

MASTERSBALL

January 1st Hitter Projections Review

By Todd Zola

The good news is we were amongst the first to go to market with 2010 projections. The bad news is we were amongst the first to go to market with 2010 projections. Why is that bad? Well, it really is not. But I have a little writer's block and am struggling with a cute little opening, so I thought I would rely on an old stand-by.

Lame attempts at humor aside, the primary issue with releasing projections so early is the fact so many squads do not care about your fantasy leagues and have obvious holes in terms of starters or reserves at several positions. Actually, as will be explained, this is not a huge problem in terms of raw projections. The real issue is setting early values and rankings, especially with respect to players between positions. We can rank players within each position pretty accurately now, the trouble lies with relative ranking across positions. This will be explained in an introduction in an essay detailing the site's valuation philosophy and methodology.

Back to the raw projections. We have elected a "common sense" approach to playing time. What this means is we are not forcing each team to have a logical number of at bats or innings pitched at this time. If a team does not have what we consider an obvious or even likely candidate to fill a role, starter or reserve, we will leave the team total short. That is what the bulk of this review is for, to go over each team, talking about what we know, what we don't know and how we are adjusting.

To give you an idea of our schedule and process, JP and I fine tuned the plate playing time estimated provided by our staff for the initial December 1 release. For the past month, the two of us have added the signings and trades and made the associated adjustments and will do so through the end of January. At that time, JP will go back to coordinating with the staff who will be focusing on their assigned teams with JP as the point man. I will get the adjusted projections, look them over, and if I have a question or concern, I will talk with JP before I run values and rankings.

The plan is to update on the 1st and 15th through February, then move to a weekly schedule in March and early April. We have found the best day to post in March is Thursday, which allows for the best balance between having the most recent information and allowing the user to prepare the data in such a manner to print using their work computers and color laser writers to use for the weekend drafts and auctions. If something major happens after Thursday, we do our best to prepare you accordingly.

What follows is a team-by-team review of hitter's plate appearances. We will provide a similar pitching review with the January 15 update. Please feel free to post any questions or concerns in the Mastersball.com section of the site message forum.

NATIONAL LEAGUE

ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS

Catcher: Miguel Montero has earned more time than Chris Snyder, but Snyder's glove will keep him in the lineup

Infield: Left side set with Mark Reynolds and Stephen Drew. Right side will have Kelly Johnson full time at 2B but a question at first with Brandon Allen and Conor Jackson in the picture. Augie Ojeda and Tony Abreu are the reserves, with Abreu being the interesting one to watch as he has the potential to usurp 2B if Johnson fails to bounce back.

Outfield: Justin Upton set in right with Chris Young in center. Left is up in the air with Gerardo Parra, Eric Byrnes and Conor Jackson as the candidates with our nod going to Parra.

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ATLANTA BRAVES

Catcher: Brian McCann one of the best with Dave Ross as backup.

Infield: Middle set with Yunel Escobar and Martin Prado. Opening day corners will be Chipper Jones and Troy Glaus, anyone's guess how much each plays. Another 300-400 infield PA are needed as the Braves are short a viable corner backup.

Outfield: Nate McLouth will get the lion's share in center but the corners are in flux. Matt Diaz and Melky Cabrera should pick up the majority with Jordan Schafer in reserve. Another decent backup is necessary so we are short another 300-400 PA. The wild card is top prospect Jason Heyward who will reportedly be given an opportunity to break camp if not start, but that was pre-Cabrera acquisition, so we want to see how things flesh out before adding him.

CHICAGO CUBS

Catcher: Geovany Soto and Koyie man the position.

Infield: Derrek Lee, Aramis Ramirez and Ryan Theriot are set. Mike Fontenot is slated for 2B, but we are not convinced he is worthy of full time at bats so Jeff Baker gets a bunch. Ramirez is a good bet to miss some time so a viable backup at 3B is needed. Overall, infield is short a couple hundred at bats while second base and backup third work themselves out.

Outfield: Marlon Byrd joins Alonso Soriano and Kosuke Fukudome as regulars but none are 150+ games guys anymore so Tyler Colvin is now in the picture with Micah Hoffpauir and Sam Fuld as complementary parts.

