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PATTON'S 1995 PREDICTIONS FOR ROTISSERIE® BASEBALL

FREE SPRING TRAINING UPDATE

ALEX PATTON

Chapter 2
The Predictions

It's a safe bet they'll be using the same baseballs this year — they have so many left over — so the first step in predicting 1995 is to decide what kind of ball they were using last year. Was there a rabbit in it?

You get different answers for different months.

By the end of April, 329 home runs had been hit in the National League and 379 in the American League. Had that pace continued, there would have been 2,361 home runs in the National League, compared to 1,948 the year before. There would have been 2,686 home runs in the American League, compared to 2,074 in 1993. At this rate, the total number of homers in the majors would have exceeded the 1993 total by 25%. The grand total of 5,047 home runs would have been an all-time world's record.

But if you look at just August, what there was of it, you find a home run pace that projects to 4,454. It's still a world's record, but not a Ralph Boston one (plus there was a wind factor: more games slated to be played than in any season except 1993). The August pace of home runs would have produced almost 600 fewer home runs than the April pace in a full season.

For the three full months of the season, home runs were fairly constant in each league. National League: May, 353; June, 347; July, 371. American League: May, 387; June, 423; July, 434.

The major league totals for the first two months of the season (April 708, May 740) provide an interesting contrast to the first two months of 1993 (April 486, May 645). Last year there were almost as many homers in supposedly hitter-unfriendly April as there were in May; the slugging average was, in fact, seven points higher in April.

This is the view of each month in the last two seasons from the pitcher's mound:

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Year
1993	4.07	4.10	4.22	4.47	4.16	4.12	4.18
1994	4.70	4.44	4.51	4.49	4.26		4.50
	15%	8%	7%	0%	2%		8%

The ERAs are for both leagues combined. In 1993, April was the kindest month to pitchers; in 1994, it was by far the cruelest.

The percents show the increase or decrease in scoring, compared to the year before: April clearly is when the biggest hitter uprising occurred. Without the strange happenings in April, there would have been about a 4% increase in scoring last year — still a surprise to everyone concerned, but something that could well be explained by factors other than an even livelier baseball.

And would there have been a 4% increase? May showed an 8% increase, June 7%, July none, August a 2% ... is there not a slight but persistent downward trend? Is it possible the quality of pitching — of all bizarre explanations — was getting better?

In one league, I don't think there's any question.

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Year
NL 1993	3.75	4.11	4.04	4.25	4.08	4.01	4.04
NL 1994	4.38	4.04	4.24	4.34	3.86		4.21
	17%	-2%	5%	2%	-5%		4%

Hudek, Lieber, Hamilton, Foster, Jacome — keep adding pitchers like these to the ranks and we're looking at some reinforcements. Get rid of the cannon fodder — Morgan, Hillman, Torres, Whitehurst — one way or the other and we may be seeing an August ERA that can last.

The AL presents a different version of events.

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Year
AL 1993	4.42	4.09	4.40	4.69	4.23	4.23	4.32
AL 1994	5.01	4.88	4.78	4.63	4.65		4.80
	13%	19%	9%	-1%	10%		11%

Yet not a totally different version. Arguably, the pitching indeed was 11% worse last year — as simple as that — and the farm systems weren't providing any answers.

Why, in the second year after expansion, would the pitching not be better? What was the matter with the farm systems? How come nature isn't filling the void?

I don't know. Maybe it can't. Perhaps Bill James was right a year ago when he stated, "There are maybe 50 good pitchers on the entire planet." This doesn't pass for what most scientists would consider an explanation, but it could be a correct statement.

How many good hitters are there?

How many that are *really* good?

More than usual?

Can anyone remember when we there's been a collection like Thomas, Griffey, Belle, Bagwell and Bonds all playing at once?

It could be that I'm just being soft in the head. These fellows are created by expansion, a juiced-up baseball, favoritism by the umpires and a lot of sunny days in April. But I don't think so.

In any event, just projecting the 71% of a season to 100% of a season, 1994 wasn't going to exceed 1987. That's on a level line of hitting, and I think it was going down. Except for the best hitters. They weren't going down. As a matter of fact, I don't think a level line is fair to some of them. Some were going down, sure, that's what happens; and some were going up.

I'm not saying who. It's hard enough to predict next year.

The prediction formula that is used this year, much like the one that was used last year, splits the difference between the two previous seasons. My guess is, the National League ERA will be around 4.10 and the American League around 4.50. If the leagues end up within 10 points on either side of these numbers, I'm golden.

