

# Baseball Playoff Spots Up for Grabs

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With two weeks remaining in the Major League Baseball regular season, three divisions and two wild card spots are virtually up for grabs.

In the National League, the Mets and Braves are battling for top spot in the East while the Reds and Astros fight for the Central Division crown.

Of the two teams that don't win their respective division, only one can get the National League Wild Card.

That means a team could presumably finish the season 28 games over .500 and be sitting home in October.

In the American League, the Red Sox and Yankees are in a dogfight to win the East title while the surprising Oakland Athletics try to stay in contention for the wild card spot. Here is a team by team breakdown of the 1999 pennant race and post-season predictions.

## ATLANTA BRAVES

Coming into the season, the Atlanta Braves had one of the most intimidating teams in Major League Baseball.

Their offensive lineup is, without a doubt, the National League's best, acquiring Bret Boone and Brian Jordan in the off season.

They were dealt a huge blow when Andres Galarraga developed cancer in his back and was lost for the season.

The pitching staff struggled miserably through the All-Star break, and somehow they still have a stronghold on the NL East crown.

Greg Maddux looks like his old self but this lineup is absolutely horrible without Galarraga, and Brian Jordan's hand is hurting him worse than he wants to let on.

Chipper Jones is having an MVP season but he can't carry the load much longer. They face the Mets six times in the final two weeks of the season and will lose five of those meetings. Look for the wheels to come off of this team and they are left out of the post season completely.

## ARIZONA

### DIAMONDBACKS

The Arizona Diamondbacks

are a great team. Buck Showalter has his team producing runs when they need it.

Randy Johnson is getting the worst run support in the league, but it's no coincidence. A good team scores just enough runs to win a ball game, and when a guy is striking out 12.7 batters per outing, an opposing team can't score too many runs.

When Johnson pitches, the D-backs don't have to score a lot of runs to win. They save their offensive support for another day in the form of Matt Williams, Jay Bell, and Luis Gonzalez, all of whom are having career years.

This team is quality. Look for them to be in the World Series against the Yankees setting up another Randy Johnson vs. Yankees match up. The Diamondbacks will win it all in 1999.

## HOUSTON ASTROS

The Houston Astros have the only two 20-game winners in the National League in Mike Hampton and Jose Lima. The problem is that they are absolutely horrid against good teams.

Against the other National League contenders, the Astros are a sub-par 11-22. This division looks to display one of the most exciting finishes in Major League Baseball history.

Mark September 28 and 29 on your calendar because this is a two game series with the Reds that will determine the Central Division champion.

The Astros will lose both games in that series, at home, and grab the Wild Card in the National League. They will then lose to the New York Mets in the divisional series because, once again, they can't play against good teams.

## CINCINNATI REDS

Who in their right mind would have predicted the Reds to be this far into the playoff hunt on September 22?

They hold the 22nd highest payroll in Major League Baseball and the team is made up of a bunch of comeback player of the year candidates.

Their bullpen sports a 3.27 ERA and won 31 games. The acquisition of Juan Guzman will prove to be a great decision.

This team is hitting home runs like crazy, as of late, including a nine home run game against the Phillies on Sept. 4.

They've come too far to blow it now. The scariest team is always the one with nothing to lose.

Pete Harnisch is pitching with a torn rotator cuff but is having a stellar year.

They win the Central Division crown but lose to the Diamondbacks in the divisional series due to the over worked bullpen, which has already logged over 450 innings this year.

## NEW YORK METS

The New York Mets have the best defense in baseball, an exceptional starting rotation including Kenny Rogers and Al Leiter, the second best bullpen in baseball.

Therefore they win the NL East and defeat the Astros in the divisional series.

Rey Ordonez might be the best defensive shortstop ever and this team is a nice mix of young talent and veteran leadership.

Randy Johnson is just too much, however, and will pitch three times in an unbelievable seven-game-NLCS to beat the Mets.

## NEW YORK YANKEES

The New York Yankees are still the team to beat. They are the defending World Series Champions and until someone can take them out in the post season, they are the best team in the league.

Derek Jeter is having an MVP caliber year and they are getting tremendous starting pitching from Andy Pettitte and Hideki Irabu down the stretch.

The Yankees will win the division, defeat Texas in the divisional series, beat Cleveland in the ALCS, and move on to the World Series.

Hats off to the Yanks for not panicking and holding on to Pettitte at the trade deadline.

## CLEVELAND INDIANS

The Cleveland Indians had their division wrapped up when they signed Roberto Alomar in the off season.

An obscene 24 games up in the Central Division, the Indians have been looking for-

ward to the postseason since May.

Manny Ramirez is an RBI machine and that lineup is enough to make a starting pitcher nauseous on game day.

The Indians are a tremendous team but they failed to acquire starting pitching at the trade deadline.

How many years are they going to try to win a championship with offense before they realize you can't win a title without pitching?

Indians will finish with the best record in the American League, beat Boston in the first round, and lose to the Yankees in the ALCS.

## TEXAS RANGERS

The Texas Rangers, like the Indians, are a high powered offensive machine with below average pitching.

They will hold off the pesky Oakland Athletics and win the West, but then they'll have to face the New York Yankees in what is always a tremendous post season series.

Look for Juan Gonzalez and company to make it interesting,

but the Yankees are too strong.

## BOSTON RED SOX

Two words: Pedro Martinez. If one man can shake up the outcome of this year's playoffs, Boston has him. Pedro Martinez is one of the best pitchers ever seen, and that includes Nolan Ryan.

With three starts left in the regular season, and a schedule including Detroit, Toronto, Chicago, and Baltimore, the Red Sox have the Wild Card wrapped up.

If Martinez can push the divisional series to five games, he will pitch twice against the Indians and they have a shot at going to the ALCS.


Don't look to see the series going that far. Boston is ousted in the first round.

## OAKLAND ATHLETICS

The Oakland Athletics have put up one heck of a fight. With one of baseball's lowest payrolls they've managed to go 15 games over .500, which is quite an accomplishment.

The Boston Red Sox are just too good and Oakland gets left out in the Wild Card race.

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