. Chien-Ming Wang will have one of the starting jobs. Andy Pettitte could get one of the jobs if they sign him. Pettitte will get pounded with his upcoming Strat card. Phil Hughes is bound to get one of the jobs. Alfredo Aceves had 5 good games out of 6 and he's almost a sure thing to get one of the starting jobs. Joba Chamberlain will most likely go back to the bullpen but he could start. The Yankees would be all set if they could sign one of the free agent aces like CC Sabathia.

## Oakland A's

Matt Holliday is a pickup which signals the direction of the club. He's a great player who wasn't picked up to play on a third place team. The trade for Holliday will make it that much more possible to sign a player like Rafael Furcal. Jack Cust is a terrible outfielder but a great dh. Mark Ellis is the kind of player who will be just that much better on a winning team. Kurt Suzuki, projected with a -2 arm, is on his way to becoming a great strat catcher. Ryan Sweeney could continue to develop and will most likely man center field with Raj Davis. The projected rf-2 for Sweeney in rf may not happen but he's definitely on the bubble between a 2 and a 3. Travis Buck came back from a concussion to flash some power, 4 home runs in 40 at-bats, in September and that might have been enough to get the team excited about him taking over in rf in 2009. Daric Barton didn't live up to the expectations in 2008 when you look at the whole season. If you look at his last 105 at-bats, he had 33 hits for a .314 BA, 18 walks for a .415 OBP, 4 home runs and he's starting to look like the hitter that the A's thought that they were putting out there at first base. He might be a player that would be good for a rebuilding team to take a chance on.

Eric Chavez is the big question for the A's this year once again. Coming off of shoulder surgery and not sure if he can make the throws from third base will be discussed until he actually does it in spring training. He's got two years left on his contract so the A's have to give him every chance to make it back. He'd probably be easy to get now in Strat if you wanted to take a chance on him.

Justin Duchscherer was fantastic in his first year as a starter. He had surgery in the off season for his right hip problem so his arm should be fine for 2009. Sean Gallagher looked pretty good as a starter even though his stats aren't great. I wouldn't mind picking up Gallagher for the 2009 season as a future pick. Dana Eveland has the kind of stats which just show an average season. He'll most likely get hit hard in strat since he's a lefty who doesn't dominate. Eveland had 7 starts out of his 29 total starts in which he pitched more than 7 innings and those were all great games. Dallas Braden had much better control as a starting pitcher with just 17 walks in 56 innings as opposed to 8 walks in 15 relief innings. In either role, no one shuts down the running game any better than Braden, and he's a sure thing for -6 hold on rating. Gio Gonzalez is a future pick in this year's Strat draft and he's got a good chance to start for the A's in 2009.

Brad Ziegler is the favorite for the closer job but Joey Devine was being groomed for that role with the Braves so he could be an option if Ziegler has any problems. Devine had the kind of a season that the Braves had been hoping for since they drafted him. Ziegler just moved to the bullpen in 2007 so closing is new to him.

#### Philadelphia Phillies

It was late in the season and Jimmy Rollins was walking at a higher rate than normal. Maybe I was just noticing because he's been on my team since his rookie card and I follow players like that closer than others. I looked to me that Rollins was trying to take the walk. I looked like he just wanted to get on base for guys like Utley and Howard to knock in. I got the feeling that Rollins could rack up some high walk totals in the future if he decides to take the walk. He had three games in which he walked three times and I know that isn't a lot, but it is when you consider his walk history. He's got a small strike zone, he's cut down on his K's and he's dangerous enough with the bat that pitchers just can't lay one in there no matter what the count is. I'm going to predict 80 or more walks for Rollins. I know it doesn't make sense mathematically but here's the deal. After an MVP, 2 Gold Gloves and a World Championship, he's got nothing left to prove and he can just concentrate on winning.

Chase Utley was ranked 10<sup>th</sup> on Hal's list in the Fielding Bible at second base in the Bill James Handbook so the 2b-2 is not a sure thing. I believe that Utley deserves the 2b-2 and the team did win the World Series, so I'll stay with my 2b-2 projection. Utley has 52 HBP in the last two seasons and

those are worth a ton in Strat. Ryan Howard hit 26 home runs at home and 22 on the road. Howard didn't get his batting average over .200 until May 22. Howard topped off his 2008 season with 11 home runs in 88 at-bats in a torrid September. I had put those Phillie photos of Rollins, Utley and Howard on my web site after meeting a Phillie fan in Ft. Worth at a business meeting. Those three superstars on the Phillies are like a third of the All-Star team.

