Chapter 5
Like It Will Be

To warm up to the task, I sparred with the big guy, Bill James. Called up the first AL team in the software program, Patton $ On Disk, that Eric Lindow and I developed a few years ago; entered the stats James projects for every Baltimore hitter in 1993; went to LIST/TEAM/1 (Baltimore) -- I'll be plugging the program madly, don't worry, throughout this chapter -- and onto the screen popped: 179 HR, 774 RBI, 135 SB, .255 BA. In 6503 AB.

In 162 games, teams get approximately 5500 AB. Players move between teams, of course, and even between leagues; if Bill's overall projections for at-bats fit within the amount available next year, I guess there's no problem. However, if he's over by 1,000 at-bats per team, everyone of the projections in the Stats Inc. book should be scaled down 18 percent.

The absolute ceiling on at-bats is 154,000 (28 X 5500), but even this is too high. Hitters in the National League come to bat approximately 5150 times per team; the rest of the at-bats are claimed by pitchers. I figured if I made these numbers -- 5500 and 5150 -- both the maximum and minimum for each team, I couldn't go too far astray.

Therefore, the starting point for working on 1993 was to sort all players by team and position, list by team, and see the at-bats picture.

Listing of Hitters - Atlanta Braves

Name	Tm	Age	C123SO	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA	P$
D Berryhill	Atl	29	C-----	307	10	43	0	.228	8
G Olson	Atl	32	C-----	302	3	27	2	.238	3
J Lopez	Atl	22	c-----	16	0	2	0	.375	1
F Cabrera	Atl	26	c-----	10	2	3	0	.300	2
S Bream	Atl	32	-F----	372	10	61	6	.261	15
B Hunter	Atl	25	-F---o	238	14	41	1	.239	12
G Willard	Atl	33	cf----	48	2	8	0	.229	2
R Klesko	Atl	22	-f----	14	0	1	0	.000	0
M Lemke	Atl	27	--Dt--	427	6	26	0	.227	2
J Treadway	Atl	30	--Dt--	126	0	5	1	.222	0
T Pendleton	Atl	32	---T--	640	21	105	5	.311	37
V Castilla	Atl	25	---ts-	16	0	1	0	.250	0
J Blauser	Atl	27	--DtS-	343	14	46	5	.262	16
R Belliard	Atl	31	--d-S-	285	0	14	0	.211	-2
R Gant	Atl	28	-----O	544	17	80	32	.259	30
D Justice	Atl	27	-----O	484	21	72	2	.256	21
O Nixon	Atl	34	-----O	456	2	22	41	.294	22
D Sanders	Atl	25	-----O	303	8	28	26	.304	21
L Smith	Atl	37	-----O	158	6	33	4	.247	8
M Nieves	Atl	21	-----o	19	0	1	0	.211	0
T Gregg	Atl	29	-----o	19	1	1	1	.263	1
TOTALS	21 hitters			5127	137	620	126	.259	199

This is what is called the Working File of the 1992 Atlanta Braves. The stats happen to be almost totally pure; the only hitter I see that did a bit of hitting for another team is old friend Jerry Willard: his glory was short-lived, and 23 of the 48 at-bats listed above occurred on the Expos.

Atlanta Braves hitters had 5104 AB last year (pitchers had 376, which is more than usual, which speaks of a strong starting rotation and weak bullpen). Players are sorted by who played most at each position. For 1993, I estimated to within 25 the number of at-bats I thought each player would get this year -- 225 for Berryhill, 325 for Olson -- then trimmed or added in increments of 25 until the team total was 5150.

Every time I entered a new at-bats figure, the program would ask, "Prorate Y/N?" Naturally, I would hit the Y key, wanting to see what 23 more at-bats did for Olson (nothing). It was more fun to prorate Justice from 484 AB to 525.

But not a lot more. He only got one more home run, six more ribbies, and earned one more dollar. Dave Justice is going to earn more than $22 this year.

So that's the next step. You've got his at-bats; pick what they're going to be worth. I picked $33. I like Justice.

The computer accepts $33 without a shrug, and churns out 1993 stats that are based on Justice in 1992: 29, 91, 10, .268. If I like the look of them, that's the end of the prediction.

If I don't, I can tinker. Surely .268 is giving him the short end of the stick; try .285. I enter 150 hits, and the only thing in his data box that changes, besides his batting average, is his salary. Now he's worth $35.

Got to tone that down; don't have a passion for Justice. I trim two home runs and three stolen bases, and he's back to $33. The 1993 forecast for Dave Justice (525 AB): 27, 91, 7, .285.

Which bears faint resemblance to the forecast in this chapter.

In the masochist notes and in various comments, I've said probably more than enough on the subject of hitting inflation. Everything depends on how bad the pitching is going to be; if it's very bad -- if the ERA in the National League is half a run higher this year, as I predict it will be -- then the numbers above for Justice won't be worth close to $33. They'll be worth around $25.

