

National League's Best Teams

Chapter Thirteen

Into the 21st Century With the NL's Greatest Dynasty: The 1998-2005 Atlanta Braves

Any doubt that the Atlanta Braves were a baseball dynasty, joining the 1921-64 New York Yankees (29 pennants in 44 years), the 1911-24 New York Giants (eight pennants in 14 years), and the 1947-66 Brooklyn-to-Los Angeles Dodgers (10 pennants in 20 years), was put to rest by the time the twentieth century came to an end. The 1991-97 Braves were the first of two different teams that were the foundation of the Atlanta dynasty from 1991 to 2005 that won 14 consecutive division titles. The team that carried the Braves' dynasty into the new century—the **1998 to 2005 Atlanta Braves**—retained the pitching core of Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine, and John Smoltz, but was now defined by third baseman Chipper Jones and center fielder Andruw Jones among their core regulars. The nearly complete turnover of core position players is what distinguishes these two Atlanta teams. Three-fourths of the Braves' 1997 infield—first baseman Fred McGriff, second baseman Mark Lemke, and shortstop Jeff Blauser who had played together since 1993—did not return the next year, and left fielder Ryan Klesko would be gone after two more years. Chipper Jones, along with catcher Javy Lopez, were the only position players on the 1998-05 Braves who played key roles on the 1991-97 Braves, and I do not include Chipper as a core regular for that team because he had been Atlanta's third baseman only the last three of those seven seasons, beginning in 1995.

An argument can be made, however, to which I am very sympathetic, that the Atlanta team that carried on the Braves' dynasty after 1997 extended only to 2003, not to their final two division titles in 2004 and 2005. The reason for this is that Glavine departed the Braves as a free agent after 2002, and Maddux did the same after 2003. Even though the core position regulars of the Braves from 1998 to 2003 remained substantially the same through

2005, the Atlanta dynasty was so much defined by the pitching excellence of Maddux, Glavine, and Smoltz that the departure of two of these three by 2004 marked the end of an era, one that really does distinguish the 1998-03 Braves from the team that won two more division titles with the continuity of the other core regulars. And Smoltz from 2001, when he returned from career-threatening Tommy John surgery, through 2004 was used as Atlanta's closer. But to be true to my methodological approach, I do extend this team to 2005 because Glavine and Maddux (and Lopez) were the only core regulars from 1998 who had left. Smoltz was still there, returning to the starting rotation in that final year as the staff ace after three stellar seasons as the Braves' closer; Chipper Jones was still there, back at third base for 2004 and 2005; Andruw Jones continued to patrol center field; and Furcal was still at shortstop.

A distinguishing characteristic of the 1998-05 Braves was the skill and frequency with which Atlanta's baseball management was able to change the players to take account of free agency losses (real or potential) and aging and still keep winning. Aside from their core regular position players—Lopez (who was gone after 2003) at catcher, Chipper Jones at third, Andruw Jones in center, and Furcal (beginning in 2000) at shortstop—the Braves employed a succession of players at the other positions. They had different first and second basemen every year through 2003, platooning at both positions in 2001, before settling on Adam LaRoche and Marcus Giles to complete their run; seven different starters in left field, including Chipper Jones who played there for two years in 2002 and 2003 (to make room for free agent acquisition Vinnie Castilla at third) before returning to third (when Castilla left as a free agent after a disappointing tour in Atlanta); and five different starters in right field, including Brian Jordan for three years (1999-2001) followed by Gary Sheffield for two. The starting rotation was more stable with Maddux and Glavine as mainstays, and Smoltz certainly would have been were it not for the necessity of his career-saving but year-losing (2000, in his case) surgery, after which he became one of the NL's most effective closers from 2001 to 2004 to reduce the wear and tear on his arm. Happily for the Braves, Kevin Millwood pitched very effectively behind Maddux and Glavine in Atlanta's rotation from 1998 to 2002.

