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Lynn Henning: [Around the majors](#)

Are the Nats capable of losing 125 games?



Assorted stuff a Major League Baseball follower is thinking about veritable hours ahead of Opening Day:

How many games will the Nationals lose? This is going to be a morbid watch, much as it was when the vultures gathered in 2003 to see if Detroit could outdo the 1962 Mets. But I suspect the over-under is a bit high when Washington is certifiably abominable. I have the Nationals losing 125 games and winning 37. That means the '62 Mets will be outdone by five games. You don't believe it? I'd like to *not* believe it.

How will the Cubs fare? Begin with the reality that the University of Detroit-Mercy, which no longer fields a baseball team, would be a darkhorse in the National League Central race. Now think about Alfonso Soriano and 50 home runs. Think more energetically about Carlos Zambrano. Think also about Lou Piniella as manager. Yeah, the Cubs could win the NL Central. That's because *anybody* can win the NL Central.

Care to make some easy money? Bet the over on the Royals' wins, which Las Vegas Sports Consultants predicts to be 65. The Royals right now are the least understood, least appreciated team in baseball. They are going to be nasty for any team that figures having KC on the schedule means an easy series, if not a sweep.

All right, put up or shut up on the NL Central. Here's your winner: Milwaukee. To repeat, *anybody* can win the NL Central.

Thoughts on the AL West: The Athletics are so banged-up and thin that they can't be counted on to fulfill their constitutional mandate

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to win the division. That leaves the Angels as the easy pick. But not so fast. I'm going with the Rangers. And that's not only because I've never before picked them to win a division race, but it's time for a surprise in the AL West.

How much attention should we pay to the Barry Bonds chase of Hank Aaron? For many of us it's going to be exhausting, irksome, insulting, and -- at the very moment he breaks Aaron's career home-run record -- briefly entertaining.

Boston or the Yankees? Frankly, I don't care. I'm as tired of this pair as I am of Bonds.

Roger Clemens to the Yankees in May? Or, does he sign with the Astros? Or with Boston? How about this? All big-league teams simply decide to let a man remain retired rather than demean themselves by perpetuating the Clemens Retirement Charade for yet another year.

Pick for the team expected to contend in 2007 that won't: Toronto. It's not a matter of the Yankees and Boston being better. It's the fact the Blue Jays are short on starting pitching.

About to have the roof collapse: San Francisco. You can't continue to fill your roster with personnel from a 35-and-over league and expect that it won't catch up. The Giants, during the second half of the season, will be giving the Nationals a run for worst record in the majors.

On the bench: Alan Trammell figures to have a fun summer at Wrigley Field working as Lou Piniella's bench coach. The guy, though, who could end up in the playoffs is Kirk Gibson. In the NL West, which is likewise open to bids, no team has more young talent than the Diamondbacks. Gibson is manager Bob Melvin's bench coach and probably made a good career move hooking on with the Diamondbacks.

Worth the hype? Fatigued as we might be -- already -- by the Daisuke Matsuzaka hype, he could become the hottest first-season pitcher since Fernando Valenzuela blew away all of baseball for the Dodgers in 1981. Just wish I could say I've seen him pitch.

What's the Metrodome worth to the Twins in a season? I'd say five games. If you know how to play on the quirkiest, silliest field in all of baseball -- and exploit its eccentricities -- you win, minimally, five more games than your opponents. That's not a compliment to the Twins. It's simply a testament to their pragmatism.

How busy will this July's trade deadline be? It will be like Christmas Eve at the mall. The oh-so-quiet trade times during spring training (never an active period, but unusually quiet this year) will lead to some serious commotion 120 days from now.

Safest prediction of the year: The 2007 World Series will be better than the 2006 World Series. The Tigers have a chance to make amends for one of the worst -- if not *theworst* -- Fall Classics in history.

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The 2007 season is shaping up as a difficult one for manager Manny Acta and the Nationals.
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