"Perhaps the best performance predictor in the field."–John Hunt, *Baseball Weekly*

PATTON'S 1996 PREDICTIONS FOR ROTISSERIE® Baseball

FREE SPRING TRAINING UPDATE

ALEX PATTON

Chapter 2
Predictions

If the strike did one thing it was get forecasters agreeing on how much hitting there would be for the first time in years. A lot. There wasn't anybody who didn't think April would be a disaster for pitchers; many predicted pitchers would need at least until the end of May to get in shape; and some, like myself, thought the rush to start the season might mess them up for the entire year.

ERA by month

	AL	NL	MLB
April	5.20	4.22	4.69
May	4.79	4.33	4.56
June	4.63	4.01	4.32
July	4.69	4.09	4.39
August	4.98	4.17	4.57
Sept/Oct	4.38	4.30	4.34
1995	4.71	4.18	4.45

As it turns out, it seems there was indeed some disruption in the American League but none to speak of in the National League. For both leagues combined, April shows the highest ERA, but how unusual is that?

ERA by month

	AL	NL	MLB
April	5.01	4.38	4.70
May	4.88	4.04	4.44
June	4.78	4.24	4.51
July	4.63	4.34	4.49
August	4.65	3.86	4.26
Sept/Oct			
1994	4.80	4.21	4.50

It's not unusual, and in fact there was more hitting in April of 1994 than there was in last year's partial April that followed an unusually long lay-off and a sharply reduced preparation period.

To that, all you can say is go figure.

And I really don't see anything else in either chart that sheds much light on either of these dark seasons. In 1994, there was a slight downward trend in overall ERA, followed by a fairly noticeable drop in August, causing me to speculate that September would have continued to see a reduction in hitting — but face it, who knows?

Last year, August had the second most hitting after April, and September had the second best pitching after June. Don't ask me what that tells us.

I worry about this more than most people, because my theory is, if I can get the big picture right, I'm bound to get the little pictures right more often than other people who are in the prediction business.

This was the big-picture forecast in last year's book:

Book predictions

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA
AL	78400	2283	10472	1381	.267
NL	73500	2036	9525	1505	.269

And this was the update picture:

Update predictions

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA
AL	71400	2210	9720	1272	.269
NL	65800	1921	8607	1465	.271

And this was the actual picture (NL pitchers do not sit for this portrait):

1995 league totals

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA
AL	69522	2164	9691	1331	.270
NL	64926	1897	8478	1595	.271

Then we quickly better reduce the book picture by 144/162 to bring it more in line with the actual AB, even though that isn't a category:

Book predictions scaled to actual season

	AB	HR	RBI	SB	BA
AL	69689	2029	9308	1228	.267
NL	65333	1810	8467	1338	.269

Thus we can see that, while in neither case do I have a firm grip on reality — there are those who say I never do — between the book and the update, I have it pretty well surrounded.

A concession that I had to make last year I have to make again: no team-by-team predictions. Hardly any point, back in November where I am, and even when you're reading this book, chances are, hundreds of players will still be floating free.

I've stuck with my at-bat cap for each league, optimistically counting, yet again, on 162 games; but a good case can be made that I shouldn't. Not that I should under-predict AB — although a case can be made for that, too — but that I should over-predict. That's what Bill James does, and he presents his usual compelling reasons for his way of doing things in this year's *Major League Handbook*:

"We have long arguments every year about how much playing time to project for who. What I always argue, and I win as many as I lose, is that if a young player can play, we should project him to play. My thinking is this: if a young player comes along, and you turn to us to see what kind of hitter he is, and we don't tell you, then we've failed you. We haven't told you what we know.

"On the other hand, if we project him to bat 537 times and he doesn't, so what? You didn't really think we knew who was going to play how much, did you?"

He discusses in detail the problem of trying to guess if Matt Lawton, Rich Becker or someone else will get the 550 AB that the center field position in Minnesota offers.

"We could project 275 at bats for each of them, rub our hands contentedly and say we've got the position covered. But have we really minimized the error?"

It's not a rhetorical question. He explains in detail why the mathematical answer to that is no. (Unless, of course, nobody wins the job and they in fact do split the AB.)

"So making the projected at bats match the available playing time doesn't really do anything to minimize the error. It's a compromise; it guarantees that you'll be half wrong. I'd rather be right half the time and wrong half the time than half wrong all the time."

I've met Bill James, and there is something about him that definitely reminds me of Will Rogers.

