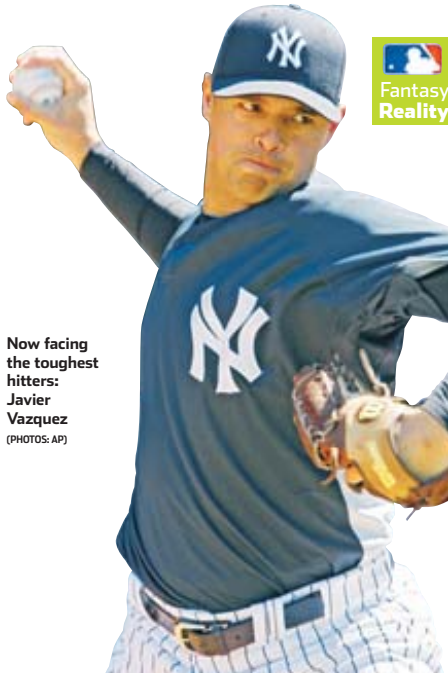


SPORTS

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If you must draft a Met or Yankee ...



Now facing the toughest hitters: **Javier Vazquez**
(PHOTOS: AP)



BY KYLE STACK • Special to amNewYork

One ironclad rule of fantasy sports is to choose players regardless of team affiliation. Just in case you feel like breaking the rules on occasion, here are the Mets and Yankees to analyze heading into fantasy baseball drafts and where in the draft to take them:

Curtis Granderson, OF
Ideal round: Mid- to late 4th

His uppercut lefty swing is reminiscent of Johnny Damon's, although he'll have a different role. Batting sixth or seventh is probable, which would mean 80-plus runs and 90-plus RBIs. Granderson is an undisciplined hitter, so Yankee Stadium's tempting right-field porch could lead to a greater emphasis on moon shots and less on putting the ball in play.

Nick Johnson, DH/1B
Ideal round: 14th to 15th

The returning Yankee is a first-time DH, which should save his injury-prone body. Johnson will still get days off as others in the lineup receive an occasional DH spot. Assuming relatively stable health, jot the line-drive

hitter down for a .290 average with 70-plus runs and RBIs.

Javier Vazquez, SP
Ideal round: Late 8th/early 9th

Don't expect a repeat of his Cy Young-caliber 2009 campaign. The advantage of less stress as the No. 4 starter is mitigated by Vazquez's transition to the game's toughest division for pitchers (he holds a 4.15 ERA and a 1.36 WHIP in 145 1/3 career innings at the four opposing AL East parks). Opt for an arm who calls a pitcher-friendly stadium home.

Jason Bay, OF
Ideal round: Mid-3rd

Cavernous Citi Field means Bay won't be the titanic slugger he was for the Red Sox. That doesn't mean he can't remain a good No. 2 or great No. 3 fantasy outfielder. Assume his batting average hovers around .275 with 25-30 homers and 90-100 RBIs. Beware you're likely to have a league mate who overvalues Bay.

David Wright, 3B
Ideal round: Early 2nd

Don't sweat the home runs. An offseason correction to his swing's timing should restore Wright to 25-homer power and 100 RBIs, while 25-plus steals are also realistic. The timing correction should also draw down Wright's 26.2 strikeout percentage to a mark more in line with his traditional .300 batting average.



Wright

John Maine, SP
Ideal round: 15th to 16th

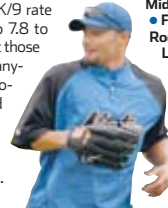
Mike Pelfrey might be the projected No. 2 starter, but Maine is the better fantasy option. It's concerning that his K/9 rate dropped from 8.5 to 7.8 to 6.1 from 2007-09, but those rates are better than anything Pelfrey has produced. An improved and healthy offense should provide Maine a realistic chance for 12-14 wins.

DRAFT ORDER

When to pick some of the top local ballplayers

- Yankees**
- Alex Rodriguez: Mid-1st
 - Mark Teixeira: Late 1st
 - CC Sabathia: Mid- to late 3rd
 - Robinson Cano: Mid-4th
 - Derek Jeter: Early 5th
 - Mariano Rivera: Early 7th
 - A.J. Burnett: Mid- to late 10th
 - Jorge Posada: Mid- to late 11th

- Mets**
- Jose Reyes: Late 2nd
 - Johan Santana (pictured below): Mid- to late 4th
 - Francisco Rodriguez: Late 7th
 - Carlos Beltran: Early to mid-10th
 - Jeff Francoeur: 16th to 17th



(KYLE STACK)

James making good on promise to drop Jordan's No. 23

LeBron James filed paperwork with the NBA to change his uniform number next season to No. 6 from No. 23, the league confirmed yesterday.



James

James said earlier this season he would be willing to give up No. 23 in an effort to have the league retire it in honor of Michael Jordan.

Julius Erving and Bill Russell have both made No. 6 famous. (AP)

Curry back at Knicks practice

The morning after a 31-point loss to the Cavaliers, the Knicks went through a hard practice. That wasn't much of a surprise.

The surprise was the big man huffing and puffing in the middle of it all. Eddy Curry, out since Jan. 18 after left knee surgery, made his return to practice and could dress for tonight's home game against Detroit.

Coach Mike D'Antoni said he was not expecting to see the 7-foot center on the court yesterday. D'Antoni didn't seem to have much use for Curry when he was healthy, but the Knicks'



Eddy Curry, at left with Nate Robinson in December, has appeared in seven games (62 minutes) this season. (GETTY)

(20-39) deadline-day dealing has left them with a small lineup and in need of some size on the floor.

"We do need a big body," D'Antoni said. "We need him to be productive. I'm sure he needs it, too." (NEWSDAY)

FOR THE RECORD

TV SPORTS TODAY

- NBA** MSG Detroit at Knicks, 7:30 p.m.
- YES** Cleveland at Nets, 7:30 p.m.
- NCAA BASKETBALL** ESPN Connecticut at Notre Dame, 7 p.m.; Oklahoma St. at (23) Texas A&M, 9 p.m.
- ESPN2** Wake Forest at Florida St., 7 p.m.; (4) Duke at (22) Maryland, 9 p.m.

RETWEETS

- "Some1 seriously used their credit card 2 buy a newspaper at airport (& I saw a \$1 bill popn out of their wallet!). There's a long line WTF?" @daratorresswims (five-time U.S. Olympian Dara Torres)
- "Hoops fans: Hank Gathers passed away 20 years ago today. I will be shooting free throws lefty tonight..." @GAtallah (NFL Players Association asst. executive)
- "At the cadillac dealership and jus had to pay 750 for some damn brakes!!! I told them nevamind cause I aint stopping anyway!!!!" @MIKESIMSWALKER (Jaguars wide receiver Mike Sims-Walker)
- Follow us @amNYsports

Last night's Rangers-Senators game ended too late for this edition.

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