The high turnover of players was a reflection of deliberate budget mindfulness by Atlanta General Manager John Schuerholz, even though the Braves did not have the financial limitations of a small-market team. Schuerholz kept his *essential* core—his three ace pitchers, the two Joneses, and Furcal—intact, judiciously played the free agent market for players such as Jordan, Castilla, and Sheffield, made a few strategic trades, and brought up promising young players (like Millwood, Furcal, and Giles) to fill out his roster. When free agency time came for core players, the Braves were willing to part with even the likes of Glavine (following the 2002 season) and Maddux (after 2003) who were the face of the franchise. Letting free agent catcher Lopez go after 2003 was less traumatic. Manager Bobby Cox, meanwhile, was a master at integrating new players into his continuing dynasty, witness—

—The Atlanta Braves continuing to dominate the National League as one century (nee, one millennium) ended and the next began, although we can really only say this about the regular season since they were notably unsuccessful in the post-season. After 1997, Atlanta's stranglehold on first place in the NL East held for another eight years, but the Braves came away with only one more pennant—in 1999, when they had the misfortune of running into the Yankees' latest dynastic juggernaut in the World Series. Despite having the best record in the league in 1998—arguably the best single season of Atlanta's 14 straight

division titles—the Braves lost the National League Championship Series to the San Diego Padres. In 2000, tied with St. Louis for the second-best record in the league, the Braves lost to the Cardinals in the first round—the National League Division Series (NLDS)—of the post-season. The Braves were eliminated in the NLCS by the Arizona Diamondbacks in 2001; upended by the wild card San Francisco Giants in the 2002 NLDS after again having the league's best record; failed to make it past the Chicago Cubs in the 2003 NLDS, the league's best record once again counting for naught; and were defeated in the NLDS by the wild card Houston Astros in both 2004 and 2005.

All good things (their 14 straight division titles) finally came to an end in 2006, when the Braves wound up third with a losing record, 18 games back. All told, the Atlanta Braves from 1998 to 2005 won only four of the twelve post-season series they played, with an overall record of 23 wins and 30 losses—a .434 winning percentage. The 1991-97 Braves, by contrast, won eight of the thirteen post-season series they played, with a 40-32 (.556) record.

Notwithstanding their post-season disappointments, Atlanta's 1998 to 2005 Braves were even more dominant than the 1991-97 Braves . . . well at least through 2003. They won 100 or more games four times in eight seasons and won four NL Eastern Division titles by eight games or more—by 18 games in 1998, when they won 106; by 19 games in 2002, when they won 101; by 10 games in 2003, when they again won 101; and by 10 games in 2004. The Braves also won 103 games in 1999, winning the division by 6½ games over the Mets, who followed up to win the wild card (and eventually the pennant) in 2000 by finishing only one game back of 95-win Atlanta. The only off-year for Atlanta during this stretch was in 2001, when a mere 88 wins was good enough to hold off second-place Philadelphia and win the East by two games; their record that year was only the fifth-best in the National League.

Atlanta continued to dominate all of baseball in pitching, surrendering the fewest runs in the league for five more consecutive years (through 2002)—giving the Braves eleven straight years with the NL's stingiest pitching staff (dating back to 1992), including ten straight leading both leagues until the AL's 116-win Seattle Mariners allowed 16 fewer runs than the 2001 Braves. Pitching had to carry the Braves because they were offensively much less imposing—finishing fourth, seventh, sixth, thirteenth (out of sixteen NL teams), and eighth in runs scored between 1998 and 2002—although this was partially a factor of Turner Field being more favorable to pitchers. Atlanta's offensive weaknesses were most exposed in short post-season series, where other contenders also had good pitching (even if not up to the Braves' standard), helping to contribute to their chronic inability to bring home another championship banner. In the five post-season series totaling 23 games that ended their season between 1998 and 2002, the Braves hit only .223 and averaged 3.4 runs per game, while their opponents averaged five runs per game and batted .254. The Braves scored only nine runs and batted .200 when they were swept by the Yankees in the 1999 World Series.