For starters, they are/were both very funny, and I got a good laugh when I read that line. Humor, though, is itself an odd duck: it exposes what's false without necessarily telling what's true.

You won't be half-wrong, Bill, if Becker and Lawton *do* split the job; and, at least while their battling for it, don't they have to? So that's one point which you could have made, and which I'm sure was discussed in your various arguments with your colleagues, but you didn't, because it would have torn your joke to shreds.

My next question is, who's failing who here? The way you put it — "You didn't really think we knew who was going to play how much, did you? — kind of puts me on the defensive, but once I've recovered: yes, damn it, that's *exactly* what I thought you might tell me. We *know* Becker and Lawton are going to be in a battle; who's going to win it?

I flip to the relevant pages and see Becker (9-52-16-.282 in 444 AB) and see Lawton (17-78-27-.270 in 564 AB) and I see that Lawton does beat Becker out, but not this year, and I'm not sure why.

Nope — cancel that. Cheap joke, nothing more.

The projection for Lawton is bold, it's what we're looking for; James quite obviously does think Lawton's ready. Not me. I'll be shocked if he puts up numbers that approach these this year (and I'll change my mind if he doesn't cool down in the AZL), and, furthermore, there's no *way* Becker posts these numbers. I was a big Becker fan myself, until I actually saw him play.

Cheap joke No. 2. James, I'm sure, watches at least as many games as I do, and he may have even talked to Rich Becker at some point. I do not talk to baseball players. They scare me.

Cheap joke No. 3. I don't talk to baseball players because I just don't get the chance (but it's also true that I'm not the sort of person to go up to someone — Rich Becker or anyone else — and ask him why he's not very good at what he does).

But I would ask James dozens of questions if I got the chance. (I did get a chance two years ago, when were riding in the same car from New York to Hackensack to shoot the ESPN pre-season special; amid chit-chat, the only serious question I got around to asking him was, Why did he ever join the Baseball Weekly tout league? His answer: "Because I'm not very good at saying no to people." He did last year.) The question I would ask with regard to the hitter projections is, Why not one more line, showing the totals?

How far over is he on at-bats?

He devotes 400 lines to 400 players (which is interesting in itself: he's over-projecting at-bats but under-projecting the number of people who will get them), and it would be such a simple matter to have line 401 show what it all adds up to. Each line is so fantastically detailed: not simply HR, but D, T, BB and SO; not just SB but CS. I'd like to see how many CS there are overall, compared to SB. It's not that I expect to see anything outlandish, but I am curious.

Following the projections for 400 hitters in 1996 is a page called "These Guys Can Play Too and Might Get a Shot." There are 24 such hitters on this list, which, James writes, "includes players that we wouldn't expect to play next year, but who we feel have the ability to play if they get the chance." Almost all 24 of them are hitters worthy of our consideration (such as Bob Abreu, Trey Beamon, Brian Giles, Todd Greene, Robin Jennings, Brooks Kieschnick, Jose Malave, Ruben Rivera and Todd Walker) and the MLE's that are shown for them definitely have useful information. But how exactly does projecting 409 AB for Brian Giles differ from projecting 444 for Rich Becker? Is one a lesser so-what if it doesn't happen? Is that the difference?

James has as much as admitted there isn't room for Rich Becker even. I guess he's saying that Rich Becker has a better chance of making him wrong somewhere else than Brian Giles has.

I'm not trying to be cute, nor am I nit-picking. The question of what to do with every one of the 24 players he names is *the* question of forecasting. A good number of them will make brief appearances in the majors this year, while a few will play a lot of the season and have significant impacts. How does showing what they all will do if they all play a lot help us identify who the few will be?

This is not to say that I don't listen to Bill James. I always do. "What we know is, Matt Lawton can play. So what I say is, let's make a strong statement that Matt Lawton can play. If Tom Kelly doesn't give him a chance to show it, that's on him." I listen to that. I like it. Makes sense, and makes me smile.

Then I naturally look for an answer to this, since I do it differently. You can make the same statement — not as dramatically but just as accurately — about a player's potential in 100 AB as in 500 AB. The player isn't generating the stats, we are; and any amount of AB can be representative of how well we think the player will play, if he plays.

Ultimately, it comes down to the fact that there's some cussed element in me that resists projecting 1,008 AB for Matt Lawton and Rich Becker. I just can't do it, not wittingly. Maybe the best resolution of this issue is to say, some forecasters should project both of them fully out, and some shouldn't.

