



CATALYST

DAVID PRICE
RAYS SP

3.7%

Price returned to Cy Young form after an early-season triceps injury, throwing four complete games with an elite 1.10 WHIP in 27 starts last year. He showed improved control too: A career-low walk rate of 3.7% offset his decreased strikeout rate of 20% (24% and 25% over his previous two seasons). So even as Price lost about 2 mph on his fastball last year, his control will make the Rays happy that they didn't trade their ace.



WHICH TEAM IS THE BEST BET THIS SEASON? SEARCH ESPN INSIDER FOR CHAD MILLMAN'S MLB GAMBLING GUIDE

PROJECTIONS

Chemistry will swing the AL East by three games, ensuring that the title returns to Tampa for the first time since 2010. The Rays benefit from a bolstered pen led by vet Grant Balfour and by demographics worth 1.7 wins. The Red Sox bonded in historic fashion last year (beards!), but the 2014 squad has below-average chemistry after the loss of three starters. Still, Boston is tighter than the Yanks, who have the AL's worst chemistry. And that's without A-Rod in the clubhouse.

Team	Pre-chem wins	Wins from chemistry			Projected record
		Ego	Demographic	Isolation	
① → TAMPA BAY RAYS	91	+ 0.1	+ 1.7	+ 0.2	93-69
② → BOSTON RED SOX WC	90	+ -0.4	+ -0.8	+ 0.2	89-73
③ → NEW YORK YANKEES	84	+ -1.0	+ -0.4	+ -0.5	82-80
④ → TORONTO BLUE JAYS	77	+ 0.2	+ 1.4	+ 0.4	79-83
⑤ → BALTIMORE ORIOLES	76	+ 0.0	+ -1.0	+ 2.0	77-85

On the darkest edge of the spectrum, the Yankees have baseball's second-lowest chemistry score, driven by the second-worst Ego rank, which will cost them two games in the standings. What's with the bum chemistry rap? New York has the highest standard deviation in salary, due to an AL-high seven players earning \$15 million or more.

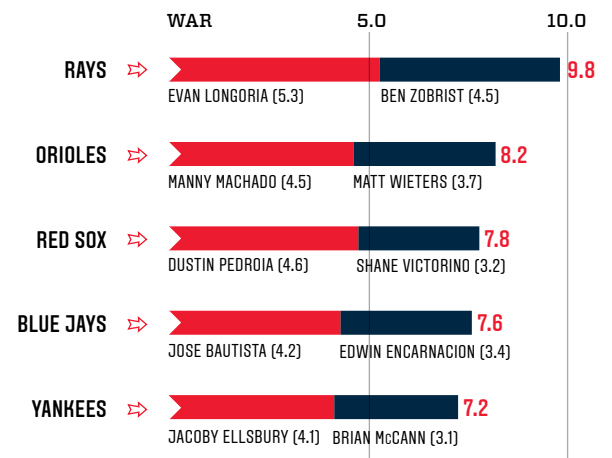
UNSTABLE ELEMENT



At the All-Star break, **CHRIS DAVIS** had a ridiculous home run percentage of 10.8, putting him on pace for 63 homers. But after the break, even though pitchers threw him strikes at a comparable rate, his HR% sank to 6.6, a 40-homer pace. Given that his career HR% before 2013 was 5.1, and never higher than 6.4 in any season, Crush is poised to come back to earth, bringing the Orioles back under .500.

DEFINING PROPERTY

In 3B **EVAN LONGORIA** and 2B **BEN ZOBRIST**, the Rays feature the highest projected one-two punch in the AL East, according to ESPN Insider Dan Szymborski [see division ranks below]. Beyond consistent offense, they've contributed an average defensive WAR of 1.8 and 1.7, respectively, since 2009, the highest in baseball among teammates over that time.



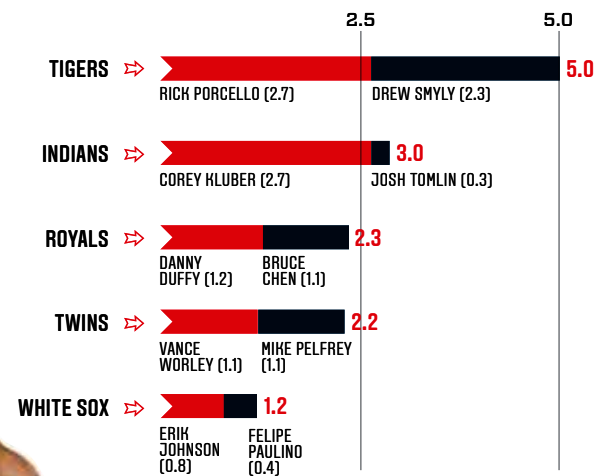


LAST SEASON MIGUEL CABRERA RANKED FIRST ON THE BBTN 100. WILL HE DO IT AGAIN? WATCH ESPN ON MARCH 27 AT 10 P.M. ET TO FIND OUT



DEFINING PROPERTY

Detroit has more Cy Young candidates than some divisions (see: NL Central), but it's the back of the rotation that makes the Tigers the clear favorites. Precise righty **RICK PORCELLO** (career 2.3 BB/9) and powerful lefty **DREW SMYLY** (career 8.98 K/9) are projected to contribute 5.0 WAR, substantially more than any of the other likely fourth and fifth starters in the AL Central.