CINCINNATI REDS

Catcher: The fragile Ramon Hernandez is the starter with Ryan Hanigan the backup. Hernandez is bound to miss time so another will be needed with Corky Miller the likely recipient as the brass likes his glove.

Infield: Joey Votto and Brandon Phillips comprise a solid right side. Scott Rolen will play the hot corner when healthy. Reports have Paul Janish as the opening day SS, but we just can't treat him as a 150+ games guy just yet so we are short some IF PA. Adam Rosales will pick up some in reserve with Chris Burke and Wilkin Castillo in the mix as well. Still, with the injury prone Rolen and not very good Janish on the left side and devoid of a viable backup, we are short a few hundred IB PA.

Outfield: Well, we know Jay Bruce will patrol right when healthy and he looks to be fine. After that, any number of combinations is possible. Drew Stubbs earned a look in center over incumbent Willy Taveras, but we are favoring the vet until Stubbs shows he is the man. Left will be a blend of Laynce nix, Chris Dickerson and Wladimir Balentien.

COLORADO ROCKIES

Catcher: We are short a few hundred PA with Chris Iannetta and Paul Phillips presently on the roster. Some more help will be needed. The team is rumored to be talking to Miguel Olivo.

Infield: Todd Helton, Clint Barmes, Troy Tulowitzki and Ian Stewart are the starters. Eric Young may backup 2B, but they are missing help at the corners and short as patience is thin with respect to Omar Quintanilla filling the role. As such, we are short some IF PA.

Outfield: The principles are set with Seth Smith, Dexter Fowler, Carlos Gonzales, Brad Hawpe and Ryan Spilborghs. The distribution however is a bit sketchy. Too bad they can't use a short fielder like in softball. We may have too many PA in the outfield, especially if Young slots there. Hawpe is a given, we are giving someone from Fowler, Gonzales and Smith too many so tread carefully here unless your instinct is stronger with respect to their playing time.

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FLORIDA MARLINS

Catcher: John Baker and Ronny Paulino will man the big league roster with Brett Hayes in the wings of one gets hurt.

Infield: Lots of moving parts, other than Hanley Ramirez set at short, it is unclear where the others may land. Until otherwise announced, Dan Uggla will be considered the second baseman. The corners will be composed of Jorge Cantu, Gaby Sanchez, Logan Morrison and Wes Helms, with the possibility of Chris Coghlan playing third if a trade of two is consummated. Emilio Bonifacio is the primary reserve. We will be monitoring this situation closely. For fantasy purposes, assume Uggla and Cantu play full time somewhere with Helms his typical reserve and use your spidey sense with respect to Sanchez and Morrison.

Outfield: Other than Cody Ross seeing nearly full time action in center or more likely right, the outfield is also unsettled. Cameron Maybin will be afforded the chance to secure center with Coghlan as of now slated to play left. A reserve is still needed as Brett Carroll needs some help. Down a reserve and with the uncertainty of how well Maybin plays, we are short some OF PA and will keep an eye on Jai Miller in the spring.

HOUSTON ASTROS

Catcher: Will likely need some help with only JR Towles and Humberto Quintero rostered. We are lacking some C PA.

Infield: Lance Berkman, Kaz Matsui, Tommy Manzella and Pedro Feliz are the starters. Jeff Keppinger and Geoff Blum will garner more at bats than your normal backups and are capable players, thus are nice end game targets in deep leagues and reserve fodder for mixed leagues.

Outfield: Carlos Lee, Michael Bourn and Hunter Pence are set. Jason Michaels is the main reserve with Jason Bourgeois around as well.

LOS ANGELES DODGERS

Catcher: Russ Martin usually does not need much relief, but when he does, one would think it will be someone higher on the food chain than present backup AJ Ellis so we are down a few C PA.

Infield: James Loney, Rafael Furcal and Casey Blake are set. Now all the Dodgers need is a second baseman as it is unlikely they will travel the Blake Dewitt path again. Chin-ling Hu is likely ready to backup the middle, but a corner reserve is needed. All totaled, the infield is missing about 1000 PA.

Outfield: Manny Ramirez, Matt Kemp and Andre Ethier make up a potentially very productive troika. Jason Repko backs up though with the departure of Juan Pierre, another 100 or so OF PA are not accounted for yet.

