







# SPORTS




## Major League Baseball Preview: NL Central, NL West

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### NL Central

	<b>Three to See</b> Adam Wainwright Jason Istringhausen Albert Pujols	In 2006, outstanding pitching and timely hitting led to a championship. What's in the cards for this year's Cards? Istringhausen	is back from injury, rookie sensation Wainwright moves to the rotation. Pujols is on a mission after being robbed of his 2 <sup>nd</sup> MVP. They have the	heart, but offseason trades have weakened the pitching staff and may keep the Cards from repeating.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>The leaders of this team show some grey, but won't let the team lose its focus</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Craig Biggio Lance Berkman Carlos Lee	Another team of hope. The 'Stros are hoping Jason Jennings and Woody Williams replace departed Andy Pettitte and Roger Clemens,	hoping Lee provides much-needed protection for Berkman, hoping Morgan Ensberg and Brad Lidge recover from their respective	slumps, hoping Roy Oswalt pitches at a Cy-young level, most of all, hoping not to finish last in the NL Central.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>Biggio will get his 3000<sup>th</sup> hit this year, and, well, did I mention Biggio's 3000<sup>th</sup> hit?</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Ken Griffey, Jr Adam Harang Adam Dunn	Bet you didn't know: Griffey, Jr is now 38 years old. Harang had the most wins AND strikeouts in the NL last year, Dunn led the league in	strikeouts, too, as a hitter. The Reds have the division's best starting five, and one of the strongest bullpens to	boot, but a lot of holes in a lineup that lacks the punch needed to compete in an improved division.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>Pete Rose will again be the most newsworthy Red of 2007, that's not a good thing.</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Bill Hall Prince Fielder Ben Sheets	If gambling was legal, the Brewers are a sweet bet at 40/1 to win the Fall Classic. Fielder and Hall are both young studs complimented	by veterans Geoff Jenkins and Johnny Estrada. Tony Gwynn, Jr looks a lot like dad swinging the bat, but is still a few years away. If	Sheets throws strikes, and Dave Bush keeps improving, the Brew Crew will be this year's surprise team	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>Cubs spent the money, Cards have the ring, but watch out for Milwaukee's Best.</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Adam LaRoche Freddy Sanchez Jason Bay	Jason Bay is a perennial All-Star and LaRoche has the potential to join him this year. Sanchez was last year's NL batting champ, but has	yet to settle into a position for this year's club. The real story is the pitching: youngsters Ian Snell, Zach Duke, and Paul Maholm all	showed signs of promising careers for the Steel City. Tony Armas Jr rounds out the starting five.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>This might be Pittsburgh's best team in a decade, but 1 year away from competing</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Alfonso Soriano Derrick Lee Kerry Wood	The Lovable Losers of the North Side spent \$300 million to get talent comparable to the Cards and Mets. Soriano, he of the	\$136 million contract, will have the biggest spotlight. One-time savior Wood will show fastball in the bullpen for the first time, and Lee	tries to regain his potential Triple Crown swing. Big "Z" Carlos Zambrano leads a solid rotation.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>Over/under on skipper Sweet Lou Pinella throwing bases at umpires this year: 3.5</i>

### NL West

	<b>Three to See</b> Jake Peavy Kevin Kouzmanoff Giles Brothers	Newcomers David Wells, Greg Maddux, and brothers Marcus and Brian Giles have turned San Diego's clubhouse into a frathouse	atmosphere. Is this the year Peavy finally turns in a Cy Young-caliber performance? Chris Young might be the best in the rotation. Minor	league stud Kouzmanoff finally gets his shot in the bigs, too. Should compete for division	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>All the NL West teams improved, question is, did San Diego improve enough?</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Nomar Garciaparra Jason Schmidt Juan Pierre	All teams in the NL West, with the possible exception of the Rockies, have something in common: Strong pitching. Newcomers Randy Wolf and	Schmidt bolster a rotation including Derek Lowe and Brad Penny that helped LA into the playoffs last year. Offensively, they rely	on Garciaparra remaining healthy and Pierre living up to his huge contract. Good luck.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>If greybeards Jeff Kent and Luis Gonzalez still contribute, they are the west's best</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Barry Bonds Barry Zito Matt Cain	Next week we're writing an article debating the good and bad of Barry Bonds, so I won't waste space here. Simply put, the Giants went	from being the oldest team in MLB history to simply being an old team. Zito had 126 million reasons to come here, and youthful	Cain infuses some life into the rotation. Offensively, this team leaves a lot to be desired in many areas.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>In order to compete, the Giants need 352 HRs and 70 wins from their two Barrys</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Brandon Webb Randy Johnson Stephen Drew	Cy Young Award winner Brandon Webb leads a rotation that features the return of the most celebrated pitcher in club	history, Randy Johnson. However, the Snakes bullpen is their biggest question mark entering the season. Offensively, the youth	movement has begun in the desert; the D-Backs will feature five position players under 24 in their starting lineup.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>Too old in some spots, too young in others, Arizona won't be great or horrible</i>
	<b>Three to See</b> Garrett Atkins Todd Helton Troy Tulowitzki	Two things are certain at home games: The beer is always Coors, and the score is always high. The Rockies enter 2007 with another	stacked lineup: Atkins is one of the big's best 3Bs, Helton the unquestioned face of the franchise, and young Tulowitzki enters at SS.	Unfortunately, the pitchers are a bunch of has-beens and who-is's. That doesn't cut it in the NL West.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>If the humidors are firing on all cylinders, they're the surprise team of the West</i>

Editor's Note: Although the Yankees are not part of the NL West, there was a misprint in Issue 9 regarding their preview. Here is the corrected preview:

	<b>Three to See</b> Andy Pettite Jason Giambi Doug Mientkiewicz	The House of Steinbrenner goes into 2007 hoping for the championship ring that has evaded the Bombers since 2000. Pettite is back in the	Bronx, is there enough left in his tank to be effective in the tough AL East? Giambi, who has always hit better playing 1B, is now a permanent	DH. Mientkiewicz wears the pinstripes for the first time; he'll have to prove himself.	<b>Bottom Line:</b> <i>Can Joe Torre stay awake long enough to inspire this team of aging super stars?</i>
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