PROJECTIONS

Negative chemistry ultimately won't cost Detroit in the moribund AL Central because the two highest-chemistry teams in the division are the Royals and Twins. KC's homogeneous subgroups decrease isolation in the clubhouse, giving the team an MLB-high 3.1 extra wins this season. And while the Twins also have good chemistry overall, it won't offset pitching that projects to allow 790 runs, second most in baseball.

Team	Pre-chem wins	Wins from chemistry			Projected record
		Ego	Demographic	Isolation	
① → DETROIT TIGERS	93	-0.3	0.9	-1.6	92-70
② → KANSAS CITY ROYALS	82	0.1	-2.2	3.1	83-79
③ → CLEVELAND INDIANS	80	0.1	-1.0	0.9	80-82
④ → CHICAGO WHITE SOX	73	-0.1	-0.5	-0.4	72-90
⑤ → MINNESOTA TWINS	66	0.1	0.1	0.8	67-95

The Tigers' clubhouse diversity contributes 0.9 of a win by itself, but the strength of its subgroups is weak due to differences in age and years with the team, leading to an Isolation score of minus-1.6 wins. The Royals' Isolation score, on the other hand, is 4.7 wins higher, boosted by a pitching staff that includes eight Americans among the team's 10 core pitchers.

CATALYST

JOSE ABREU
WHITE SOX 1B

2.6

The White Sox won't contend for the AL Central crown this season, but rookie Abreu is precisely the player to drive the team out of the cellar. ZiPS projects him to smack 26 homers and score 79 runs in 2014 while accumulating a .364 on-base percentage and 2.6 WAR. His production is a huge factor in a forecast that sees the Sox improving by nine games over last year.

UNSTABLE ELEMENT

THE INDIANS went a remarkable—and unsustainable—34-18 in one-run and extra-inning games last season despite an iffy bullpen that blew a division-leading 22 saves and had a combined WAR of just 1.5. Add to that the loss of former All-Star starters Ubaldo Jimenez and Scott Kazmir, who totaled 23 W's and 340% IP in 2013, and Cleveland is projected to regress 12 games this season, the worst drop in the AL.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ASTROS' UPCOMING NO. 1 PICK, CHECK OUT ESPN INSIDER FOR KEITH LAW'S TOP 50 DRAFT PROSPECTS



PROJECTIONS

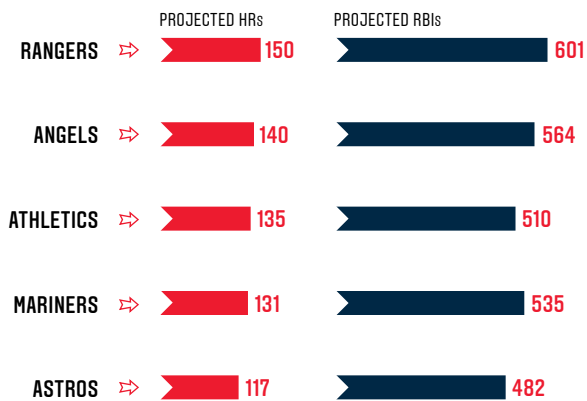
Strong clubhouse demographics give the Rangers 1.6 added wins and will lead them to the AL West crown in a close race. [Of course, the arrival of 1B Prince Fielder doesn't hurt.] In Anaheim, Josh Hamilton and Albert Pujols are healthy again. And with 2.4 extra wins coming from their own good demographics, the Angels will steal a wild card from the A's, who lack diversity—Dominican reliever Fernando Abad is the only nonwhite pitcher on the projected roster.

Team	Pre-chem wins	Wins from chemistry			Projected record
		Ego	Demographic	Isolation	
① → TEXAS RANGERS	89	+0.0	+1.6	+0.4	91-71
② → LOS ANGELES ANGELS <small>WC</small>	87	+0.6	+2.4	+0.8	88-74
③ → OAKLAND ATHLETICS	87	+0.2	+0.3	+0.5	87-75
④ → SEATTLE MARINERS	76	+0.1	+0.6	+0.5	77-85
⑤ → HOUSTON ASTROS	61	+0.4	+1.5	+0.9	63-99

Texas' plan to develop team chemistry? Buy it, to the tune of \$268 million for Fielder and OF Shin-Soo Choo. The Astros, on the other hand, led by GM Jeff Luhnow, have a different idea: Build through the draft. Houston has drafted a core of young talent in P Mark Appel, SS Carlos Correa and CF George Springer—a strategy predisposed to creating good chemistry.

DEFINING PROPERTY

The Rangers' top nine hitters are projected to belt more homers than any other West team. Led by **PRINCE FIELDER**, with 30 HRs, and Shin-Soo Choo, with 17, the team has more than replaced the 40 total HRs hit by Nelson Cruz and Ian Kinsler last year.



UNSTABLE ELEMENT



At 31, **ROBINSON CANO** has passed the career apex for most sluggers, suggesting a decline that will make his \$240 million contract look foolish sooner rather than later. Worse yet, while Cano has fared reasonably well in Seattle—three HRs in 17 games since 2010—Safeco Field (along with three other AL West stadiums) was among the 11 most pitcher-friendly parks in 2013.

CATALYSTS

TYLER SKAGGS & HECTOR SANTIAGO
ANGELS SPs

↓
3.81

Skaggs, 22, projects to 10 wins after two seasons as a spot starter in Arizona. The Halos will pair him with another lefty, Santiago, who had a 1.5 WAR last year for the White Sox despite control issues. They're projected to have a combined ERA of 3.81, giving the Angels enough at the back of the rotation to keep the A's at bay.