MILWAUKEE BREWERS

Catcher: Most sites will suggest some combo of Gregg Zaun, Angel Salome and George Kottraras will do the catching for the Brewers, but keep an eye on Jonathan Lucroy. Presently, we are hedging that he comes up mid-season, but he could break camp with the big club and get more time.

Infield: Prince Fielder, Richie Weeks, Alcides Escobar and either Casey McGehee or Mat Gamel will be the primary infielders. Craig Counsell is back at utility.

Outfield: From left to right, Ryan Braun, Carlos Gomez and Corey Hart are the starters with Jody Gerut at their back. They'll need another body at some point.

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NEW YORK METS

Catcher: The Mets are rumored to be close to signing Bengie Molina. We'll make the necessary adjustments at that time, but it appears as though Omir Santos and Josh Thole will be biding time in Triple-A for awhile as Henry Blanco was signed and Chris Coste has a spot on the 40-man guaranteed, though Coste could work into the picture at first base if no one else is signed.

Infield: Hard to believe New York will enter the 2010 campaign with Daniel Murphy at first, but that is how it presently appears. Luis Castillo and a hopefully healthy Jose Reyes play the middle with David Wright at the hot corner. Alex Cora returns as the primary reserve and could see more action in the likely event Reyes does not play 155+ games. Anderson Hernandez serves to benefit as well.

Outfield: Jason Bay joins Carlos Beltran and Jeff Franceour as starters leaving Angel Pagan and Fernando Martinez to battle for the reserve PA with Nick Evans as well

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES

Catcher: Carlos Ruiz and Brian Scheider will share the time with our nod going to the incumbent Ruiz.

Infield: Finally, a team with early fantasy projections in mind. Ryan Howard, Chase Utley, Jimmy Rollins and Placido Polanco make a formidable quartet. Ross Gload, Greg Dobbs and Juan Castro are the chief reserves with Wilson Valdez at the ready.

Outfield: Yay, another stable group with Raul Ibanez, Shane Victorino and Jayson Werth playing nearly every day. Ben Francisco and Mark Buehrle's best friend Dewayne Wise will back up.

PITTSBURGH

Catcher: Ryan Doumit and Jason Jamarillo return.

Infield: Andy Laroche, Ronny Cedeno and Aki Iwamura are set. First is in flux as converted catcher Jeff Clement will be given an opportunity to claim the position with Garrett Jones as a fallback. Steven Pearce, Ramon Vazquez and Bobby Crosby are the reserves with Pedro Alvarez looming on the farm, but is thus far not projected.

Outfield: Andrew McCutchen is a definite and Jones will get his full time at bats. The hope is Lastings Milledge holds down one corner. If Jones is at first, Delwyn Young and Brandon Moss serve to benefit. We will monitor this and adjust as necessary.

SAN DIEGO PADRES

Catcher: Nick Hundley won't catch every game so we'll assign another 200-250 PA when we know his backup.

Infield: Adrian Gonzalez, David Eckstein, Everth Cabrera and Kevin Kouzmanoff are slated to man the infield. We need several hundred backup PA though Chase Headley can play the hot corner.

Outfield: Holy schnikies – Headley, Tony Gwynn and Kyle Blanks are the current outfielders with Oscar Salazar in reserve. We're short another several hundred at bats here as you'll excuse us for not penning in Gwynn and Blanks for 1300 combined PA.

SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS

Catcher: Even if Buster Posey is named the starter, we'll need some more PA considering Eli Whiteside is the backup and it appears as though Pablo Sandoval will only be used in an emergency.

Infield: The middle is set with Edgar Renteria and Freddy Sanchez. Mark DeRosa signing one pushes Pablo Sandoval across the diamond to first. The expectation is Juan Uribe is brought back to fill the utility role. Eugenio Velez, Manny Burris, Travis Ishikawa and John Bowker are all in the picture. We will have to do some more scrubbing here when things flesh out a bit more.

Outfield: We know Aaron Rowand will play center. After that, well, we think this is the year Nate Schierholz gets a serious look and we think Fred Lewis is not going to regain his full time gig. Even with Andres Torres in reserve, we are almost 500 PA short all totaled.

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ST. LOUIS

Catcher: Yadier Molina is a rock with Jason Larue and Matt Pagnozzi in reserve.