You can tell roughly how many home runs, RBIs, stolen bases and what kind of batting average will be needed to produce this amount of scoring. With these totals as targets, I work out denominators that convert the stats into dollars, and then I crank up The Projector in *Patton $ On Disk* and start making predictions player by player. First I estimate to within 25 how many AB the player will get. Then I generate the stats — normally by simply typing in a predicted value for the player; the program generates stats to fit, based on the kind of stats the player had last year. The alternative method is to type in the predicted stats and let the program compute the predicted value.

I work team by team, and in the past have shown the predictions team by team. That way I get great similarity scores on team at-bats. This year, with so many free agents, it seemed sort of pointless. The team at-bats are more or less right (assigning free agents to likely destinations) and the total of all the individual at-bats adds up exactly to the target number in each league. As long as I stay close to the HR, RBI, SB and BA targets for each league, the formulas produce realistic values for hitters. The 168 hitters drafted in auctions will be worth around $2,184. Even if I'm off in a few particulars, I'm going to be right about the group.

Under $ in the predictions is what the stats are worth in the cold, neutral world of the stat services. How much does your team improve with these stats? Ten percent? Then the player is worth $26.

The bid limits for hitters try to reflect the intricacies of the game. Is the player durable? Is he one of the few good hitters at a weak position? Where does most of his value reside? (In the running game — underpay; in the power departments, pay a premium.) Is the prediction at the outer limit of what he can do, or is it the least he can do? What about that persistent rumor that he's going to the other league?

Most important, how big is the player? Big players get paid in full — and sometimes then some — in my universe. The little guys get cheated. The single most important thing to understand about Rotisserie baseball is that a big guy who has a big season, even if it's a little less than you pay him, is a better buy than a scrub who turns a slight profit.

These ideas, and hopefully a few more, are spelled out in the player comments.

The bid limits for hitters *add up to $2,184, exactly*. Not only that, there are exactly 168 hitters who receive bid limits. These are the prices that I would take into an auction myself, in a no-freeze-list league, in early December.

There are no projections for pitchers. What you see is the key factual information about 1994 (all the old that fits) and, under $, what the pitcher was worth *in 1994*. The bid limit itself is not a prediction; it is this year's equivalent of last year's letter grades, a guide to how much to pay for a pitcher.

The grades were meant to serve two masters at once. A pitcher who received a B grade, for example, was predicted to earn between $10 and $30. Bettors were advised to place a minimum bid of $5 and a maximum of $25. For scoring purposes, a B+ pitcher was predicted to earn $25, while a B- pitcher was predicted to earn $15. Effectively, a B+ bidding range was $10 to $20; a B- grade suggested bidding at least $6 and not much more than $10. There was, in other words, a deliberate small overlap between B+ and B-.

Pitchers with C grades were predicted to earn between nothing and $20. The bidding range was $1 to $10. A C+ pitcher counted for scoring purposes as a $10 prediction. The bidding range of C+ was $3 minimum, $10 maximum. In other words, B and C grades overlapped.

The point of reviewing this is to get an orientation on the exact bid limits that are being offered for pitchers this year. Is a $9 pitcher a B- or C+?

Is a $14 pitcher a B or B+ pitcher?

Is a $21 pitcher an A- pitcher or B+ pitcher?

There's no answer. The distinction was blurry before, so maybe it's just as well that it's now lost. A $21 pitcher is a pitcher you *really* want — and really hope you don't have to pay $21 for.

Grades are still extremely helpful in sorting pitchers out initially, and the pluses and minuses sort them out further, but once an exact dollar amount is settled on, I found, you are liberated from the confines of grades. There's no predictive difference whatever between a $21 pitcher and a $22 pitcher, nor between a $20 pitcher and a $19 pitcher. There's a slight difference in preference, which, as you're forced to make quick decisions in the heat of battle, could loom large.

I used to argue that it's best not to agonize over whether you prefer Bere or Sele, Avery or Swift, Montgomery or Ward — you'll love whoever you adopt and they will or won't break you're heart. The solution, using exact bid limits, is simple enough: give the same exact values, if you're having trouble deciding. (In practice, I discovered subtle preferences everywhere and felt no guilt about expressing them.) The big advantage of numbers over grades is that they can be totaled by a calculator or in a spreadsheet.

The bid limits for pitchers *add up to $936 exactly*. There are only 108 pitchers who receive bid limits. These are the prices for pitchers that I would take into an auction myself, in a no-freeze-list league, in early December.

Thus the maximum bids for both hitters and pitchers add up to $3,120, which is the maximum that standard Rotisserie leagues can spend. Knowing that, you don't even need a calculator to alter them. Did a $17 hitter tear his anterior cruciate in Venezuela? Sorry

— but part or all of $17 goes to your replacement and you get none. The budget for pitchers is too low? No problem; take some money from the hitters. The prediction for a player that you really like is out to lunch? Take $5 from somebody that I've overvalued and give it to him.

