



NATIONALS

Barry Svrluga's pitching analysis and projected rotation

1
RHP
Livan Hernandez

2
RHP
John Patterson

3
RHP
Pedro Astacio

4
RHP
Ramon Ortiz

5
RHP
Tony Armas Jr.

CL
CLOSER
Chad Cordero

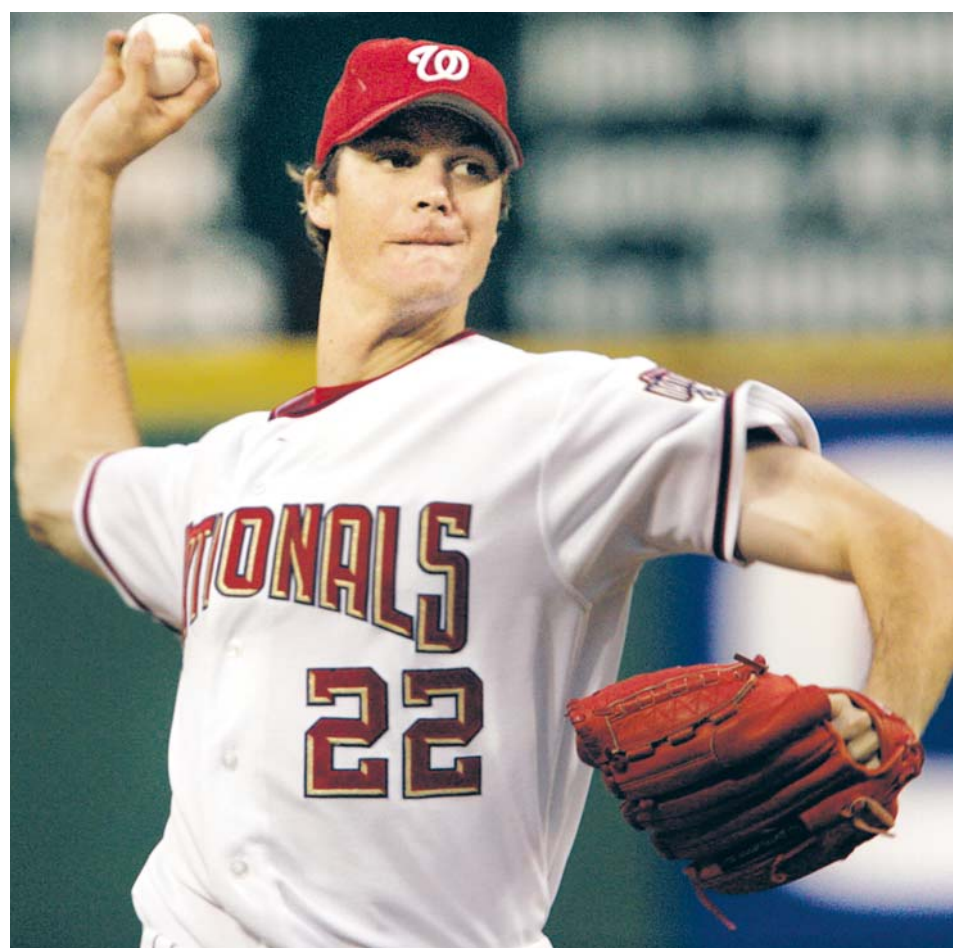
SP JOHN PATTERSON No. 2 Starter

VITALS
Number: 22
Age: 28
Height: 6-5
Weight: 210
Bats: Right
Throws: Right

2005
Starts: 31
CG: 2
Innings: 198 1/3
Wins: 9
Losses: 7
ERA: 3.13
Hits: 172
Runs: 71
Earned: 69
Walks: 65
Strikeouts: 185

'06 SALARY
\$450,000

WHY HE IS IMPORTANT
If the Nats are to overcome some lowly expectations, they will have to get a true breakout season from the guy with the best stuff in their rotation.



Funny how a pitcher with a 16-18 record in 63 major league starts can be considered a budding ace. But that's exactly the situation in which Patterson finds himself. Patterson's record last year suffered from minuscule run support — 3.68 per game, seventh lowest in the National League. But his reputation, based on a repertoire that at times is dominating, grew. It all means Patterson arrived at spring training carrying himself differently. "I got good momentum last year," Patterson said, "and I haven't had anything to slow me down." In the past, there always has been something, whether the elbow surgery that wiped out nearly all of his 2000 season, the unhappiness with his old club, the Arizona Diamondbacks, or the long climb back to good health. Now, he must give the Nationals seven good innings each time out. He must win games on his own, because the offense is not expected to be explosive.

