

With a newborn baby keeping me home every night, three highly competitive fantasy baseball teams, a propensity for the occasional online wager, the MLB Package on cable, and the Indians offense bordering on unwatchable this season ... I've watched an unhealthy amount of baseball games this season. I've watched my share. I've watched your share. I've watched a lot. As the midway point of the season approaches, and the All-Star game looms, I took some time out to jot down my All-Stars for this 2008 season. The guys I'd take if I could put the team together myself.



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I used baseball's rules. 32 man rosters, a 12-13 man pitching staff on each side, and at least one representative from every team.

American League

Starting Lineup

C Joe Mauer, Minnesota - That sweet lefty stroke. After becoming the second

youngest player, and first AL catcher to ever win a batting title in '06, he's back at it after an injury plagued '07, hitting .331 with a .417 OBP.

1B Kevin Youkilis, Boston - I'm still having nightmares about what this ugly SOB did to the Tribe in the ALCS. Never thought Youk would develop into the hitter he has. He's on pace to hit over 30 HR's with 120 RBI's and 120 runs scored. And he is one of the best defensive first basemen in baseball.

2B Ian Kinsler, Texas - Went 20/20 last year despite missing 30+ games due to injury. On pace to go 30/40 this year, has raised his average over 30 points, and may score 150 runs hitting atop that lethal Ranger offense if he stays healthy.

SS Michael Young, Texas - Not quite the run producer he was a few seasons back, but he plays hard, plays every day, and has been the best of a bad lot of AL shortstops this season.

3B Alex Rodriguez, NY Yankees - A one of a kind talent that puts up eye popping numbers every year. People no longer even fawn because they've come to expect it. He's one of those guys most baseball fans will appreciate more when he's gone. Still love watching this guy choke every October though.

OF Josh Hamilton, Texas - Hands down, Hamilton has been my favorite player to watch play this season. Size, speed, power, the compelling story of his comeback from years of drug addiction. The best story in what has been an exciting year for baseball thus far. The consummate "five tool" player.

OF Grady Sizemore, Cleveland - The lone bright spot in a horrific year for the Indians offense, and one of the most exciting players in all of baseball. Covers a lot of ground in center field, and will end the season with 30 HR, 30 SB, and an OBP of around .380.

OF J.D. Drew, Boston - Drew has stepped up immensely in the absence of Big Papi, finally, at age 32, living up the huge potential he entered the league with. Getting on base at a .420 clip. Slugging .583. And leads all AL right fielders in outfield assists.

DH Milton Bradley, Texas - Not sure what's more improbable. That four of my nine AL starters are on the Rangers. Or that Milton Bradley has a .452 OBP and leads all American League hitters in OPS.

Reserves

C Kurt Suzuki, Oakland - The young Hawaiian catcher gets my nod as the backup backstop. He plays every day, is hitting at a .280 clip, has been good behind the dish, and has been masterful in his handling of Oakland's surprising young staff.

1B Justin Morneau, Minnesota - This big Canadian lefty slugger just continues to churn out big season after big season as half of the Twins vaunted M&M connection. A lot of people forget this was the AL MVP in 2006.

2B Brian Roberts, Baltimore - Being connected to the Mitchell Report and perpetually rumored to be on the trading block hasn't affected Roberts production. On pace for another big year hitting close to .300 with 100+ runs and 50 SB's.

SS Derek Jeter, New York - As mentioned above, it has been a bad year for AL shortstops. Jeter is just now starting to get going after a cold start not helped by a hand injury.

3B Joe Crede, Chicago - Solid as a rock defensively at 3B and once again displaying 30 HR, 100 RBI power at the dish after missing almost all of last year with a bad back.

OF Ichiro Suzuki, Seattle - The best player on a bad team gets the nod over King Felix as the Mariners representative on my squad. He's stealing bases at a record pace and great in the field. No one behind him is hitting though.

OF Johnny Damon, New York - I was among the lot that though Damon was on the decline, but he's having a huge year for the Yankees, hitting .323 with a .390 OBP. He still throws like a girl though.

OF Manny Ramirez, Boston - On pace for another ho hum 30/100 season. Still kills me to see Manny with "Boston" across his chest.

OF Magglio Ordonez, Detroit - His numbers are off from last year's ridiculous .363 BA, 139 RBI campaign, but Maggs is clearly still one of the games most feared sluggers.

OF B.J. Upton, Tampa Bay - Getting on base at a .400 clip, on pace to steal 50

bases, and patrolling center field for the surprising Rays. Another fun player to watch play.

Pitching Staff

STARTER: SP Scott Kazmir, Tampa Bay - The young lefty is leading the Rays rotation after missing the start of the year with an injury. Holding opposing hitters to a .186 BA, has struck out 68 in 62 IP, and has a 2.03 ERA.

SP Cliff Lee, Cleveland - After a disastrous 2007, got out to one of the greatest starts in baseball history, and hasn't cooled off much. A 10-1 record pitching for a team with no offense.

