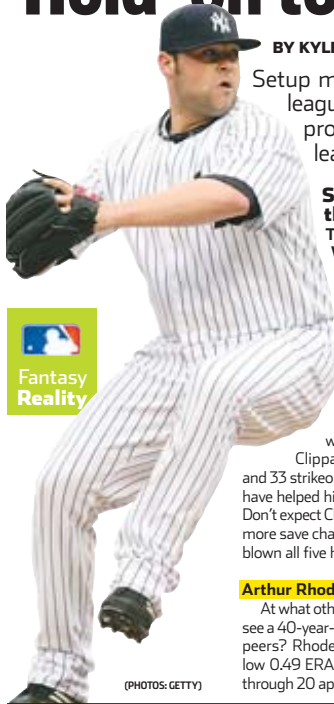


'Hold' on to these hot relievers

BY KYLE STACK • Special to amNewYork



Setup men go from unrecognized to in demand in fantasy baseball leagues that count holds as a statistical category. They can even provide insurance for strikeouts, ERA and WHIP in non-hold leagues. Here are seven of them to keep an eye on:

Set up in their role Tyler Clippard, Washington

It's hard to believe a Nationals reliever could be among the league leaders in holds, a stat that indicates preserved victories. But so it is with the ex-Yankee Clippard. His 2.12 ERA and 33 strikeouts in 29 1/3 innings have helped him garner 10 holds. Don't expect Clippard to get many more save chances, though: He's blown all five he's received.

Arthur Rhodes, Cincinnati

At what other position can you see a 40-year-old outperform his peers? Rhodes sports an ultra-low 0.49 ERA and a 0.65 WHIP through 20 appearances, though

his 12 holds and 18 strikeouts in 18 1/3 innings are more fantasy-relevant. With closer Francisco Cordero on his way to his fourth straight 30-save year, Rhodes will likely remain in a setup role.

Joba Chamberlain, Yankees

Chamberlain has finally found stability with the Yankees as Mariano Rivera's setup man. With nine holds and 25 strikeouts in 20 innings, the burly 24-year-old should remain an elite reliever. While he'll get the occasional save chance, Chamberlain won't be a closer as long as Rivera is healthy.

Joel Zumaya, Detroit

Just as talented as Chamberlain, Zumaya fell off the radar the last two years with shoulder troubles. Yet he's living up to his previous billing with 29 strikeouts in 26 frames, a 2.08 ERA and

1.12 WHIP to go with six holds. Zumaya will likely stay where he is in Detroit's bullpen: Closer Jose Valverde has been outstanding.

Closer candidates

Joel Hanrahan, Pittsburgh
He's already accumulated nine holds — as many as he had last year — and has whiffed 27 batters through just 17 innings. He could take over if incumbent closer Octavio Dotel struggles as he did in April (10.61 ERA, two blown saves).

Mike Adams and Luke Gregerson, San Diego

Adams (22 Ks in 19 1/3 IP) and Gregerson (26 Ks in 23 1/3 IP) each have 12 holds and could compete for the closer role if incumbent Heath Bell is traded in the event the hot-starting Padres drop out of playoff contention.



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