You can even deal with inflation. Somebody's got Mondesi frozen at $11 this year? The bid limit for him, $25, is kind of irrelevant in that case. Pencil in $11 next to Mondesi — right here in the book, that's why the paper's so cheap — and distribute $14 to players who won't be frozen.

A total of 276 players have bid limits. Approximately 600 players will play in each major league this year, and most Rotisserie leagues nowadays hold a reserve draft after the auction to fight over all the loot that they know is still out there. In Ultra leagues the draft soaks up an additional 204 players. The reserve list designations are my attempt to predict who the best unbought players will be.

There are five classifications, and some of them don't have the same meanings for pitchers as they do for hitters.

Reserve List 1 (R1):

Top prospects who should appear in the majors well before September and contribute significant stats. Pitcher R1's may contribute significantly bad stats, of course, but history shows that the best pitcher call-ups are better each year than the best hitter call-ups. These pitchers often are very hard to identify beforehand, however, whereas most of the good hitters can be seen coming from miles away.

For self-scoring purposes in next year's book, we'll say that all R1's will earn $5 next year, a figure that's much lower than the best R1's will be worth and much higher than the average R1 will be worth.

Reserve List 2 (R2):

Most hitter R2's have at least gotten as far as Double-A already. They'll probably start in Triple-A and have a good chance of being called up in September. They won't contribute much this year, but they could very easily be worth the $10 or even $15 (leagues vary on this matter) that they will cost as freezes next year. The R2 hitter payoff normally is in the following season.

R2 pitchers are much more likely to have an influence this year, for better or for worse, while they are more unlikely to be players that you'll want to freeze for even $10 next year.

For self-scoring purposes, we'll say that the average hitter R2 will earn $2, the average pitcher R2 will lose $1. We will also predict that the five best pitcher R2's will be worth much more than the five best hitter R2's.

Reserve List 3 (R3):

The R3 hitters are boring. They are veterans who didn't make the top 168 hitters or Triple-A players who don't even do much for Triple-A Rotisserie Leagues. Rusty Greer, had he been in last year's book, would have been an R3.

R3 pitchers are incendiary. They are the veterans on major league staffs who you don't dare put on your opening day rosters, like Ricky Bones. A few Triple-A lifers, like Mike Birkbeck and Butch Henry, will also be in this group.

For scoring purposes, make hitters worth $1 each, pitchers ($3) each. The average pitcher on this list will undoubtedly lose more than $3 — much more if there's no Bones or Butch among them. But there is.

Reserve List 4 (R4):

Hitters and pitchers alike are so far from the major league scene that they should be

thought of strictly as futures. The only question is, does the future lie in the direction of the majors or in the direction of some other occupation?

The vast majority of R4's are at least progressing towards the majors; for them, being an R4 is a compliment. For a few — those who have been an R2, if not an R1, in the past — the R4 classification is the same as thumbs down.

Leagues with extensive farm systems should examine every single R4 under a magnifying glass; most of them aren't profiled, so you'll have to buy every book that I've bought and subscribe to everything that I subscribe to, not that you haven't and don't already.

Everyone else would be well advised to leave room on the brain pan for something else. No, not your wife's birthday — the R5's.

Reserve List 5 (R5):

Here, in the heart of *Baseball America*, we can dream. This is where Derek Jeter lived last year and Cliff Floyd the year before. An R5 has no chance — none — of jumping all the way to the majors. Unless he's named Alex Rodriguez. But if your league has even a limited farm system, each and every R5 in this book should be picked before the vast majority of R3 hitters and before many, many R3 pitchers. The R4's as a group may get to the majors a step ahead of the R5's, but when both groups have taken the last step, the R5's will run away from the R4's. That's the theory, anyway.

There should be no need for a self-scoring value for either of these last two groups, but just in case, we'll say any R4 hitters who make it to the majors will earn $0 each, while R5 hitters will earn ($1); R4 pitchers who make the leap will earn ($5) each, while R5 pitchers, if their allowed to, will earn ($10), conservatively.

The idea is that you work from the top and the bottom towards the center. Predicted values for reserve list hitters can be a help selecting within each group, but, of course, playing time is the key. A hitter who's predicted to earn $3 in 75 AB has received more of an endorsement as a prospect than a hitter who's predicted to earn $4 in 150 AB.

The R1's should contain the most concentrated value. R3's should have the most total value (at least among pitchers, as long as negatives are counted as zero); however, this territory is so vast it's hard to figure out where to stake your claim. For that reason you'll find a few veteran pitchers that have been nudged over into R2 land — I want them to stand out — and a few that I feel are truly desperation picks who have been given R4 status. The only thing worse is to have pitched in The Show last year (many no-bid hitters as well as pitchers have been trimmed to save space) and get a zero under Bid this year: not even worth picking on reserve.