SP Josh Beckett, Boston - His ERA is up a little bit from last year, W-L record is just 7-5 ... but that's no indication of Beckett's stuff this year, which has been as good as ever.

SP Ervin Santana, Anaheim - Has been one of the most valuable players in all of baseball, leading the Angel rotation in the absence of Kelvim Escobar, and until recently, John Lackey. Nine wins, 91 K's, and a 1.05 WHIP.

SP Joe Saunders, Anaheim - Leads the AL in wins with 11. Doesn't miss a lot of bats, but has really emerged this season after being a spot starter for the Halos the last two years.

SP Shaun Marcum, Toronto - Marcum recently landed on the DL, but few pitchers in all of baseball have been more dominant than the Jays young righty this season. He's holding opposing batters to a .198 BA (second only to Kazmir amongst AL SP) and has walked just 18 batters this season.

SP Roy Halladay, Toronto - The 6'6 Halladay is a workhorse. One of my favorite guys to watch throw. Maybe the most underrated starter in baseball, and he's having another huge season.

SP Rich Harden, Oakland - Who knows how long he'll stay healthy, but he's sure fun to watch when he is. Has yet to lose a game in 10 starts. 72 K in 59 IP. And a 2.44 ERA.

SP Justin Duchscherer, Oakland - Leading all AL starters in ERA (1.99) and

WHIP (0.97) after being moved from the bullpen to the starting rotation. Kind of lost in the Rays shadow, the A's have been a great story this season.

RP Joakim Soria, Kansas City - 20 saves for a team that has won just 34, and some of the best stuff I've seen from any pitcher this season. A 1.32 ERA and in 34 IP, has allowed just 18 hits and 9 BB.

RP Troy Percival, Tampa Bay - The second best individual story in baseball behind Josh Hamilton this season. Percival has come back from the depths, and has anchored the Rays solid bullpen, saving 17 games and holding batters to a .144 average.

RP Mariano Rivera, New York - Will this guy ever slow down? He's going be 39 years old this fall, and looks better than ever this season, with 21 saves, a 0.76 ERA and a 0.54 WHIP.

RP Francisco Rodriguez, Anaheim - Whoever K-Rod's agent is ... he's got to be as happy as a pig in shit right now. The Angels closer is having a career year in the last year of his contract, and with 31 saves already, is on pace to shatter Bobby Thigpen's single season record of 57.

National League

Starting Lineup

C Russell Martin, Los Angeles - A gold glover behind the dish, Martin has a .412 OBP this season. He steals bases, he hits home runs. This kid does it all. He has been one of the few bright spots for a disappointing Dodger team.

1B Lance Berkman, Houston - The MLB leader in OPS (1.121), Berkman has been feasting on opposing pitching all season, batting .354 with 20 bombs and 60 RBI's with the All-Star break still three weeks away.

2B Dan Uggla, Florida - It's just hard to comprehend what this cat is doing this season. Since starting off the season hitting just .255 with 4 HR in April, Uggla has slammed 19 HR in his last 42 games, has morphed into a legitimate MVP candidate, and has a Marlins team that many predicted would lose 100 games right in the thick of the playoff race.

SS Hanley Ramirez, Florida - The other half of the young dynamic Marlin middle infield, Hanley has 16 HR's of his own this season, has close to a .400 OPB, and is on pace to swipe over 40 bases.

3B Chipper Jones, Atlanta - After spending most of the season hitting over .400, Chipper is "back down" to .393, and is improbably getting better with age, raising his batting average in each of the last five seasons.

OF Matt Holliday, Colorado - Holliday's power numbers are a little off this season, but he's still hitting .329 with a .410 OBP. And is one of the best defensive outfielders in baseball. A young superstar of the sport, and one of my favorite players to watch play.

OF Ryan Braun, Milwaukee - What this kid has done since arriving in the bigs last year is nothing short of remarkable. Hit .324 with 34 bombs and 97 RBI's in a little over half a season last year, and he's already got 20 HR's this season. Needs to work on his BB/K ratio, but aside from that, Braun does it all. And at a new position (LF) this year.

OF Nate McLouth, Pittsburgh - Quietly, the Pirates offense has been one of the best in baseball this season, and McLouth is a big reason why. The kid fills every line in the box score, plays a fearless centerfield, and is one of the best kept secrets in baseball this season.

DH Adrian Gonzalez, San Diego - 24 HR and 82 RBI in 2006. 30 and 100 last season. 21 and 65 already this year, not even halfway home. It's been him and little else offensively for the disappointing Padres this season.

Reserves

C Brian McCann, Atlanta - One of my favorite players in baseball, and definitely one of its most underrated. People in AL towns just don't realize how good McCann is. A big, strong, strapping backstop that puts the bat on the ball, hits for power, and calls a helluva game.

1B Albert Pujols, St. Louis - Pujols has been out for the last couple weeks, but there's no way I can leave this cat off any All-Star team of mine. Especially considering he was hitting .347 when he got hurt.

1B Prince Fielder, Milwaukee - The Prince shook off a terrible start and has really gotten going as of late, with five HR in his last seven games. He makes my NL team in one of my last roster spots over Ryan Howard because he's hitting about 60 points higher.