For this reason the software has two distinct programs this year, EVA92 and EVA93. EVA92 evaluates last season's stats with last season's formulas. In the working file, predicted stats can be entered, and they are given a value based on the '92 formulas. EVA93 offers my predicted stats and assigns them a value based on the predicted '93 formulas. If you like the formulas, but don't care for the predictions, you can overwrite them with the '92 stats at the press of a key; or, of course, overwrite them with your own predictions.

As for the printed results here, I've left the material in a team-by-team format precisely to help you evaluate it. Catchers get between 550 and 575 at-bats on major league teams, shortstops between 575 and 600, center fielders between 625 and 650. On all 28 rosters, I've tried to adhere to general guidelines like these, but there undoubtedly are slip-ups. The game of musical chairs among the uncoveted free agents is just getting into swing as this book goes to press. Five weeks later, the rosters will need major revisions. If you don't have an IBM-compatible computer or have better uses for $35 (see postscript for where to

send it; I draw the line at printing order forms instead of rosters), get out your pencil; mark these pages.

The bats left/right information should help you spot who's likely to platoon with who and who's likely to come forward if someone gets hurt. Players with no at-bats projected are people who probably won't make the 25-man rosters, but who could have some sort of impact in the future. The younger they are, generally, the further in the future.

Capital letters under the positional headings indicate the player qualifies at that position, either by playing 20 games there or the majority of games there. Small letters probably mean the player put in some time at the position last year, but not necessarily. Damion Easely, for example, did not play second in the majors last year; I gave him a few games at second in his working file in order to get at least a small d -- for destination -- in next to his name. Willie Greene, who played no outfield last year, cannot get the at-bats projected spelling Sabo only, but he can, spelling Sabo and Kevin Mitchell.

The ages are Stats Inc. ages: how old the player will be on July 1, 1993.

Which is the only prediction that is made in these charts about pitchers.

Worth showing? To me they are, or they wouldn't be there. Pitchers are sorted by "position" -- the program believes a pitcher is a starter if he gets no saves -- and then by innings-pitched (which for some reason, at the relief pitcher position, often confuses the program). The stats are the major league stats -- acquired in one league or the other or, in a case like Cone's both -- of the pitcher in 1992. The purpose is to give a quick analysis of each staff's possible strengths and weaknesses.

Again turning to the Braves, we see that they have superb qualitative numbers, as expected, but are a little shy in the quantitative. Teams need 1450 IP; the Braves are 133 short. Pete Smith has never pitched 200 innings before.

Ninety wins is a handsome quantity. There should be upwards of 40 saves to go with them, rather than 21. Other righthanded middle relievers will emerge from spring training, but as of now Marvin Freeman looks like the man.

San Diego has nine saves. I know nothing about Mark Ettles beyond what I can barely make out in my October 25 issue of *Baseball America* (22 saves, 86 K in 68 IP at AA Wichita), but he makes this book's version of the 40-man rosters.

San Diego needs 400 more major league innings than its pitchers got last year -- 600 more if Bruce Hurst departs for the Red Sox, who are short themselves. Bruce gets listed with them also, with no innings, right next to Nate Minchey.

The throws-left/right info should point up needs as well, but I have to warn that it was done in a hurry and there will be mistakes.

Finally, the values. Greg Maddux $51. That is precisely how valuable he will be if he again has a 2.18 ERA and 9.10 ratio, while the league ERA rises to 3.95 and the ratio rises to 11.90. A starting pitcher in one of the leagues this year is going to earn over $50, although it's my feeling it won't be Greg Maddux.

Who will it be?

One of the A-graded starting pitchers in the profiles. In any event, that's where this book's pitcher predictions are. I would recommend drawing up your own lists of pitchers under various grades. Thumb through *Who's Who* just glancing at the

pitchers' careers, and write their names under whatever grade you deem appropriate. Be hunchy.

Then compare the grades in these pages.

You know what? They're going to be the same. That was the basic discovery of last year's book. We know we don't know what pitchers are going to do, but we all share the same tentative opinion. You weren't spared Chuck Finley last year because you didn't like him.

Pitchers are radical, and that makes us conservative. Deep down, we may suspect this is going to finally, finally be Mike Harkey's year; and there's no way in hell we're going to spend more than $5 for him. C+. C+ +. Nobody gives him a B-.

Two perceptions, nascent now, could be fully operating by the time April rolls around, and if they are, there will indeed be a big shift in the way the game is played.

(1) Pitchers may in the end be radical more because of the way we score than the way they pitch. Vince Coleman was as bad as Finley last year, as far off form, and he cost more, but he still helped Rotisserie teams; he doesn't even make the Loser Board. Finley regained his form before the season was over and actually helped the Angels, but he hurt Rotisserie teams. Our lack of faith in pitchers is, of course, a function of the way we score, but leaving that aside: *Were* pitchers less reliable than hitters last year? I keep looking at those Leader Boards, and I'm not so sure.