Shane Victorino was fantastic and an all-around replacement for Aaron Rowand. Jayson Werth kills LHPing and has won the full time job in rf for the Phillies in 2009. Carlos Ruiz was at his best in the post season and that's a good sign for the future. Pat Burrell is most likely gone despite his 33 home run, 86 rbi season. So much more was expected of Pedro Feliz but lower back problems interrupted his season and ruined his stats. He should be back in 2009 and he should be back in form. I had projected a 3b-3 but switched to a 3b-2 after the projections were sent out. Feliz looked great on defense in the post season.

Brad Lidge will be weak as a strat closer. Ryan Madson will also be weak as a late inning set-up guy in Strat. I wonder if anything will be done to try to make their cards more closely represent their true value. Cole Hamels had an amazing season and it seems crazy that he only won 14 games.

### Pittsburgh Pirates

Jack Wilson had a left calf injury which put him on the DL for 47 days in April and May, and he went on a tear when he returned. Wilson was batting .304 with a .348 OBP on July 13<sup>th</sup> before a 2 for 29 slump wrecked his numbers. I would say that Wilson is in dire need for a change of scenery and a move to a team like the Tigers would be great for his career. Freddy Sanchez had a nice run to finish the season going 73 for his last 211 at-bats. That's a .346 BA after the All-Star break. I believe that Sanchez can still hit well over .300 and he'll need to do that for his strat card to have much value since his walk total is always low. Adam LaRoche had another good season and there is nothing wrong with that. In Strat, you really like to have someone who can have the great seasons over at 1b and I don't know if LaRoche is capable of a really great season. I always liked him with the Braves but I can see why they traded him. Andy LaRoche hit .152 with the Pirates in 2008 and he won't get more than 150 at-bats if that happens in 2009. Ryan Doumit has become one of the top strat catchers in the set. He's a lefty catcher with power who has a lot of hits on his card. I'd guess that Doumit has a good chance to get a good clutch rating since he batted .333 with runners in scoring position with 2 out, and .325 with runners on and 2 out. Remember, that is a guess, since I have no clue to how they really do the clutch numbers. With 27% caught stealing numbers, Doumit is pretty close to getting a 0 throwing arm and that is good for his future throwing arm in Strat. The catchers throwing arm in Strat seems to be one of those things that ramps up slowly and ramps down slowly. It is based on reputation and that gives the vets the benefit of a doubt when they start to fade. That's just my opinion but it's based on 35 years of playing this game so I guess that counts for something. I sometimes get the feeling that no one is reading this stuff and that I'm just writing for myself.

The Gold Glove to Nate McLouth caught me off guard. I had projected an of-3(0)e1 but I quickly changed that to an of-1(0)e1 after he won the award. I have to say that there was no clear cut sure thing Gold Glover in the NL to win that last spot after Beltran and Victorino. Of the previous winners, Andruw Jones had a lost season and Jeff Francoeur had a frustrating season. Aaron Rowand didn't have a great year. Mike Cameron is still good but not a Gold Glover. Chris Young isn't quite there yet. I'd love to see the Gold Glove voting in cf. Rawlings has the GG voting protected like it was a matter of National Security.

Ian Snell had a terrible season and I believe that it was just an off year. I saw him get upset after someone made an error and a pitcher has to just shake that off. He'll get there. Paul Maholm had a good season but you can get to him in strat. Zach Duke had 13 good games in 31 starts but he only

had 5 wins. Duke is not as bad as his stats show. Tom Gorzelanny had an up and down season which was finally shut down due to an injury to his middle finger on his left hand. I would bet that Gorzelanny can return to the form that he showed in 2007. I wouldn't mind having Matt Capps on my own team. Capps had his season unravel in mid June and he finally went on the DL with right shoulder bursitis. It sounds like Capps is motivated to be in better shape heading into spring training and he's all set for a big year. John Grabow has an interesting projected card and if you can live with a few ball park diamonds, he'll be very effective vs RHBs.