My method is to start with line 401. I ask myself, how much hitting is there going to be in each league this year? The fourth year after expansion; pitchers may finally have their act together again. Ball seemed a little less juiced last year than two years ago. No new stadiums to throw

things askew. (The only new stadium that hasn't been a hitters's stadium is the one the Hurt plays in.) Farmer's almanac says it's going to be cold in April and blowing in at Wrigley (that's not a tip; only have my Stats Inc. books so far)...

The ERA's that I pin on the wall for 1996 are 4.40 for the AL, 4.00 for the NL — still a lot of hitting, ample for me to have fun with, but less than last year (4.71 in the AL and 4.18 in the NL). With a calculator I work out the number of HR, RBI, SB and BA needed to produce ERA's like these (allowing for league differences) and pin these numbers up on the wall. Then I crank up The Projector in *Patton $ On Disk* and start building toward them player by player, and this part really is fun.

Haven't done it yet for this year — it's the last thing I do — but it will be fun.

I've already done the hard part, which is the bids. The bids are serious business. The bids are bets, the predictions are guesses.

Clearly, each player is grounded in the year before. For example, suppose Piazza doesn't get hurt and the season is completed and he gets 547 AB, as he did in 1993. Rounding that off to the nearest 25, I enter 550 for Piazza in his data box; the program asks "ProRate? Y/N", I hit the Y key with a vengeance. Into the data box pops a new Piazza (with all secondary stats, the ones we pay close attention to but aren't worth anything, expanded as well):

Piazza — first try

AB	H	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$
550	190	40	117	1	.345	46

The one thing that's not simply multiplied by 550/434 here is the salary; if it were it would be $49. That is, if the formula used in this year's book, which judged Piazza's 1995 stats to be worth $39, were simply thrown into The Projector, the pro-rated stats would be worth $49.

The Projector has a prediction formula that's tailored to the predicted overall stats. No matter much how much hitting there is in the National League this season — whether there's more, or as I'm predicting, whether there's less — it will be worth around $2,500. That figure varies somewhat, depending on how much "free loot" comes along, but the stats of the hitters we buy in the draft will be worth $2,184 (according to the pricing theory that this book is based on). The prediction formula for 1996 judges the pro-rated stats that you see above to be worth $46.

In essence, the formula puts Piazza's expanded stats in the context of a full season, which pushes his price down, but it expects less hitting by the average player, and that pushed Piazza back up a bit.

The question is, is it a good prediction either way — price or stats?

Seems a bit much, doesn't it? I recommended a bid limit of $43 for Piazza and that *had* to include position scarcity, I'm sure it did; so, without even fussing with the stats themselves, let's enter $40 in Piazza's data box and see what happens.

Piazza — second try

AB	H	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$
550	181	35	111	1	.329	40

Two tries does it, I think. This seems reasonable. Very much within Piazza's reach. Just can't get hurt.

If I was 100% confident that Piazza *won't* get hurt, for these stats, from a catcher? I'd bid $45.

If you don't see this precise prediction for Piazza in the tables that follow, it means, in the end, I couldn't leave well enough alone. There was a third try, a fourth try.

And so it goes, for over 600 hitters.

Matt Williams will be fun.

The batting average is going to be much harder to figure than the home runs. Do you split the difference between .336 and .267?

Since Bill James has by far the harshest deadline for getting his projections to the printer, I can already show you his 1996 Matt Williams (which most of you, I imagine, have already seen; the projections are in the *Stats Major League Handbook*, which, incredibly, you can buy at the beginning of November):

Bill James: Matt Williams this year

AB	H	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$
539	146	36	100	2	.271	28

The price, I'm sure you realize, is my prediction formula applied to his predicted stats. There is a Bill James pricing system, but it must be for Bill James fantasy baseball; it's not for Rotisserie.

So forget the price — do you like the stats?

His method couldn't be more opposed to mine. Yet by no means are we looking at a simple weighted average. Age is a big factor. And such matters as BB/SO ratio, undoubtedly, are taken into account. The formula has never been divulged.

Which is fine. James has given us a lifetime of formulas to play with. Probably the formula that generates the projections simply isn't readable; the point is, it is a formula. James is hands-off and proud of it.

Right off the bat, in his essay in this year's *Handbook*, he lists Our Projection of players who would hit 30 home runs in 1995 next to a list of Actual Factual.