Infield: Speaking of rocks, methinks the Cards are okay at first. The rest of the infield, however, is in flux. Skip Schumaker will get his at bats in the outfield or second. Brendan Ryan, Julio Lugo will also play the middle with Tyler Greene in reserve. David Freese is listed as the third baseman, but sorry, we don't see it so the IF is short some PA, likely going to an unknown third sacker.

Outfield: Ryan Ludwick, Colby Rasmus and Schumaker currently look like guys who will shag flies in St. Louis. Obviously, this is a work in progress and we will stay abreast of the situation as the latest rumor mill has Matt Holliday in serious negotiations to return.

WASHINGTON

Catcher: The Nationals did not sign Ivan Rodrigues to sit, but they do have Jesus Flores and Wil Nieves so the precise breakdown is anyone's guess.

Infield: The corners are locks in Adam Dunn and Ryan Zimmerman. The middle is not quite so cut and dried as Ian Desmond is going to be afforded the chance to claim the SS job in the spring, sliding Cristian Guzman to second where Willie Harris is his main competition. Our money is on Desmond to secure the job and for Washington to leave Harris in the super-utility spot.

Outfield: Josh Willingham, Nyjer Morgan and Elijah Dukes are the starters, with Harris and Justin Maxwell in reserve. With so many moving parts, it seems as though one more reserve is needed, so we are short a few hundred at bats. The extra player likely revolved around Desmond sticking and Harris' role. With Harris in the infield, another outfielder will be needed.

AMERICAN LEAGUE

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

Catcher: You'd think the way he is thought of in the fantasy world, with Matt Wieters on your roster, you wouldn't need a backup, but alas, the Orioles are also carrying Craig Tatum and Michel Hernandez.

Infield: Second, short and third are covered with Brian Roberts, Cesar Izturis and Garrett Atkins. First, on the other hand is a question with Michael Aubrey and Ty Wigginton possibilities currently on the roster. At this time of the year, you may not know exactly where Wigginton will get his AB, you just know he will. Another possibility is Josh Bell impressing at third, moving Atkins across the diamond. Robert Andino is the primary reserve.

Outfield: Nolan Reimold has earned the left field gig, joining mainstays Adam Jones and Nick Markakis. Felix Pie is in reserve along with Luke Scott and Lou Montanez. Wigginton can also dabble in the outfield. Scott will be the primary DH.

BOSTON RED SOX

Catcher: Victor Martinez will receive the lion's share of at bats, pushing perennial starter Jason Varitek to a reserve role.

Infield: Most feel Boston plans on finding another stick to play first or third, with Kevin Youkilis manning the other, and we concur. Marco Scutaro and Dustin Pedroia cover the middle with Jed Lowrie and possibly Tug Hulett in reserve. The wild card is Mike Lowell. As of now, we are not figuring Lowell into Boston's plans.

Outfield: While there are rumblings the Red Sox may again pursue Jason Bay, with the acquisitions of Mike Cameron and Jeremy Hermida joining returnees Jacoby Ellsbury and JD Drew, a move is not a necessity. Josh Reddick is slated to work in reserve. David Ortiz will be the primary DH.

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

Catcher: The steady AJ Pierzynski will be backed by youngster Tyler Flowers unless Chicago brings in another veteran.

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Infield: Paul Konerko, Gordon Beckham, Alexei Ramirez and Mark Teahen go from corner to corner with Omar Vizquel and Brent Lillibridge around for support. Mark Kotsay can fill in at first as well.

Outfield: Carlos Quentin and Alex Rios look to bounce back while newly acquired Juan Pierre joins the fray. Kotsay backs up along with Andruw Jones. We are expecting Jordan Danks to parlay his successful AFL season into a spot on the White Sox roster and will monitor the situation in the spring. Presently, DH will be shared by a number of players including Jones and Flowers. If the White Sox bring a bat on, we will adjust accordingly.

CLEVELAND INDIANS

Catcher: The future is Carlos Santana, the question is how soon into the future and what occurs in the interim. There is no shortage of candidates with Lou Marson, Wyatt Toregas and Chris Gimenez in tow. Our nod goes to Lou Marson initially with a mid-season call up for Santana.