## St. Louis Cardinals

Troy Glaus had a .372 OBP which is the second highest of his career. Glaus seems to have a very low total of runs scored with 69 (27 on home runs) and this is based on 147 hits, 87 walks and 3 HBP. Albert Pujols had a .462 OBP and that is a career high for him. Pujols also had a career high of 104 walks. Pujols still hasn't come down to earth after 8 unbelievable seasons that compare to players like Babe Ruth or Lou Gehrig. Pujols and Derrek Lee should still get 1b-1's even with Adrian Gonzalez winning the Gold Glove. You would guess that something has to give with Mark Teixeira and Casey Kotchman both projected as 1's also. These two guys, Kotchman and Teixeira, would be the ones that I would guess could lose their 1b-1 ratings. Yadier Molina is close to being the top catcher in the strat set. Ryan Ludwick was a huge bonus for those managers who took him for that wild card in last year's draft. It took Ludwick a few years to make it but with two good seasons under his belt, he's probably going to keep producing for a while. Felipe Lopez hit .385 with the Cardinals and he's not on the depth chart. Lopez may just be best if he can find a team that will use him as their main utility player. Chris Duncan had neck surgery and I'm not sure how long the recovery period is. Duncan isn't on the depth chart so they may not be counting on him for the start of 2009, but that's not to say that he won't be ready. Rick Ankiel will have a valuable strat card and I'd like to have that throwing arm in cf for my team.

Adam Wainwright is getting better. Tom Wellemeyer was a nice surprise and he'll have a card that could win for my teams. Joel Pineiro doesn't have a good card and it was wrecked by a horrible July in which he gave up 23 more hits than innings. Pineiro might be a good option for a rebuilding team to take a chance on. Kyle Lohse had a 15-6 record and none of those were cheap wins. He pitched well in all 15 of those wins and only twice did he allow 3 runs in those 15 wins. Lohse has a strat card that is a true reflection of him: it isn't great but it can win. (PS-I know that everyone in the majors is a great player or they wouldn't be there. I am just refining my search among the great and Lohse is in the middle.) I really don't need to have any Cardinals fans mad at me. Has there been any mention of Chris Carpenter?

The closer job seems to be destined to go to Jason Motte or Chris Perez. Both are hard throwing righties and both had success with the Cardinals in 2008. Motte would be the favorite at this point. Perez might be better off as the set-up guy for a while until he finds a way to get a hitter out when they're sitting on the fastball. Josh Kinney and Tyler Johnson could be set to win spots in the bullpen.

## San Diego Padres

Trevor Hoffman will be impossible to use as a closer in Strat unless you're playing face to face or home. Heath Bell has a reversed card from last year when he was very tough on RHBs and now he's tougher on LHBs. Mike Adams made a nice comeback since he hadn't pitched much in the majors since 2004. Adams will be a nice weapon to have in the bullpen but you'll have to watch out how you use that card with the 8 ball park diamonds vs RHB.

Chase Headley was hitting better as the season went on. The 104 K's in 331 AB needs improvement but he's more or less a future pick. Once Jody Gerut got going, he was hitting better than he ever

had before. Gerut hit with power and he hit well vs LHPing. Gerut is someone who will most likely slide in the draft and you should be able to pick him up cheap. Brian Giles' days as a rf-3 are probably over and I projected a rf-4. Giles is still an on-base machine and is a valuable strat player to have. Adrian Gonzalez will finally get a great start card. Gonzalez has been improving in each of the last three seasons with the Padres and he's improving in the categories of home runs (24 to 30 to 36), rbis (82 to 100 to 119), and walks (52 to 65 to 74). Gonzalez will get the 1b-1 and he's on his way to a 40 home run season and a 100 walk season. Khalil Greene has taken a big step backwards in 2008 and it seems like his 2007 season might be a career year.