Then came 2003, when it seemed the world flipped because the Braves led the league in scoring (and had the second-most runs in the major leagues, outscoring even the Yankees) but were ninth—yes, ninth—in fewest runs allowed. Atlanta was fourth and fifth in the league in runs scored, and fifth and third in fewest runs allowed, in the next two years which brought them to the end of their 14 straight division titles. They failed to advance out of the Division Series in any of their last three post-season appearances. The Braves were more proficient at the plate in those fourteen Division Series games—averaging 4.1 runs per game and hitting .246—but indicative of a pitching staff that by 2003 no longer had Glavine,

Millwood, or Smoltz in the rotation and by 2004, no Maddux either, their opponents in those series hit .283 and averaged 5.7 runs per game.

The end of the Atlanta dynasty coincided with the rise of the Philadelphia Phillies as the next team to dominate the National League, or the NL East at the very least. The Phillies had finished second to the Braves in 2004 and 2005 and second to the New York Mets in 2006. Indeed, it appeared likely that the Mets—whose core regulars now featured center fielder Carlos Beltran, shortstop Jose Reyes, third baseman David Wright, Tom Glavine (after he left the Braves in 2003) as their ace, and who would add Johan Santana in 2008 to headline their starting rotation—would vie with the Phillies for the best team in the league and the division through the rest of the decade. Indeed, Reyes, Beltran, and Wright were three of the 10 best National League position players between 2004 and 2011, according to me, based on their best consecutive seasons during those years. The Phillies, for their part, were built around a core that included power-hitting Ryan Howard at first, the league's best second baseman in Chase Utley, Jimmy Rollins at short, Shane Victorino in center, Jason Werth in right, Carlos Ruiz behind the plate, and rising southpaw Cole Hamels in the starting rotation.

After winning the NL East and losing the League Championship Series in seven games in 2006, the Mets looked certain to get another chance at the World Series in 2007 with a seven-game lead and the season winding down in mid-September when they suffered a collapse of epic proportions by losing 12 of their final 17 games to lose out by one game to Philadelphia, whose Phillies closed with 13 wins in their last 17 games to win the East. As if that wasn't bad enough, the Mets endured another calamitous collapse in 2008—though perhaps not quite so epic—when they lost 10 of their last 17 games, while the Phillies were winning 13 of their final 16, to blow a 3½-game lead and ultimately finish three games back. There has since followed for the Mets seasons of injuries to all of their key players, bad market decisions—notably the signing of free agent slugger Jason Bay who has been anything but a home run dynamo since his arrival from Boston—and the opening of a new ballpark whose original dimensions conspired against Wright and Bay, not to mention the loss of Santana to Tommy John surgery for the entire 2011 season, that ended their competitiveness against the Phillies.

The Philadelphia Phillies' dramatic surge finishes in 2007 and 2008 to overtake the Mets in the last 17 games of each season established them as imposing, resilient, and the most formidable team in the National League. With free agent acquisitions in 2010 and 2011 including standout pitchers Roy Halladay—who had already earned a century-plus legacy in the American League for his best consecutive years from 2002 to 2009, according to me—and Cliff Lee, the Phillies also made clear they were prepared to spend money like the Yankees and Red Sox in the American League to sustain their winning ways. Lee had pitched for the Phillies the last two months of the 2009 season, leading them to the World Series, before being traded to the Seattle Mariners because the Philadelphia front office did not believe they could afford both he and Halladay. By 2011, they concluded they indeed could, and Lee joined with Halladay and Hamels to give Philadelphia the best starting threesome in baseball since Maddux, Glavine, and Smoltz.