"As you can see, we projected only 14 players to hit 30 or more home runs. In fact, 21 players hit 30 or more home runs. This is normal. Since we always project players to have typical seasons, rather than good seasons, we will always under-project the players who have career years."

Let's take a look:

Our Projection	HR	Actual Factual	HR	AP Projection	HR
Ken Griffey Jr.	41	Albert Belle	50	Frank Thomas	51
Albert Belle	40	Dante Bichette	40	Albert Belle	47
Frank Thomas	40	Jay Buhner	40	Jeff Bagwell	46
Barry Bonds	38	Frank Thomas	40	Barry Bonds	45
Juan Gonzalez	38	Mark MgGwire	39	Ken Griffey Jr.	43
Matt Williams	38	Rafael Palmeiro	39	Matt Williams	43
Fred McGriff	36	Mo Vaughn	39	Fred McGriff	40
Manny Ramirez	36	Sammy Sosa	36	Gary Sheffield	40
Cecil Fielder	34	Larry Walker	36	Andres Galarraga	37
Tim Salmon	34	Gary Gaetti	35	Cecil Fielder	37
Jeff Bagwell	30	Tim Salmon	34	Juan Gonzalez	37
Jose Canseco	30	Barry Bonds	33	Mo Vaughn	37
Mike Piazza	30	Jim Edmonds	33	Bob Hamelin	35
Sammy Sosa	30	Vinny Castilla	32	Mike Piazza	35
		Eric Karros	32	Sammy Sosa	34
		Mike Piazza	32	Tim Salmon	34
		Mickey Tettleton	32	Joe Carter	33
		Cecil Fielder	31	Dave Justice	32
		Andres Galarraga	31	Jay Buhner	32
		Tino Martinez	31	Jose Canseco	32
		Manny Ramirez	31	Chili Davis	31
				Kevin Mitchell	31
				Ryan Klesko	31
				Manny Ramirez	30
				Rafael Plameiro	30
				Ruben Sierra	30

Look who else has horned in. Couldn't help it.

The corollary seems to be, if you allow yourself to meddle, human nature being what it is, you're going to over-project the players who have career years. Not just in terms of numbers of players but numbers of homers, Actual Factual seems to sit right between us. The computer and the sentimentalist have reality surrounded.

James points out that eight of the players he projected to hit 30 homers did, and five of the other six missed "simply because they were hurt... As a group, they hit more home runs per at bat (.064) than we projected for them (.061), but just missed too much playing time, between injuries and the strike, to reach 30." That leaves one unaccounted for; wouldn't you know it would be the one player for whom failing to hit 30 homers truly is atypical. "The sixth player... was the Crime Dog, who had his string of 30-homer seasons snapped by the shortened schedule. He hit 27 homers; there is very little doubt that, with another 18 games, he would have cleared the barrier."

Well, if you're going to be like *that*, Bill, I'm going to claim the Crime Dog, too, so Actual Factual, which was closer to me anyway — it really wasn't in the middle (BJ 14, AF 21, AP 26 30-homer hitters) — comes closer in my direction, and away from yours.

Also, all five players that you cry-babied over (Griffey, Canseco, Bagwell, Williams and Gonzalez) I can cry-baby over.

Can I tell you something about Gary Sheffield, while I wipe my eyes? He had an HR-per-AB rate of .075. Just because your formula only projected 25 HR for him doesn't mean I don't deserve a hankie.

Speaking of HR rates, what about that Juan Gonzalez? Wasn't he awesome? HR/AB rate of .077. Crime Dog's was only .051. So if we're going to give ourselves McGriff, why not give ourselves Gonzalez (hit .417 the last week) — what do you say?

The score now is BJ 14, AF 23, AP 26.

Had either Canseco (24 HR) or Williams (23) been hot in the final 18 games, one more of our picks would have gone over the 30-homer mark.

And why limit ourselves to our picks? The better way to ask the question is, how many hitters did we predict would hit 30 homers in a full season and how many reasonably would have in a full season? Five other hitters, besides McGriff and Gonzalez, were nestled in the 29-27 HR bracket at the end: Reggie Sanders, Edgar Martinez, Ron Gant, Tony Phillips and John Valentin. The truth is, Actual Factual would probably have passed me.

And I'm going to be just as much of a pest about similarity scores, head to head. On just homers, clearly James and I tie on, say, Salmon: can't be any argument about that. But do we get a similarity score of 1,000?