## San Francisco Giants

You do realize that Pablo Sandoval getting a c-4(0) rating will boost his value way up in the draft for contending teams looking for an edge. Sandoval is projected to have 50 hits on his card and 5 ball park diamonds. He'll be a beast! Sandoval won't have a walk on his card but it won't matter. If his future was as a catcher, he'd probably go ahead of John Baker, Marlins, in the draft. The Giants need the defense of Brian Bockock at ss. Emmanuel Burriss will most likely take over at 2b and he gives the Giants a much needed leadoff hitter. Burriss would be a nice card to have with this draft. I would boost the Burriss on-base numbers by 2 or 3 since he's bound to have a -16 clutch rating. Burriss only had 18 rbis and there's nothing clutch about that. Was that an odd play when Burriss scored the run as a pinch runner for Benji Molina, for the home run that Benji Molina hit? Does anyone know why JT Snow played one game for the Giants?

The starting rotation is the strength of the team. Tim Lincecum won the Cy Young and his strikeout totals are awesome! Matt Cain should be getting better faster since I always thought that he had no-hit stuff. Barry Zito will get lit up in strat but they're stuck with him. Jonathan Sanchez has developed into a valuable power left handed pitcher. The Giants were worried about fatigue, from innings pitching, taking their toll on Sanchez. Noah Lowry is a big question mark for the Giants but there should be no reason why he can't come back to his former level.

I have Brian Wilson in Strat and I don't know how I'm going to use that card in Strat. The stats that Sergio Romo put up are so good that he'll never be able to match those in a replay. The hits from the batters cards will be enough to mess up his numbers. Romo may get some relief from Strat and some of those ball park diamonds may disappear. So, my numbers are a worst case and I expect his actual card to be 'fixed' to help out his stats.

## Seattle Mariners

Yuniesky Betancourt is about to drive me crazy. I have him on one of my teams and here's the deal: he doesn't walk, he doesn't strikeout, he has no power, he has no steals and his fielding isn't as good as I was hoping for. Why do I keep him? I still hold onto the hope that he's going put it all together and have a big year. Willie Bloomquist will be a nice guy to have as your leadoff hitter vs LHPing. Luis Valbuena will most likely take over at 2b during the 2009 season. That will push Jose Lopez to 1b or he'll be traded. The Mariners need the boost in overall defense. Jeff Clement would seem a natural fit for first base and for sure, he could handle the dh spot. He's a lefty catcher who has no guarantee to be as good as projected vs LHPing. I could see no reason not to make Ichiro Suzuki a cf-1 as well as a rf-1. Ichiro is a long term Gold Glove winner and he truly is great out there.

Felix Hernandez had a higher walk total but most of his other stats improved across the board (but not wins). Eric Bedard had left shoulder surgery and it sort of washed out his 2008 season. You could still get some use out of Bedard in Strat since he's a backwards lefty with good numbers vs RHBs. Jarrod Washburn will be tough to use as a starter in Strat but he'll be ok as a lefty out of the bullpen. You won't be able to use Washburn's innings up in that relief role but he's going to get

rocked if you try to start him. Washburn had an abdominal injury which cost him a few starts and I don't see Washburn as the type of starter who will improve much at 34 years old. Ryan Rowland-Smith made the most of his chance to be a starter and he's locked up a starting role for 2009. Brandon Morrow pitched much better in the closers role than he did as a starting pitcher. Morrow could still end up in the starting rotation since JJ Putz is their closer.

## Tampa Bay Rays

Carl Crawford has been a solid lf-1 for a long time and he may be the best player on the Rays. Crawford had been improving for 6 straight seasons and a right middle finger injury put an end to that. Crawford showed in the post season that he is fully recovered. BJ Upton looked pretty good in cf and I would be surprised if he isn't a cf-2. Gabe Gross did a good job in rf and he was brought in as a defensive replacement for Rocco Baldelli. Gross should be a rf-3(-2) again. I know that Baldelli was a cf-2 last year but he didn't play like that in 2008, and I'm projected a rf-4 for him. Jason Bartlett and Akinori Iwamura stabilized the infield and they should both be 2's. The Rays had good defense at the corners too with Longoria and Pena. The big surprise on both offense and defense has to be Dioner Navarro. Navarro, with some nice strat value, is projected as a c-3(-2), he's a switch hitter and he batted .295. In spring training, I took about 50 photos of Evan Longoria and he looked great in that game vs the Braves. The Rays are looking for a dh. How hard can that be?

James Shields will become a great starting pitcher.

David Price has a good chance to be a better starter than Shields.

Scott Kazmir will become a great starter if he can cut down on his walks.

Matt Garza might be just as good as Shields.