(2) The distance between the good and the bad pitchers is what's going to be truly radical this year. Even if I've overstated the case, we know that the number three, four and five starters on teams are going to lag even further than usual behind the number one and two starters. We know if we come out of the draft with a staff made up of these laggards, we're cooked; we don't compete.

So we all will be sitting there with the same rather limited lists of A and B pitchers. As they get checked off, as one by one they get crossed out, I very much doubt prices will come down. Only one starting pitcher made the top 10 list of the most expensive pitchers in the American League. I predict that will change. If this has not occurred to people in your league yet, hop on the phone: trade your $17 Chad Curtis, much as it pains you, for their $5 Melido Perez.

On the last pages, after the team by team predictions, the hitters are tied in a bow. Everybody ranked by position. Would I go into the draft with this list?

Nope. I'm sure I won't.

My interlocutor, were he still around, would be yelping at this point, "What do mean? You got a secret list you're going to spring on these guys? How much does it cost?"

I've got a changeable list. These are guesses, not weighted averages. Hunches, not mechanical forecasts. Feelings change.

Larry Fine of the Tooners tells Les Leopold of the Tooners's -- and also Peter Golenbock's book -- "Old buddy, you can crunch these numbers all you want, but when I'm in that room my gut's got to make the call."

Speaking of which, did I really give Cecil Fielder such a shaft? $24? Against these pitchers? I must have taken leave of my senses. Colin, give me back page 105. What do you MEAN it's gone to the printers? I want it back!

$29 for Cecil. That's what I'm going to say. That'll rock the opposition. What's your gut say to that, Larry?

He's mine? Hot damn. Pencil in 62 homers.

Colin, give me back Ed Taubensee. I mean it. I've got feelings about little guys, too.

How come -- what's my new take on Ed Taubensee? Did I stumble on something in last year's *Elias* -- how many times he pulled the ball at night in extra innings with no one on -- that has shed new light?

Uh-uh. I was thinking about Kenny Lofton a moment ago, and it seemed to me -- without even dredging up any specific examples -- that the laughingstocks in lopsided trades often turn out to be better ballplayers than we think. Ed, I'd change the prediction for you to $4 if I could.

Wouldn't change my bid; sorry.

That's the other part of the equation. Not what they're going to earn but what we're willing to pay.

It's nice to have specific prices for hitters. In fact, it's essential. If your prices add up -- as these ones do -- and if the competition keeps scooting past these prices, you'll get some hitters, don't worry. I would certainly hope you can take these prices as they are into a draft and, using them as the stopping point, do very well.

I'm pretty sure you could do better, using these prices as a springboard for arriving at your own prices. This guy thinks Monty Fariss is going to take left field from Jeff Conine? Give me a break. Fariss doesn't know which end of a wooden bat to use.

Add to Conine, and subtract from Fariss.

There's plenty of white space in the Listing of Hitters (sorted by position and Patton $). It might have been a neat idea to double space. But costly, and Colin has taken those charts, too.

So what you've got is beta predictions. A vast array of hunches that should stimulate your own. In many, many cases, these inspired visions -- as well as yours -- bear a strong likeness to weighted averages, get disappointingly high similarity scores with mechanical forecasts. What can I say? It's a crowded room on draft day; has been for several years now.

These aren't *my* beta predictions; I don't mean that. Whatever funky prices Dollar Bill and I march into the auction with, these are the ones I get hoisted onto the shoulders or onto the gallows for next year.

My last piece of advice: Use the team charts to look for hot teams. Add up who's supposed to score the most runs. Who (based on last year) figures to give up the least. Which pitching staffs are going to be sending in all sorts of untested pitchers, and which actually seem to have an abundance of experience. Hitching a ride with a hot team, a team that is unexpectedly hot, takes you a long way.

I would have done all this myself and thrown it in here. Ranked teams by runs scored and ERA. Added up everything. Shown the totals. (I can report them: 72100 AB, 1906 HR, 9230 RBI, 1885 SB, .269 BA in the NL; 77000 AB, 2063 HR, 9840 RBI, 1588 SB, .267 BA in the AL. Remember, the NL totals don't include pitchers; nevertheless, these figures say I came close to but didn't hit the targets that are proposed by the formulas for the 1993 average hitters -- masochist's stuff.) The reason I didn't throw it in is simple: I haven't run out of space but

time. My predictions won't impress many people -- and definitely won't be seen by many -- if they appear in May.

A rule of writing is to stop each day in the middle of a chapter, while there's more you want to say. Don't think it was meant to apply to books.

I've had a lot of luck in this game, and I'm quite sure it hasn't ended. It was complete serendipity that I should take my first plunge into the prediction business in a season that would seem so unpredictable, and yet really isn't. The big picture I feel extremely confident about, even if there may be a few errors in the 680 details. In any case, here they are. Hope you've already enjoyed them.