



OUR EXPERTS RANK **BRYCE HARPER** THE BEST LEFTFIELDER IN BASEBALL. TO SEE HOW YOUR FAVORITE PLAYERS STACK UP, CHECK OUT THE BBTN 100 ON ESPN.COM

### PROJECTIONS

Both the Nationals and Braves have young, talented rosters with few Isolation players. The key difference, though, which will be reflected in the final standings, is that the Braves' locker room lacks veteran leadership and diversity with respect to age and nationality—traits that promote good chemistry. The Nats also have nearly double the number of players who have spent multiple seasons with the club, promoting unity in Washington.

Team	Pre-chem wins	Wins from chemistry			Projected record
		Ego	Demographic	Isolation	
① → WASHINGTON NATIONALS	91	+0.1	+0.2	+0.7	92-70
② → ATLANTA BRAVES <small>WC</small>	90	+0.1	-1.0	+0.9	90-72
③ → NEW YORK METS	73	-0.5	-0.3	-1.3	71-91
④ → MIAMI MARLINS	68	-0.7	-0.4	+2.1	69-93
⑤ → PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES	70	-1.5	-0.2	-0.2	68-94

The Mets are ranked 27th in chemistry, owing largely to a weak Isolation factor. The underlying issue? A disparate starting staff, led by Bartolo Colon, 40, and Zack Wheeler, 23. The Phillies, ranked 30th, suffer from an extremely negative Ego factor, driven by several overpaid vets, like Ryan Howard (projected 0.2 WAR) and Jonathan Papelbon (0.8).

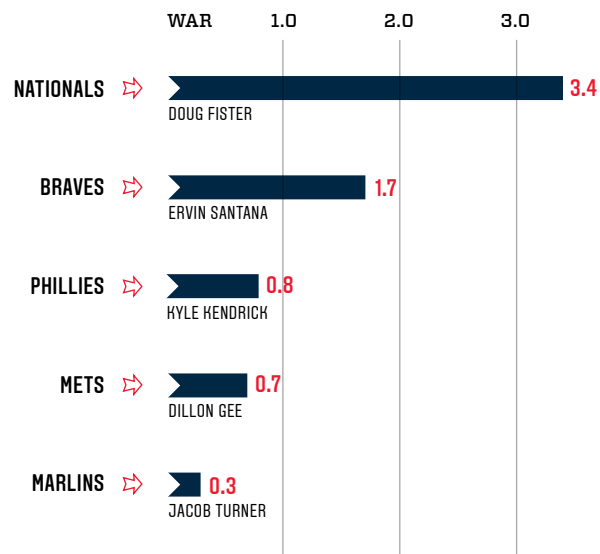
### UNSTABLE ELEMENT



Atlanta's bullpen, led by **CRAIG KIMBREL** and Luis Avilan, had a league-low 2.46 ERA due in part to two metrics: the fourth-lowest BABIP (.278) and the highest percentage of runners stranded (82%). How did it keep hits from finding holes and runners from scoring? Well, credit Gold Glove SS Andrelton Simmons (2013 defensive WAR of 5.4, highest since 1906). Also credit luck—which may not last when you consider that the pen also had a middling strikeout rate and a low percentage of fly balls leaving the yard.

### DEFINING PROPERTY

The Nationals have an exceptional rotation, led by Stephen Strasburg, Gio Gonzalez and Jordan Zimmermann. But where the Nats' staff truly differentiates itself is with its No. 4 starter, **DOUG FISTER**, whose projected 2014 WAR (below) far outpaces all other No. 4 starters in the division.



### CATALYST

**BRYCE HARPER**  
NATIONALS OF

28

Harper, 21, showed signs of increased plate discipline last season, significantly increasing his walk rate (from 9% to 12%) and decreasing his strikeout rate (from 20.1% to 18.9%). This plate discipline translated to an increase in the number of his fly balls that turned into home runs, from 10.6% to 12.7%. If Harper can stay healthy, he might very well surpass his ZiPS projections: career highs in HRs (28) and OPS (.886).



THE CARDINALS RANKED FIRST IN LAST YEAR'S FUTURE POWER RANKINGS. WHERE DO THEY RANK THIS SEASON? HEAD TO ESPN INSIDER TO FIND OUT

CATALYSTS

**MICHAEL WACHA**  
&  
**OSCAR TAVERAS**  
CARDINALS SP & OF

3.5

St. Louis should expect greatness from Wacha, its No. 2 starter. He struck out 65 in 64% IP last season and then won his first four postseason starts. The next Redbirds big shot, Taveras, 21, had a .953 OPS in Double-A two years ago, then hit .306 while battling an ankle injury in Triple-A last season. He's forecast for only 388 plate appearances, since a starting spot will be hard to come by this spring. Still, the two are projected to combine for a 3.5 WAR to help the Cards defend in the Central.

PROJECTIONS

The Cardinals will repeat as Central champs despite the third-worst chemistry in MLB. Problem 1: A lack of diversity in the pitching staff. Problem 2: Most of the Demographic subgroups that the Cards do have include an isolated player, leading to an Isolation factor of minus-1.4 wins, tied for 27th in the league. Good thing every other Central team except the Reds has negative chemistry too.