Andy Sonnanstine is good to great as a starter. Super hold, no walks, high inning starter.

This rotation could be in place for a few seasons and could carry the Rays to another World Series.

Edwin Jackson would be a nice pitcher for a rebuilding team to take a chance on. He's almost sure to be traded by the Rays and he'll be a good starter on another team. The Rays could use another closer. Percival is too fragile, Wheeler is a better set-up man than a closer, Howell is a better middle reliever and Balfour is a better middle man.

## Texas Rangers

Michael Young won the Gold Glove and sort of messed up all of my shortstop projections. I can't see Young getting a ss-1 and that means that the ss-1 that I projected for Orlando Cabrera is out of the questions. If the Gold Glove is not a 1, then there will be no other 1's at that position in that league. I switched Michael Young to a ss-2. This is a big improvement for a team that wasn't considered a good defensive team. Ian Kinsler made some big improvements in his third season. Kinsler is a solid 2b-3. A few people have asked me why I didn't rate Josh Hamilton as a cf-2. One of the main factors that I consider to round down a players who is in between two ratings is the teams finish. Texas, with 79 wins and 21 games behind, doesn't seem to need much defensive help to replicate that finish. Hence, Hamilton will probably be a cf-3. Chris Davis is a 3b-4 and a 1b-4 but I've seen him make some good plays at 3b coming in for a slow roller. I really like Davis for the future and he's got the kind of power that will play well in Texas. Taylor Teagarden was crushing the ball when he came up to the major league team. I still haven't given up on Jarrod Saltalamacchia and I'd like to have him on my team for the future. Nelson Cruz was a hitting machine when he came up for the end of the season and they almost have to give him the starting nod in rf. I projected Cruz as a rf-3 and he was a rf-2 last year. He could get the rf-2 again.

I looked over the list of pitchers and the one that I like for the future is Matt Harrison. He should get the full shot at a starting job in 2009.

## Toronto Blue Jays

Aaron Hill is trying to recover from a concussion. John McDonald and Marco Scutaro will battle for the shortstop job in some kind of a platoon. There will be good defense provided from both of these guys. I guess that Scott Rolen could pull out a 3b-1 but I'm guessing that the chance for a 3b-2 is the better bet. Lyle Overbay is like Adam LaRoche at 1b. Vernon Wells will get a very nice card and he's still a cf-1. Alex Rios' card is a bit of a disappointment, but the rf-1 will be nice if he gets it. They will basically give the lf job to Travis Snider. The dh spot is Adam Lind's to lose. Joe Inglett is a nice utility guy for strat and he's got some speed to go with the lefty bat.

Roy Halladay will have a great strat card. Halladay was 20-11 in 33 starts.

AJ Burnett has a card that lefties can get to but otherwise he'll be tough. He's bound to go to another team this winter. Dustin McGowan should recover from his right shoulder injury to have a spot in the rotation in 2009. Jesse Litsch is going to get a nice strat card and he's a bit of a surprise. Litsch had 8 good starts in his last 9 starts, and that strong finish is always a good sign for 2009. (Note: I traded for Gavin Floyd last winter because of the way he finished out the 2007 season and it paid off pretty well.) David Purcey will get the spot that Shaun Marcum had in 2008. Purcey pitched well and Marcum is injured.

## Washington Nationals

What does this team need Josh Willingham when they already have Wily Mo Pena, Elijah Dukes and Lastings Milledge? It seems a bit crowded with the same type of player, doesn't it? Ryan Zimmerman batted .306 in the second half but his season total of 51 rbi is a big drop from the 91 rbi in 2007 or the 110 rbi in 2006. The Nats need Zimmerman to return to his rbi producing form in order to improve in 2009.

The trade to get Scott Olsen was a good one for the Nats. Olsen seemed to have worn out his welcome with the Marlins and the Nats are desperate for a big innings starter. Olsen will have a nice card except for a slight home run problem. John Lannan will have an useable strat card and enough innings to give him some decent value. Tim Redding wasn't as good as he was in 2007 but he'll have some value for someone that needs innings. Redding was much better in the first half of 2008 and he faded badly in September. Collin Balester finished the season badly but he had enough good starts to lock up a spot for 2009. The last starter job will come from the slew of injured pitchers/recovering pitchers on the roster.