As the new National League dynasty, the Phillies have now won five consecutive Eastern Division titles, two pennants (back-to-back in 2008 and 2009), and one World Series (in 2008, over the Tampa Bay Rays). But the **2006 to 2011 Philadelphia Phillies** are not one of the five best teams in the National League over the last half-century (since 1961), let alone

among the best in NL history. Only one of their five division titles was won with 100 victories and a margin of greater than eight games—2011, when they won 102 (but had been on a pace to win 106 before somewhat inexplicably losing eight straight games near the very end of the season) and beat out the recovering Atlanta Braves by 13 games in the NL East. In only two of those years—2010 and 2011—did the Phillies have the best record in the league. With the dangerous Utley and Howard at the center of their line-up, the 2006-11 Phillies led the league in scoring twice and were second twice; they led the league in fewest runs allowed only once—in the most recent season when Halladay, Lee, and Hamels were together for the first time. The only core regular on this team who was the best at his position or one of the NL’s best players in the surrounding decade was Chase Utley, whose best consecutive years from 2005 to 2009 also merit him a century-plus legacy, according to me. (Neither Halladay nor Lee is counted as a core regular for this Phillies team.)

Like the Atlanta Braves after the 1997 season, the Philadelphia Phillies following the 2011 season appear to be on the threshold of reconstituting their core position players with Howard and Utley likely remaining the indispensable offensive fulcrum of the team. Werth left as a free agent after 2010 and reporting from the winter meetings in December 2011 (as this is being written) indicates Philadelphia is prepared to part ways with free agent shortstop Rollins. Meanwhile, Cole Hamels’ 2011 season suggests he may join Halladay and Lee as elite starting pitchers, and all on the same staff. Under Manager Charlie Manuel’s direction, the Phillies have improved their record in each of the last five years. The Philadelphia Phillies’ best years may be yet to come.

2 BEST NATIONAL LEAGUE TEAMS, 2001-2011

	D-P-WS	W - L %	Ach	Dom	Play	Total
Atlanta Braves, 1998-2005	8 - 1 - 0	780-514 .602	34	44	32	110
Philadelphia Phillies, 2007-11	5 - 2 - 1	473-337 .584	38	25	14	77

P = Pennant WS = World Series Ach = Achievement Score
 Dom = Dominance Factors Score Play = Players Score Total = Total Score

If not for their post-season travails, I would have no hesitation in asserting that the 1998-05 Atlanta Braves were the best National League team since the 1906-10 Chicago Cubs. That means better than 1949-59 Brooklyn Dodgers, who had their own post-season issues. That means better than the 1991-97 Braves, with which Maddux, Glavine, Smoltz, and (for three years) Chipper Jones provided continuity. That means better even than the 1972-76 Big Red Machine hailing out of Cincinnati. By the measure of 100-win seasons, number of blow-out pennant race victories, and number of seasons leading the league in scoring or fewest runs allowed, this Atlanta team was more dominant relative to the rest of the league than those teams. And their overall “players” score by my methodological approach exceeds by a wide margin that of the 1991-97 Braves, matches that of the 1972-76 Reds—who had Joe Morgan, Johnny Bench, and Pete Rose with century-plus legacies, according to me—and falls short by a meaningful difference to the 1949-56 Dodgers with Jackie Robinson, Duke Snider, and Roy Campanella having century-plus legacies, according to me, and a host of others who were the best at their position for all or the majority of years under consideration for their team.

Unlike the 1991-97 Braves, which had relative stability among their core position players for their seven years but none who were the best at their position, according to me, this Atlanta team had only four position players who played for at least half the years under consideration, but three of them—Furcal at shortstop, Chipper Jones at third (through 2001, after which he was positioned in left field for two years), and Andruw Jones as one of three outfielders—were all the best at their position for at least half of the eight years for this team. Both Joneses had best consecutive seasons during these years that place them, according to me, among the 50 best National League position players since the start of the twentieth century. While Maddux and Glavine were at their peak in performance mostly for the first half of Atlanta's fifteen-year stranglehold on division titles, both remained among the league's five best starting pitchers in both contemporary and surrounding decade context for the 1998-05 Braves. Maddux's best consecutive years of 1992 to 1998 that make him the best pitcher at his peak in National League history, according to me, include only the first year for this Atlanta team, but his continuing strong pitching through 2002 would still give him a century-plus legacy for the 1998-05 Braves. Smoltz, meanwhile, had completed the five best consecutive years (from 1995 to 1999) of his lengthy time as one of three aces in the Braves' rotation that give *him* a century-plus legacy, although not exclusively for either team, when his career took a turn to the bullpen after the Tommy John surgery that sidelined him for all of 2000. From 2002 until he moved back to the starting rotation in 2005, Smoltz was one of the premier closers in baseball.

