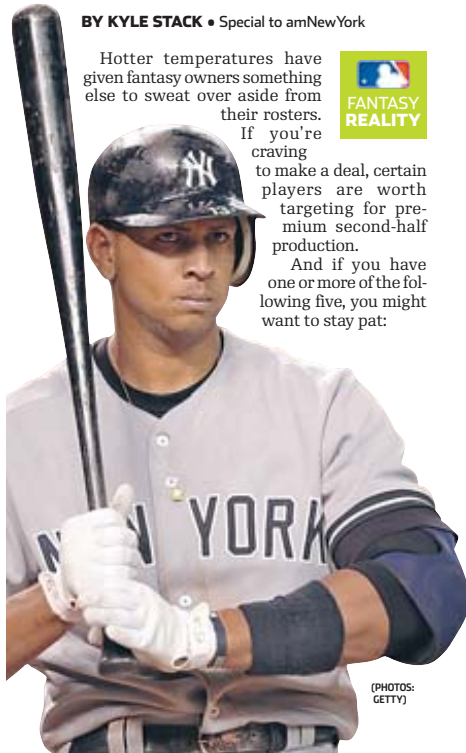


# Bank on second-half stars

BY KYLE STACK • Special to amNewYork

Hotter temperatures have given fantasy owners something else to sweat over aside from their rosters. If you're craving to make a deal, certain players are worth targeting for premium second-half production.

And if you have one or more of the following five, you might want to stay put:



(PHOTOS: GETTY)

**ALEX RODRIGUEZ, 3B, Yankees**

Still waiting for A-Rod to kick into high gear? Despite his mediocre .272 batting average and .824 OPS, there's reason to be optimistic. He batted just .256 in last year's first half as he returned from hip surgery before heating up after the break with a .310 average. In fact, the last time A-Rod hit below .290 after the All-Star break was in 2000, when he put up a .277 average. If a player of his caliber is to be traded, it should be when his value is at its apex. That time seems forthcoming.



**COLE HAMELS, LHP, Philadelphia**

Here's the starter to acquire if you're looking to buy low on an elite pitcher. His ability to zone in after the All-Star break is evidenced by his career 3.27 ERA and 1.12 WHIP during that time versus 4.00 and 1.24 first-half marks. Last year was no exception, as Hamels posted an ERA more than a full run lower than in the first half (3.76 versus 4.87) — the second time he had done that in four seasons.



**RYAN ZIMMERMAN, 3B, Washington**

If MLB held its All-Star Game after the season, Zimmerman might be a four-time honoree. Instead, he's earned just one nod (2009) due to his erratic first-half production. In the second half, however, he's never hit below .282. Zimmerman's production could peak in September, when he plays 16 of his 26 games at home; he has hit .296 at Nationals Park in the first half against a .275 average everywhere else.



**J.D. DREW, OF, Boston**

Always unpredictable because of injury concerns, Drew has come alive during recent second halves. Last year, he batted .316 with a .999 OPS after the break following a meager first half (a .252 average and an .854 OPS). In 2007, he boosted his OPS by 82 points in the second half (.759 to .841). The payoff might come in September, when Drew combined a .338 batting average with a Ruthian .601 slugging percentage in 148 at-bats from 2007-09.



**ADAM LAROCHE, 1B, Arizona**

LaRoche's tendency to rake after the break is why owners can't give up on him despite his .251 batting average. The seven-year veteran has hit .300 with a .909 OPS after midsummer for his career, including .311 and .915 averages in last year's second half after posting .250 and .784 in the first half. Expect LaRoche to heat up in August; his career .310 average and .933 OPS during that month represent his highest averages in each category for any month.

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Last night's Yankees-A's and Reds-Mets games ended too late for this edition.

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