Infield: Andy Marte finally gets his chance to live up to his former prospect hype as he is in line to play first, with Jhonny Peralta at third, Asdrubal Cabrera at second and Luis Valbuena assuming the duties at second. However, there is also a chance Matt LaPorta shifts to first. Brian Buscher can back up third and it seems another reserve to cover the middle is warranted.

Outfield: Grady Sizemore and Shin-Soo Choo are locks. Left is tricky, as Michael Brantley could force his way into more time, pushing LaPorta to the infield as suggested, though LaPorta could also see some time at DH. Trevor Crowe is a solid reserve. With Travis Hafner at DH, LaPorta and Marte should both see plenty of action regardless of how Brantley fares.

DETROIT TIGERS

Catcher: Gerald Laird will begin the year as starter, but upstart Alex Avila will be vying for playing time. Robinson Diaz also factors in.

Infield: Miguel Cabrera and Brandon Inge are set at the corners. Adam Everett was brought back to pick it at short. Most feel Scott Sizemore will be his double-play partner and we agree. Ramon Santiago again fills the super-utility role as he is able to play all around the infield.

Outfield: Austin Jackson will be afforded every chance to justify the bid trade. Magglio Ordonez is back in right. Left will be split amongst Clete Thomas and Ryan Raburn with Carlos Guillen occasionally when he is not designated hitter.

KANSAS CITY ROYALS

Catcher: Jason Kendall will start with Brayan Pena backing up. It seems likely someone else will be needed at some point as it is not likely both make it all season unscathed.

Infield: Alex Gordon, Yuniesky Betancourt and Alberto Callaspo are set. First is a bit in flux as it is unclear if Billy Butler will be asked to grab his mitt or be full time designated hitter. Josh Fields is also in the picture as Gordon has played first before. Mike Aviles is back from injury and will back up with newly acquired Chris Getz.

Outfield: David DeJesus will play left with Jose Guillen, when healthy, in right. Center is in flux with Mitch Maier on the roster but not worthy of full time at bats. Willie Bloomquist, who can also play infield can play there as well. Brian Anderson was inked to a Major League deal so he will get some run as well. The Royals have a ton of moving parts and appear to be short one stick, just don't expect it to be top-notch. We'll adjust accordingly when (if?) it happens. DH will be shared by everyone, assuming Butler plays first.

LOS ANGELES ANGELS OF ANAHEIM

Catcher: Mike Napoli and Jeff Mathis are back to share the receiving duties. We give Napoli more PA even with the signing of Hideki Matsui cutting into potential DH opportunities.

Infield: Kendry Morales is out to prove last season as no fluke. Maicer Izturis, Howie Kendrick and Erick Aybar will split the middle with Kendrick the wild card. Aybar has earned virtual full time status. The question is whether Kendrick can remain healthy and productive enough to warrant the bulk of the second

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base at bats. We will side with history for now and give Izturis more than Kendrick, but this will be on our radar all spring. Brandon Wood appears to be the third baseman but don't be surprised if the Angels look to sign someone under market value like they did with Bobby Abreu last season.

Outfield: Juan Rivera, Torii Hunter and Bobby Abreu will start. Gary Matthews is the primary backup with Reggie Willits in the mix. Hideki Matsui will DH with Matthews, Rivera and Napoli sneaking in now and again.

MINNESOTA TWINS

Catcher: Joe Mauer and Jose Morales make a formidable pair.

Infield: Many are assuming Justin Morneau returns as good as ever, but backs can be tricky so we are playing it cautious until we can gauge things better in the spring. The rest of the infield has a few moving parts. The hope is JJ Hardy plays short leaving second and third to Alexi Casilla, Nick Punto and Brendan Harris. Punto and Harris can play either while Casilla is second only. Presently, we have Casilla as the odd man out getting a decent number of PA, but fewer than the others. Matt Tolbert picks up what is left. It is also quite possible the Twins bring on a more legit third baseman and we will adjust at that time.

Outfield: The logjam is gone, leaving Delmon Young, Denard Span and Michael Cuddyer as the primary guys with a viable backup necessary as Jason Kubel should assume the majority of DH duty. We are sort some OF at bats while we wait on a backup, though Jason Pridie is an in-house option. It just makes sense the Twins will find a hybrid corner infielder/corner outfielder to take care of two weaknesses.