CLOSER CHAD CORDERO Setup Man: Gary Majewski

VITALS
Number: 32
Age: 24
Height: 6-0
Weight: 200
Bats: Right
Throws: Right

2005
Saves: 47
Chances: 54
Innings: 74 1/3
Wins: 2
Losses: 4
ERA: 1.82
Hits: 55
Runs: 24
Earned: 15
Walks: 17
Strikeouts: 61

'06 SALARY
\$525,000

WHY HE IS IMPORTANT
If the Nats are going to have any sort of success this season, Cordero has to do a reasonable impersonation of... well of himself from 2005.



There is reason to believe that he can't duplicate last season's performance, and not by any of his own doing. He clearly wore down at the end of last season; after giving up a total of three earned runs in 41 appearances in June, July and August, he allowed eight in just eight appearances in September, when he also blew three save opportunities. So the question becomes: Can Cordero be as effective over an entire season as he was for the first five months of 2005? "I'm stronger," he said. "I think I can pitch better. I'm rested and ready."

SP LIVAN HERNANDEZ No. 1 Starter

VITALS
Number: 61
Age: 31
Height: 6-2
Weight: 245
Bats: Right
Throws: Right

2005
Starts: 35
CG: 2
Innings: 246 1/3
Wins: 15
Losses: 10
ERA: 3.98
Hits: 268
Runs: 116
Earned: 109
Walks: 84
Strikeouts: 147

'06 SALARY
\$7 million

There certainly are better pitchers in the National League, but there aren't many who are more fun to watch. Hernandez's knowledge of his craft, and ability to change speeds — from his decent 90 mph fastball to a 68 mph curve — can leave hitters flailing when he's at his best, which he was during the first half of last season (12-3, 3.48 ERA). The early focus this season will be on Hernandez's surgically repaired right knee, not to mention his occasionally fiery temperament. If Hernandez is healthy — and he has averaged more than 236 innings over the last six seasons, an average of 12 more innings than Randy Johnson, the next best — then he will be perhaps the Nationals' most important starter simply because he can save the bullpen. He can win 18 games, if healthy — and the Nationals need nothing less.



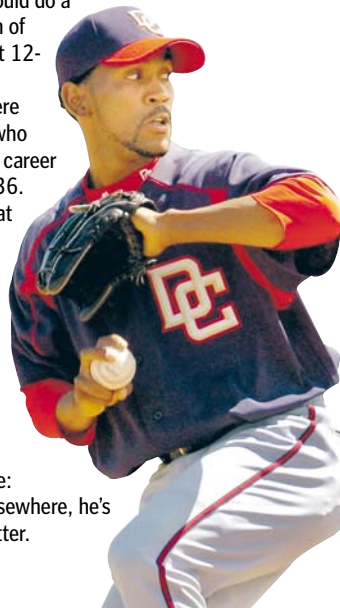
SP RAMON ORTIZ No. 4 Starter

VITALS
Number: 26
Age: 32
Height: 6-0
Weight: 175
Bats: Right
Throws: Right

2005
Starts: 30
CG: 1
Innings: 171 1/3
Wins: 9
Losses: 11
ERA: 5.36
Hits: 206
Runs: 110
Earned: 102
Walks: 51
Strikeouts: 96

'06 SALARY
\$2.5 million

In the offseason, the Nationals pursued free agent right-handers A.J. Burnett and Kevin Millwood, and didn't really have a serious chance at either. So they were left pursuing pitchers such as Ortiz — and hoping he could do a reasonable impersonation of Esteban Loaiza, who went 12-10 with a 3.77 ERA for Washington last year. There are worries about Ortiz, who only once in a seven-year career has had an ERA below 4.36. Yes, last year he pitched at Cincinnati's Great American Ball Park, which gives pitchers gray hair, and posted a 5.63 ERA at home. But his 5.08 ERA on the road didn't impress many, either. Spacious RFK Stadium should help — some. But the bottom line: Whether he's at RFK or elsewhere, he's going to have to pitch better.



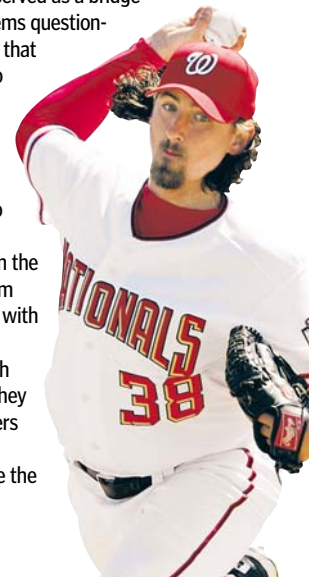
RP THE BULLPEN

MEMBERS
Gary Majewski
Joey Eischen
Mike Stanton
Jon Rauch
Felix Rodriguez

2005 (COMBINED)
Saves: 1
Chances: 7
Innings: 227 1/3
Wins: 11
Losses: 12
ERA: 3.69
Hits: 220
Runs: 100
Earned: 93
Walks: 102
Strikeouts: 148

'06 SALARY
\$3,587,500

Gone is Hector Carrasco, he of the mesmerizing change-up. Gone is Luis Ayala, he of the season-ending elbow injury suffered during the World Baseball Classic. The Nationals were nearly unbeatable from the seventh inning on last season, when Carrasco, Ayala and Gary Majewski served as a bridge to Chad Cordero. Now, it seems questionable a new group can repeat that performance. They'll use two lefties — Joey Eischen and Mike Stanton — and Stanton was particularly effective this spring. Jon Rauch, the long man, was so good for much of the spring that he might threaten to join the rotation. General Manager Jim Bowden believes that teams with limited payrolls have to win games from the sixth through the eighth innings because they can't afford big-money starters or closers. That's why the bullpen, once again, could be the key to the season.