The 1998-05 Atlanta Braves are being considered, based on their core regulars, for all eight of those years, but we must take account of their best subset of years—1998 to 2002—when they matched the 1991-97 Braves with a .610 winning percentage, brought that low only because of an 88-74 (.543) record in 2001 that was Atlanta's worst since 1990, before their string of division titles began; won 100 or more games three times in those five years, including a franchise record (including the Boston and Milwaukee years) 106 victories in 1998; had the best record in the National League three times; coasted to their division title by eight games or more twice (and by 6½ over the Mets in 1999 when the Braves won 103); and led the league in fewest runs allowed all five years. These were also the foundation years—when they were at their best—for the century-plus legacies of Chipper and Andruw Jones, and Greg Maddux extended his best consecutive years string into the new century. Overall during these five years, the Braves *appeared* more balanced between the contributions of their position players and pitchers—a 56:44 split (compared to a less desirable 50:50 split for the 1991-97 Braves)—as measured by wins above replacement (WAR), but this is misleading because in three of those years the contribution to their team's collective WAR by Atlanta's pitchers (remember, we're still talking Maddux, Glavine, and Smoltz, and Millwood as well) exceeded 50 percent.

Taking into account Atlanta's dominance in those five years in particular—(the Braves' "dominance" score, according to my methodological approach, for 1998 to 2002 would be equal to the 1941-46 Cardinals as the second highest after the 1906-10 Cubs for any National League team)—and their player legacies (three position players and two starting pitchers who I count as the best at their positions and three players with century-plus legacies), and keeping in mind that the Braves went on to win three more division titles, two by decisive margins, in the next three years, I am inclined to say that the 1998-05 Braves were a better team than the 1991-97 Braves. But—

—There is the not insignificant matter that the 1998-05 Atlanta Braves advanced to the World Series only once, while the 1991-97 Braves went four times in seven years,

notwithstanding that they emerged from the Fall Classic victorious only once. Remember, however, that my methodological approach deliberately understates the importance of post-season success because of the vagaries inherent in short series, which seem even more of a “wild card” in this wild card era, where multiple rounds just to get to the World Series increase the potential for very good teams to be derailed. Much to their chagrin, the Atlanta Braves have been cursed by the wild card era. For this reason, coupled with the 1998 and 1999 seasons being the two best consecutive years put together by the Atlanta dynasty, both of which fall within the years under consideration for their 1998-05 team—which is different from the 1991-97 team because of a near wholesale turnover of core position players—I believe they were the better team. That’s according to me. You may feel differently.

That, however, does not make the 1998-05 Braves a better team than the 1972-76 Cincinnati Reds. The Big Red Machine was nearly as dominant in the league in their time as the 1998-05 Braves in theirs, and with Morgan, Bench, and Rose having century-plus legacies, and Perez, Concepcion, and relief ace Clay Carroll joining those three as the best at their positions, the Reds match the Braves’ “players” score in my methodological approach. With the two teams so closely matched in these two elements, the Reds’ far more significant success in winning three pennants and two World Series in five years proved more than decisive in my still considering them—the 1972 to 1976 Cincinnati Reds—the second best team in National League history, after the 1906 to 1910 Chicago Cubs.