No, because we projected 162 games, and in 162 games Salmon projects to 38 HR. I'm not as close to Albert as I look (he projects to 56 HR). James is not as close to Thomas as he looks (Thomas projects to 45 HR).

Putting all that aside, a method that unabashedly seeks a player's "typical year," even if it hasn't happened yet (Manny Ramirez), successfully projects 8 players to hit 30 or more home runs. My method of simply guessing is successful on 13.

Which means, of course, that I make 13 bad guesses; 13 that at the very least are overly optimistic about home runs (and indeed are optimistic across the board). Not only are they bad guesses, but they miss reality by a much wider margin than James does: he said Bagwell would hit 30-113-14-.310, I said Bagwell would hit 46-130-6-.329.

So that's the warning. Sometimes I beat the hell out of Bill James, and sometimes he beats the hell out of me.

Overall? Well, it's like this. Since 1992, James and all the other mechanical forecasters have been at a disadvantage. Their formulas did not foresee the effects of expansion. I anticipated these effects, and then when a juiced up baseball was added to the mix, I went with that, too. So I was able to make some wild predictions and get away with quite a few of them. Stat-generating prediction formulas (my prediction formulas do generate stats in the prediction formulas, if you enter the dollar amounts in the data boxes, but it's still more accurate to say that they measure the values of the stats that are predicted)... where was I? Oh: stat-generating formulas — hell, mechanical forecasts — need stability to be successful. The more chaotic baseball is, the better my guesses will look — if I guess right about the big picture.

This will be an interesting year, a good contest between my method and the mechanical forecasts. I'm looking for a slight tilt back in the direction of the pitcher — for reasons already discussed — and there's been so much hitting in the last few years that data upon which mechanical projections depend will finally have brought the projected hitters up to speed. Bill James and I might have pretty much the same line 401 this year.

As a customer service, I'm going to try very hard to be different.

I'll be very disappointed if my Matt Williams looks like his Matt Williams.

He won't — we already know that — but it's shorthand for saying I hope to be very different in the particulars. When I reach Jeff Bagwell, I'm going to look at my bid value for him, and of course look at his five-year scan, and then I'm going to start knocking the numbers around in his data box until they look like good guesses.

If I discover something in the process that inclines me to change the bid for Bagwell, then, unfortunately, here's how it has to be done: I change the bid here, *in the prediction chapter*, and leave the first chapter as it is.

The bid in the previous chapter is the beta bid. It's the one that was on the screen when I wrote the comment. Often the comments and the bids are linked. Not only that, but if I change the bid as much as $1 for Bagwell, I have to award that $1 to someone else. It's easy to do in the software program, hard to do in the numerous files for chapter one that are already being transformed into the printed word.

As I make predictions, I'll work team by team, even though I well realize the teams I'm looking at in November won't be the teams you'll be looking at in March. I don't have to be totally strict, but it helps me stay within my overall at-bat cap. Roberto Alomar will not be a Blue Jay, and I'm not bothering to list the Blue Jays on one page in this book, but I'll be predicting what Alomar's going to do this year as if he's a Blue Jay. Unless his status has officially changed before my cut-off (December 1), you'll find "Tor" after his name; you'll be able to tell that the context is non-specific at the time of the prediction. If he signs with the Dodgers before December 1, you'll find him in NL charts with "LA" after his name, and the predictions will have been adjusted to a known destination. For perhaps the first week of December, I may yet be able to sneak big signings into the charts.

Alomar will be one of the harder players to predict, even if I do know where he's playing. He's precisely the sort of player that I want to make slightly more dashing guesses about this year. Before the bids — which have only evolved in the last few years — I felt the pull of the typical, just like James, because that's what betting is all about. The bids, hopefully, have liberated me; I should be able to depend more on hunch and intuition for people like Roberto Alomar, and whether that's good or bad is what we're going to discover.

If baseball does have a return to normalcy this season (and remember, with expansion looming again in 1998, it won't last long), maybe we'll learn if Bill James is right. Do players normally do what they normally do? Or do they normally zig and zag?

Obviously, they zig and zag to some extent; we'd sure hate this game if they didn't. But if I let the predictions themselves zig and zag a little bit more than they have in the past, just a bit, will I be more in step or out of step with Actual Factual than if I played it like James does, whose predictions are my bids?