What team does Kevin Mitchell belong to? Where is Dave Stewart going to pitch? Does Norm Charlton even try out with the Phillies?

With between 200 and 2,000 free agents on the horizon, depending on the settlement, I've decided that the team affiliation in the charts has only one useful purpose: to help clarify player identification. K Mitchell R Cin is not going to play for Cincinnati — that's the one thing we do know — but he's not Keith Mitchell either. T Pendleton B Oth is unmistakably the former third baseman of the Atlanta Braves.

Thanks to the software program I use (P.S. — You can too!), the predictions can keep changing long after every other part of the book, including what you're reading right now, has been given to the (laser) printer. In a blink, Luis Alicea goes to the American League, Naerhring and Rodriguez lose AB, Pena and Oquendo gain AB in the NL. If the Boston Globe isn't just trying to sell newspapers, you might even see J Canseco R Bos in the charts. If K Ryan R Tex is part of the switch, I'd dearly love to retrieve the Ryan comment and express my astonishment that Duquette would do such a thing, but I can't.

All calls in the charts are official, if not final. I can't even change Jose's predicted 1995

earnings above his four-year scan in the player profiles. There will be numerous discrepancies (mostly small) between the predictions and bid limits in the player profiles and the predictions and bid limits in this chapter. It's impossible to stop fussing.

For your curiosity, the absolute, final, official, last-minute, exact prediction totals for hitters are printed at the end of the alphabetical listing. One thing you will notice is that the hitters in both leagues are predicted to earn around $2,500, not $2,184. The bid limits are *not* my version of Optimum Bids; they are the limits past which the hitters as a group can't earn any more. The 168 drafted hitters, that is. Every year, the final hitting stats in both the National and American Leagues are worth considerably more than $2,184. How much more depends on how good the prospects who are promoted during the season are. The amount of "free loot" that they contribute varies, but normally it's around it's around $300.

At the end of the alphabetical listing of pitchers, their stats are also totalled; comparing these totals to the 1994 NL and AL totals will you give you an idea of how much inter-league trading had taken place by early December. Nate Minchey makes a difference.

In the positional listings, hitters are ranked by bid limits: the values of the predicted stats are right to the left of them (left to the right of them is space for your own bid limits). Another thing you don't want to be confused by is which other positions the player may qualify at. Capital letters indicate at least 15 games were played at the position, or that it was the position a utility player saw the most action at, or, in the case of call-ups, that it was the player's primary position in the minors. Small letters denote either fewer than 15 games at the position or, in a few cases, such as Jeff Conine (3b), a position he is expected to play, even if he didn't last year. If you find you're weak in a position after the auction, one recourse is to pluck off the best R players at that position during the reserve draft.

If you are in an Ultra league, but haven't had time to prepare, there are more than enough names here to see you through; unfortunately, space didn't allow for first names. You'll know which K Mitchell you want, but you might have to say R Bolton if you don't want T Bolton, and vice versa. If, late in the day, your eye falls on this Morris guy (who knows, could be Hal's brother), you can't just say Morris, you have to say B Morris. (Do *not* guess and say Bill Morris, because some lawyer's taping the whole 14 hours.) When they say, Who? you answer, "Cubs second baseman; bats left," and that ought to shut them up.

You'll have to decide whether you miss the listing of the predictions in the team by team format. Apart from being unfeasible this time, the much speedier access that the alphabetical listing affords may be an improvement. Yet I don't love the change myself. It's hard to read anything in the alphabet soup. More than that, however, not being able to put together even a facsimile of what teams will look like this year tells what shape the game is in.

There may be no games. I know that. In early December, the odds are better than even that there will be no agreement before the start of spring training, at which point the doors will be opened to scabs. The owners want to break the union, and if they can't, they still demand their pound of flesh. Chopping off a month's worth of paychecks will bring a certain amount of satisfaction. The players held the hammer in the fall; in the spring the owners do.

There will be a season; with luck, even a complete season. Whenever it starts, there's going to be a lot of pent-up energy, angry energy, expressing itself on the field. Underqualified pitchers better have quick reflexes.

Tony Gwynn would have hit .400. Ken Griffey — I doubt Matt Williams — would have hit 62 home runs. One or the other or both would have happened; they are the two biggest things that were lost in the rubble.

Nothing so epic will happen this year. It *may*, but to predict it seems almost unseemly.

I have to say, though, there is absolutely no reason, no predictive reason, that a serious assault on baseball's most hallowed record shouldn't happen again. If they start on time. This is an age of great hitters. There aren't quite enough pitchers to go around. The ball will certainly be no *less* lively than it has been for the past two seasons. The umpires still aren't calling the high strike. April may be sunny again.

I think I'm hoping, more than predicting, no one will hit 62 homers this year because the owners shouldn't be so lucky.