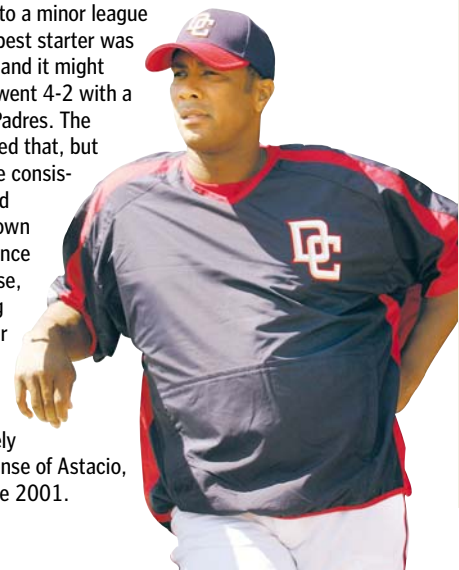
SP PEDRO ASTACIO No. 3 Starter

VITALS
Number: 48
Age: 36
Height: 6-2
Weight: 210
Bats: Right
Throws: Right

2005
Starts: 22
CG: 0
Innings: 126 2/3
Wins: 6
Losses: 10
ERA: 4.69
Hits: 133
Runs: 66
Earned: 66
Walks: 37
Strikeouts: 78

'06 SALARY
\$700,000

Midway through last season, there was plenty of evidence that Astacio had lost it, that his career might be over. From Opening Day in 2003 through June 21 of last season — when he was released by Texas — he went 5-10 with a 6.81 ERA and allowed hitters a .302 average. But ask people with San Diego, which signed him to a minor league contract, who its best starter was down the stretch, and it might say Astacio, who went 4-2 with a 3.17 ERA for the Padres. The Nationals don't need that, but they do need some consistent innings — and Astacio hasn't thrown 200 in a season since 1999. If Ryan Drese, who still is coming back from shoulder surgery, or Jon Rauch is going to insert himself into the rotation, it likely will be at the expense of Astacio, who is 29-24 since 2001.



SP TONY ARMAS JR. No. 5 Starter

VITALS
Number: 36
Age: 27
Height: 6-3
Weight: 225
Bats: Right
Throws: Right

2005
Starts: 19
CG: 0
Innings: 101 1/3
Wins: 7
Losses: 7
ERA: 4.97
Hits: 100
Runs: 57
Earned: 56
Walks: 54
Strikeouts: 59

'06 SALARY
\$2.1 million

There have been some encouraging signs from Armas this spring, with his fastball back up to 93 mph and sporting the late movement that made him so effective early in 2003, before he had major shoulder surgery. But consider these numbers: 5, 16 and 19, followed by 31, 72 and 101 1/3. Those are the number of Armas's starts in each of the past three seasons, followed by his innings pitched in those three years. If Armas truly is to be a contributor, he must remain healthy and have the same stuff each time out. In the past, he might have had his good fastball once every four times out, and then it would inexplicably dip to, say, 89 mph. The Nationals hope those lulls are eliminated. "I'm seeing signs," pitching coach Randy St. Claire said. "We'll have to wait and see."



MANAGER FRANK ROBINSON

VITALS
Number: 20
Age: 70
Wins: 994
Losses: 1,085
Seasons: 14

COACHES
Eddie Rodriguez (bench)
Davey Lopes (first base)
Tony Beasley (third base)
Randy St. Claire (pitching)
Mitchell Page (hitting)
John Wetteland (bullpen)

Robinson needs six victories to reach 1,000 in a managerial career with four teams. And in his four seasons managing the Montreal-Washington franchise, all of them when the team was hampered because it is owned by Major League Baseball, he has turned in only one losing season. But this doesn't mean that those around baseball consider Robinson one of the game's top managers. Far from it. His strategies are frequently questioned. He sometimes makes moves — such as inserting pinch runners in the middle of an at-bat — that make it seem like he's a step behind rather than a step ahead. And late in the 2005 season, when the Nationals' clubhouse chemistry was crumbling, Robinson had trouble turning it around. This is an important season for Robinson, a Hall of Famer who wants to protect his legacy. If he gets a mediocre bunch to play well, he just may do that.