Explanation of the Charts

The **hitters** are predicted in full, including runs scored. Under $ is what the predicted stats will be worth this year if the overall assumptions about how much hitting there's going to be are more or less correct. Under Bid is the recommended bid price beyond which you shouldn't go.

There are numerous reasons why the bid price might differ from what the hitter is predicted to earn. Reasons that the bid might be higher include —

- Position scarcity: the hitter is a giant at a weak position.
- Investment safety: the hitter is durable, reliable and good.
- Upside: the hitter could easily go way past the stats that are predicted.
- Hedging: the prediction is grim but I could be wrong.
- Good stats: players who cost $40 and earn $40 help more than players who cost $10 and earn $10, in this or any pricing system.

Reasons that the bid might be lower include —

- Performance risk: the player has fallen short of expectations before.
- Physical risk: the player gets hurt a lot.
- Downside: the prediction is so optimistic that it's the upper limit of what the player can do.
- Hedging: the prediction is optimistic but I could be wrong.
- Possible punting: much of the player's value is in SB, the easiest category to bail out of.
- No upside: there's about a $10 ceiling on what the hitter can do.
- Life's not fair (or linear): hitters with a $5 ceiling get the minimum wage.

The full season is predicted and thus the predicted stats for hitters add up to around $2,500. The hitters that are bought in the auction will earn $2,184, exactly, in the average league. (The predictions for these hitters will somewhat exceed $2,184, simply because predictions never adequately anticipate injuries.)

Bid prices go to the expected top 168 hitters who will be available this April, and the bids add up to $2,100, exactly. The reason the bid prices for hitters add up to less than what the hitters will earn is that the bid prices for pitchers add up to more than what the pitchers will earn.

The **pitchers** who are bought in the auction will earn $936, but that includes many, many negative earning. The minimum bid is $1. Most leagues spend a little more than $1,000 on pitching. The bid prices for pitchers — the expected top 108 pitchers available in April — add up to $1,020, an arbitrary figure.

Thus the bids for the expected top 276 players add up to $3,120, and you can make adjustments from there. You are encouraged to. The more time you are able to put into customizing your bid prices, the better off you will be at the auction. Separating yourself from the crowd, without departing from common sense, is the whole key to the game. (There is plenty of scribble space in the margins for changing bids, entering freezes or even tracking the auction.)

The stats for pitchers in the charts are the actual 1995 stats, *not predictions*. Under $ is what the pitchers earned in 1995, not what they are expected to earn this year. The stats are real, and the $ are really what the pitchers earned in 1995. According to my formulas.

The bids for pitchers are the predictions. They predict an order of earnings much more than earnings themselves. And they don't really predict an order of earnings so much as a simple preference, all things considered. The predicted earnings of a pitcher with a $5 bid price might be more than the predicted earnings of a pitcher with a $10 price, if I were predicting earnings, but I'm still not doing that. Maybe next year and maybe even this year in the software program (details in the PS).

That leaves us with the battle that often wins the war, the reserve draft.

When the auction is over and 276 players have been bought, less than half the players who will play in each major league have been accounted for. The idea of reserving players is to have them play for you, at the appropriate time, for nothing. Even Ultra leagues, soaking up an additional 204 players, don't get them all (they get about two-thirds), but they certainly get most of the important ones. 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.

(Quick review of last year's R1's: the vast majority started out on major league teams and so were bid on. People like Clontz, Cordova and Brian L. Hunter. The best unbought R1 was Jimmy Haynes, who earned $8. The worst was Glenn Dishman, who earned ($3). In between them were seven other players who obviously didn't do much.)

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. A few veteran pitchers that I don't want to be lost in the next group are given R2 designations.

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.

(Even here, the majority ended up being available in auctions last year. Players like Garret Anderson and Carlos Perez, while several who weren't available, like Dwayne Hosey, were bought anyway. The best unbought R2 was Chad Ogea $23. The two next R2's that no league in Appendix A bought were veterans Chris Hammond and Mike Morgan, worth $13 and $12. The best unbought hitting R2 was Herbert Perry $7. The worst unbought R2 was Scott Klingenbeck ($17). A total of 34 other unbought R2's earned more than Klingenbeck and less than Morgan. Quite obviously, the best pitchers were far better than the best hitters.)

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. John Cangelosi was the quintessential, though hardly typical, R3 in last year's book.

R3 pitchers are incendiary. They are the veterans on major league staffs who you don't dare put on your opening day rosters. Mike Moore is a good example of a pitcher who should have been and R3 but instead had a $1 bid price in last year's book. Danny Darwin was an R3 who should have been an R3. Frank Castillo is an example of an R3 who should have had a $1 bid price.