2B Chase Utley, Philadelphia - It's a crime that this guy doesn't crack my starting lineup, he's having another amazing season, and has truly evolved into one of baseball's biggest stars. But Uggla gets the nod.

2B Brandon Phillips, Cincinnati - Speaking of talented second basemen, Phillips is on pace to go 30/30 in back to back seasons, and flashes mean leather in the middle infield for the Reds. To think we gave this kid away for a player to be named later ...

SS Cristian Guzman, Washington - One of the lone bright spots for the Nats this season, the resurgent Guzman has been awesome hitting at the top of that lineup, and would be having an even better season if Zimmerman and Nick Johnson hadn't been missing from the middle of it.

SS Jose Reyes, New York - In putting this team together, I was really surprised when the mega-payroll Mets were one of those teams that I had to dig deep on to find a worthy representative. At the end of the day, I ended up adding Reyes and Johan Santana. Neither is having a typical season, but both are still All-Stars even in off years.

3B Aramis Ramirez, Chicago - Aramis is one of those players, he just puts up numbers, year after year. And he's having a great season here in '08, producing runs like a mother in the middle of that vaunted Cub lineup.

OF Kosuke Fukudome, Chicago - A lot of people questioned the money the Cubs threw at Fukudome, but he's been worth every penny. They're actually hitting him leadoff now with Soriano out, and why not? He's got a .404 OBP. He's also been great in right field for them.

OF - Pat Burrell, Philadelphia - Pat the Bat is a masher. You can chalk this guy up every season for 30 HRs, 100 RBI, and 100 walks. Like the Rangers and the Cubs, the Phillies lineup is just loaded top to bottom with run producers.

OF - Ryan Ludwick, St. Louis - This can't really be the same Ryan Ludwick we had, can it? He's been reborn in St. Louis, where he's slugging over .600 with 16 HR and 56 RBI. The fourth ex-Indian to make this team. Milton Bradley, Manny, Brandon Phillips being the others.

Pitching Staff

STARTER: SP Edinson Volquez, Cincinnati - Volquez was traded for Josh Hamilton this off-season. Volquez may be starting the All-Star game on the hill for the NL, and Hamilton will likely start and hit clean up for the AL. Amazing. Volquez has been sick this season. Sick I say. A fastball in the mid to high nineties and a knee buckling changeup. He's 10-2 with a 1.71 ERA and 110k in 95 IP.

SP Tim Lincecum, San Francisco - The diminutive Lincecum has quickly become one of baseball's best young starting pitchers. He's 8-1 for a bad Giants team, throws four pitches for

strikes, and K's over a guy an inning.

SP Cole Hamels, Philadelphia - Hamels has improved his stats across the board in each of his three years for the Phillies, emerging to the point this season where he will be in the Cy Young Award discussions. He's third in the NL in K's, has a 1.03 WHIP, and opposing hitters are batting just .210 off of him.

SP Ben Sheets, Milwaukee - Plagued by injuries the past three seasons, Sheets has stayed healthy this season and is putting together a helluva campaign leading the rotation for the suddenly red hot Brewers.

SP Johan Santana, New York - Johan is 7-6 with a 2.93 ERA and 95 K's, fine numbers for any starter, but a little disappointing to Mets fans after the team backed up the Brinks Truck for him this off-season. Remember though, this guy is notorious for getting better as the season progresses, and he now has a book on a lot of these NL hitters.

SP Jake Peavy, San Diego - Peavy missed about a month with an injury in late May and early June, but when healthy, the unanimous 2007 NL Cy Young Award winner is clearly one of the top starting pitchers in all of baseball.

SP Brandon Webb, Arizona - Webb shot out to a 9-0 start, quickly leading the Diamondbacks high atop a surprisingly uncompetitive NL West. However, both Webb and the D-Backs have struggled as of late, with Webb actually dropping four of

his last six decisions.

SP Dan Haren, Arizona - Haren is the second half of the D-Backs vaunted 1-2 punch, and has statistically been the better pitcher this season. Haren is 8-4 with a 0.96 WHIP, and opposing hitters are hitting just .216 off of him.

SP Ryan Dempster, Chicago - Moved from the bullpen to the rotation, Dempster has been dominant for the Cubbies this season, going 9-2 to this point with a 2.63 ERA and 85 K in 110 IP.

RP Carlos Marmol, Chicago - Marmol has been the best set up man in baseball this season, pitching the eighth inning very effectively for Lou Pinella, striking out 64 guys in 44 IP, and holding hitters to a .123 BA.

RP Kerry Wood, Chicago - Dempster went from the pen to the rotation, and Wood went from the rotation to the closer role. Both have thrived. After a shaky start, Wood has been dominant for the Cubs, saving 19 games and absolutely owning the ninth inning of games .

RP Brad Lidge, Philadelphia - Lidge wore out his welcome in Houston after a couple up and down seasons, but has thrived in the city of brotherly love after the Phils dealt for him this off-season. 18 saves and a 0.87 ERA.