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SPORTS

'No name' players who offer big-name value

BY KYLE STACK
Special to amNewYork

Part of the joy of fantasy baseball is recognizing a no-namer before all your league mates take notice. A month into the season, there are already a number of pitchers and position players whose production might be getting overlooked. Here are four of them:

Dallas Braden, SP, Oakland

Braden might be better known for his verbal dustup with **Alex Rodriguez** last week than for his stats. It's that type of competitive spirit that has inspired a 2.77 ERA, a 0.85 WHIP and three wins in his first four starts. More changeups and fewer fastballs have helped Braden throw off hitters, who have grounded out 42 percent of the time they put the ball in play. Hitters are also making less contact against him than last year (83 percent vs. 88) when swinging at pitches in the zone.

Alberto Callaspo, 2B/3B, Kansas City
Don't be surprised by Callaspo's .291 batting average.

He hit .300 in more than 600 plate appearances last season, and he has a .317 average in more than 2,600 minor league at-bats. His average could easily cross the .300 line because his hit percentage on balls in play is a modest .290, indicating more luck is due his way. The switch-hitter has found comfort in the fifth and sixth spots by batting .354 there. That kind of middle-of-the-order production should lead to another 70-plus RBI campaign.



Ty Wigginton, 1B/2B/3B, Baltimore

One of a handful of players with eligibility at three infield positions, Wigginton owes most of his playing time (his starts at second base) to **Brian Roberts'** stay on the disabled list. Wigginton may shift to first base or go to the bench once Roberts returns, but until then, he might be baseball's least recognized slugger. He has three 20-homer campaigns, including 23 in just 386 at-bats for the Astros in 2008, so even a part-time role could be a power boon for a lucky fantasy owner.

Josh Willingham, OF, Washington

He's technically baseball's most patient hitter. Willingham's 19 walks through his first 88 plate appearances put him among the major league leaders and explain the .303 hitter's sky-high on-base percentage of .466. Willingham's astute eye at the plate is also why his strikeout percentage is a career-low 14 percent. Fewer swings-and-misses have resulted in Willingham connecting on 83 percent of the pitches at which he swings and 24 percent of his batted balls becoming line drives, both career highs.

From left: Josh Willingham, Alberto Callaspo and Dallas Braden (PHOTOS: GETTY)



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