Many veteran minor league pitchers are also R3's. It means I think they have more hope than the countless more who aren't listed.

For scoring purposes, make hitters worth $1 each, pitchers ($3) each. The average pitcher on this list will undoubtedly lose more than $3.

(Best unbought R3: Honeycutt $15. Best hitter: Cangelosi $14. Worst R3: Bryan Hickerson ($17). (Darwin ($18) was bought by one league.) The average unbought R3 pitcher, of whom there were 54, earned ($1.07). The average unbought R3 hitter, numbering 45, earned $2.84.)

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. In other words, they are promising enough to take up space on your farm team.

Leagues with extensive farm systems should examine every single R4 under a magnifying glass; most of them aren't profiled, so to get a picture of them you'll have to buy books that have many more pictures, such as John Benson's *A to Z*, or that concentrate exclusively on prospects, such as Eddie Epstein's *Scouting Notebook*, a great new offering from Stats Inc.

The rest of you should leave room on the brain pan for the next group, unless you really think you could have picked Jason Isringhausen out of the 27 NLP R4's in last year's book.

(Best R4 hitter: Yami Benitez $4. Besides Isringhuasen, the only other R4 prospect to earn anything was Mike Mordecai $3. Several R4 prospects got ahead of themselves and lost something, such as Jeff Suppan ($1) and Ugueth Urbina ($3).)

Reserve List 5 (R5)

Here, in the heart of *Baseball America*, everyone can dream. The future is not now, not this year — never, no way — but maybe... maybe if you stare *real hard*, you'll spot this year's Johnny Damon among them. Could happen.

R5's are seriously serious picks for leagues with even limited farm systems. In leagues that award low fixed salaries to farm-system players when they finally do arrive, R5's are snapped up in the first round. It's a much surer bet that Ruben Rivera will eventually produce than that Frank Castillo will have a good season.

Last year, I wrote, "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." Now it looks like the R5's as a group are going to sprint out ahead as soon as this year.

(Damon already has; Rivera also reached the majors, as did Jose Herrera and Karim Garcia; Paul Wilson and Todd Greene — if they're not available themselves — are prime R1's; Andruw Jones moved up to the R1 of R5's; and it was a small group to begin with.)

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 (as long as negatives are counted as zero for pitchers — precisely why they are on reserve); however, this territory is so vast it's hard to figure out where to stake your claim.

Just as the predicted stats and bids can keep changing right up to the second that Adam Summers, who turns all of this into the printed word, finally puts his foot down, I can keep adding reserve list picks as I find them. Any R1's and R5's that you see listed who don't have profiles are late additions, ones that have passed a very strict standard, indeed — because who likes to confess his ignorance? — so I suggest you track them down.

Or just name them. Last name and team they play for. Position next, if someone asks. Then the age; then even bats or throws left or right, before you say the first initial, because at that moment everyone will know that you, too, are whistling in the dark.

1996 AL hitters — alphabetical

Name	B	Tm	Age	C123SO	AB	R	HR	RBI	SB	BA	$	Bid
M Aldrete	L	Cal	35	-F---O	75	9	1	12	0	.267	2	1
M Alexander	R	Bal	25	--Dts-	250	38	2	23	12	.232	5	2
L Alicea	B	Bos	30	--D---	425	63	4	46	9	.261	9	5
R Alomar	B	Tor	28	--D---	550	74	15	69	25	.296	28	32
S Alomar	R	Cle	30	C-----	350	51	12	51	0	.286	12	10
R Amaral	R	Sea	34	-----O	175	31	0	12	14	.274	7	2
R Amaro	B	Cle	31	-----O	50	4	1	5	0	.220	0	R3
B Anderson	L	Bal	32	-----O	600	116	17	69	28	.258	23	22
G Anderson	L	Cal	24	-----O	525	77	17	90	3	.299	23	25
G Arias	R	Cal	24	---T--	0	0	0	0	0	.000	0	R2
C Baerga	B	Cle	27	--D---	600	104	15	94	8	.305	27	29
H Baines	L	Bal	37	------	425	65	21	72	0	.294	20	17
B Barberie	B	Bal	28	--Dt--	225	35	1	23	2	.258	3	1
K Bartee	B	Min	24	-----O	0	0	0	0	0	.000	0	R4