Team	Pre-chem wins	Wins from chemistry			Projected record
		Ego	Demographic	Isolation	
① → ST. LOUIS CARDINALS	93	-0.1	-0.6	-1.4	91-71
② → CINCINNATI REDS	84	0.0	-0.2	1.2	85-77
③ → PITTSBURGH PIRATES	82	0.1	-0.8	-1.4	80-82
④ → MILWAUKEE BREWERS	77	-1.0	-1.3	0.2	75-87
⑤ → CHICAGO CUBS	69	0.3	-3.5	2.2	68-94

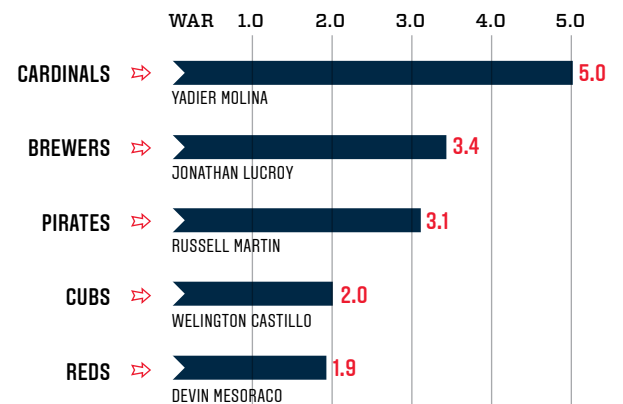
Pittsburgh is projected to regress by 14 games this year, the most in MLB, and its poor chemistry is one reason. The team has few players with common traits, decreasing its Demographic (minus-0.8) and Isolation (minus-1.4) factors. Demographics cost the Cubs 3.5 wins, the worst mark in MLB. The issue? Chicago has too much diversity, leading to weak subgroups.

UNSTABLE ELEMENT

Pirates starter FRANCISCO LIRIANO produced 16 wins in 17 quality starts by keeping balls on the ground—his 51.8% ground ball rate was his highest since 2010—and by improving his K/BB ratio to 2.6, after averaging 1.9 over the previous three years. But projected decreases in Liriano's K% and a slight increase in his BB% signal a high regression probability.

DEFINING PROPERTY

The Cardinals' YADIER MOLINA is forecast to generate 5.0 WAR, tops among NL Central backstops (see below) and the second-highest projection for a catcher in the league. That will make him worthy of a sixth straight All-Star appearance.



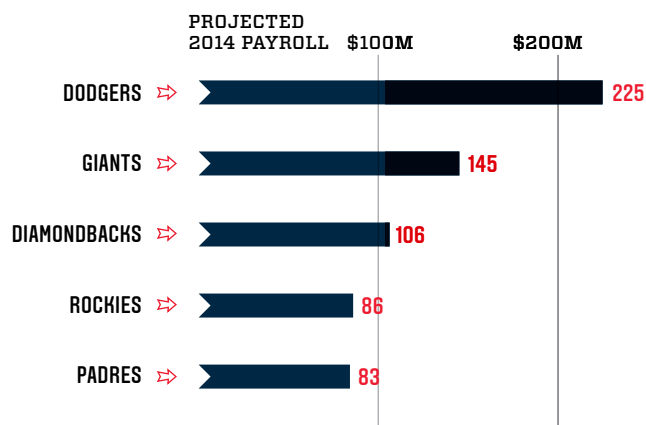


IS TROY TULOWITZKI OR HANLEY RAMIREZ THE BEST SHORTSTOP IN BASEBALL? THE BBTN 100 ON ESPN.COM HAS THE ANSWER



### DEFINING PROPERTY

By paying 10 players \$10M-plus, and four \$20M-plus—led by P **ZACK GREINKE** [\$26M] and 1B **ADRIAN GONZALEZ** [\$22M]—the Dodgers should unseat the A-Rod-less Yankees for highest Opening Day payroll. LA's outlay [\$5.3M more than in 2013] tops the West by 55%.



### PROJECTIONS

The Dodgers are the NL West favorites despite a 25th-ranked chemistry score that will cost them two wins. Their Ego factor, based on several pricey acquisitions in the past two years, costs them one win alone. And while the roster is diverse, the club suffers from many isolated players, including SP Hyun-Jin Ryu [South Korea] and reliever Kenley Jansen [Curaçao], costing the team another win.

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① → LOS ANGELES DODGERS	93	-0.9	-0.2	-1.0	91-71
② → SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS WC	86	-0.6	2.8	-0.2	88-74
③ → COLORADO ROCKIES	84	-0.1	0.8	-1.7	83-79
④ → ARIZONA D-BACKS	82	0.3	-0.5	0.2	82-80
⑤ → SAN DIEGO PADRES	76	0.0	1.1	-0.1	77-85

San Francisco, which projects to grab a wild-card spot, has the highest chemistry score in baseball due to well-aligned subgroups [Latino relievers of all ages, a Caucasian starting staff with different levels of experience and team tenure]. If Buster Posey can catch 140-plus games, the Giants will be primed to chase a third World Series crown in five years.

### CATALYST

**BRETT ANDERSON**  
ROCKIES SP

6.3%

Anderson, 25, bolsters the back end of the Rockies' rotation, which had a minus-3.5 WAR and a 1.62 WHIP in 81 starts last year. He's an extreme ground ball pitcher with exceptional control—a career 6.3% walk rate compared with the 2013 MLB average of 7.9%. With OF Carlos Gonzalez and SS Troy Tulowitzki entering their primes, the Rockies are well-positioned to be the Indians of 2013.

### UNSTABLE ELEMENT

At 34, Dodgers 3B **JUAN URIBE** had a career year in 2013. He had a personal-best 4.1 WAR, driven by a batting average 27 points above his previous career rate (.278 vs. .251), which equated to 11 extra hits last season. Problem is, the spike wasn't due to better plate discipline—his walks per plate appearance and pitches seen per PA were still below MLB averages—but rather an uptick in seeing-eye grounders. In other words: luck.