NEW YORK YANKEES

Catcher: Though his workload will be tempered, Jorge Posada is still the man. Francisco Cervelli is the recipient of the extra time.

Infield: Let's see....Mark Teixeira, Robinson Cano, Derek Jeter and Alex Rodriguez. Check. Ramiro Pena can cover the rare middle reserve at bats with Nick Johnson and Nick Swisher available to sub for Teixeira if necessary. With ARod needing some more frequent rest, a backup capable of playing the hot corner is necessary.

Outfield: Curtis Granderson is a sure thing in center. Swisher is slated for right. Do you really think Brett Gardner will be the Champs opening day left fielder? We don't. He'll be a great reserve. Nick Johnson will DH with Posada getting some extra AB there as well.

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

Catcher: The underrated Kurt Suzuki will be amongst the league leaders in receiver at bats. Landon Powell picks up the scraps.

Infield: Daric Barton has a chance to finally show why he was a top prospect a few years ago. Mark Ellis plays second with Cliff Pennington inheriting the job at short. When (if?) healthy, Eric Chavez plays third. Aaron Miles and Eric Patterson should see a decent amount of time as well. Someone will be needed to cover the inevitable Chavez injury with the chance Jake Fox gets a shot.

Outfield: Rajai Davis and Coco Crisp will play most of the time. Ryan Sweeney and Scott Hairston will play more than a normal reserve, but not full time. Patterson and Travis Buck are also in the mix. Fox will likely DH with Hairston helping out as well.

SEATTLE MARINERS

Catcher: The future is Adam Moore and we have him getting some decent time, though the recent signing of Josh Bard may delay his assumption of the job full-time. Bard also is insurance as Rob Johnson is recovering from multiple off-season surgeries.

Infield: Chone Figgins and Jack Wilson man the left side with Jose Lopez at second. First is up in the air with Mike Carp the only real candidate but we just can't give him full time PA. Bill Hall and Jack Hanrahan are in reserve with Josh Wilson potentially in the mix. We are devoid a few hundred PA we expect to go to a first baseman.

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Outfield: Ichiro Suzuki and Franklin Gutierrez are solid. Left will be shared by Michael Saunders and Milton Bradley with Bradley also seeing time at DH with Ken Griffey. Ryan Langerhans is useful as he can back up all three positions.

TAMPA BAY RAYS

Catcher: The newly acquired Kelly Shoppach will share time with Dioner Navarro.

Infield: Carlos Pena, Jason Bartlett and Evan Longoria are locks. Ben Zobrist will get is at bats, though there is a chance some come in the outfield with Sean Rodriguez playing second. Willie Aybar continues in the utility role.

Outfield: Carl Crawford and BJ Upton are regulars with Matt Joyce and Gabe Kapler in line to share right. If Fernando Martinez is healthy and productive, he could work his way into the mix as well so we will keep an eye on his progress in the spring. Pat Burrell will be the main DH.

TEXAS RANGERS

Catcher: Youngsters Jarrod Saltalamacchia and Taylor Teagarden will be in a time share with Saltalamacchia getting a few more at bats.

Infield: Michael Young and Elvis Andrus are staples on the left side with Ian Kinsler at second. Chris Davis should man first though it is possible Justin Smoak finds his way to the Bigs sometime in 2010. We are taking the wait and see approach for now. Joe Inglett and Esteban German provide back up.

Outfield: Julio Borbon is likely to parlay a strong finish to 2009 into a full time gig in 2010. Nelson Cruz and Josh Hamilton will join Borbon, though the exact alignment is still up in the air. David Murphy is there in reserve. The Rangers are short a stick to DH as the deal for Mike Lowell fell through. As suggested above, Chris Davis could slide into the role if Smoak excels or if a first baseman is acquired. We will leave several hundred PA void for now.

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

Catcher: John Buck should start with Raul Chavez and Kyle Phillips sharing the rest.

Infield: Lyle Overbay, Aaron Hill, Alex Gonzales and Edwin Encarnacion are the starters. John McDonald and Jose Bautista handle utility duty.

Outfield: The outfield is set with Adam Lind, Vernon Wells and Travis Snider. Bautista also backs up here and don't be surprised if Joey Gathright hangs on as well. Randy Ruiz will be the primary DH with Lind and Snider seeing some time there to get Bautista in the lineup.