5 BEST NATIONAL LEAGUE TEAMS, 1961-2011

	D-P-WS	W - L %	Ach	Dom	Play	Total
Cincinnati Reds, 1972-76	4 - 3 - 2	502-300 .626	41	35	32	108
Atlanta Braves, 1998-2005	8 - 1 - 0	780-514 .602	34	44	32	110
Atlanta Braves, 1991-97	6 - 4 - 1	651-417 .610	39	43	22	104
New York Mets, 1984-88	2 - 1 - 1	488-320 .604	30	45	13	88
Los Angeles Dodgers, 1974-78	3 - 3 - 0	475-335 .586	34	40	10	84

P = Pennant WS = World Series Ach = Achievement Score
Dom = Dominance Factors Score Play = Players Score Total = Total Score

8 BEST NATIONAL LEAGUE TEAMS, 1901-2011

	D-P- WS	W - L %	Ach	Dom	Play	Total
Chicago Cubs, 1906-10	4 - 2	530-235 .693	32	60	33	125
Cincinnati Reds, 1972-76	4 - 3 - 2	502-300 .626	41	35	32	108
Atlanta Braves, 1998-2005	8 - 1 - 0	780-514 .602	34	44	32	110
Atlanta Braves, 1991-97	6 - 4 - 1	651-417 .610	39	43	22	104
Brooklyn Dodgers, 1949-56	5 - 1	767-466 .622	28	31	37	96
St. Louis Cardinals, 1941-46	4 - 3	606-319 .655	32	50	21	103
New York Giants, 1904-08	2 - 1x	487-278 .637	22	40	24	86
New York Giants, 1910-14	3 - 0	478-286 .626	26	45	21	92

x = no World Series in 1904
P = Pennant WS = World Series Ach = Achievement Score
Dom = Dominance Factors Score Play = Players Score Total = Total Score

TRANSPARENCY ANNEX

ATLANTA BRAVES, 1998-2005

8 NL Eastern Division Titles (1998 thru 2005)
1 Pennant (1999)
0 World Series Wins

ACHIEVEMENT

1 st place (x 3)	2 nd place (x 2)	3 rd place (x 1)	World Series (x 1)	Score
8 x 3 = 24	0	0	0	
+ 1 pennants = 1				
+ 4 NL1 (x .5) = 2.0				
27	0	0	0	27

ACHIEVEMENT SCORE = 27 / 8 years x 10 = **34**

DOMINANCE

100 Wins	8 Games Ahead	NL1/Runs Scored	NL1/Fewest Runs Allowed	Score
4	4	1	5	14

DOMINANCE SCORE = 14 / 32 (4 x 8 seasons) x 100 = **44**

PLAYERS

CORE REGULARS	WAR '98-'05	BEST at POSITION	Decade '97-'06	Last 50 yrs	20 th C +
SS Rafael Furcal, 2000-05	19.2	2000-05	no		
3B/1f Chipper Jones, 1995-2011	43.5	1996-2001	'98-'02	yes	yes
CF Andruw Jones, 1997-2007	48.8	1998-2007	'98-'06	yes	yes
C Javy Lopez, 1994-2003	16.0	no	no		
P Greg Maddux, 1993-2003	24.8	1988-2002	'97-'01	yes *	yes *
P Tom Glavine, 1988-2002	19.9	1993-2002	'97-'02	^	^
P Kevin Millwood, 1998-2002	11.7	no	no		
P-RP John Smoltz, 1989-2007 (-1)	19.9	no	no	^	^
TEAM WAR, 1998-2005 = 329.2	203.8				
Core WAR= 61.9 % of Team 41.2 Av. Team WAR + 61.9 %	66.7 / 10 6.7	5 / 8 x 10 6.3	4 x 1 4	3 x 2 6	3 x 3 9

* Maddux's 20th century-plus legacy is for his best consecutive years of 1992-98, but he would still have such a legacy for his years of 1997-2001.

Glavine, for best consecutive years of 1991-98, and Smoltz, for best consecutive years of 1995-99, both have a 20th century-plus legacy.

PLAYERS SCORE = 6.7 (Base WAR) + 6.3 (Best at Position) + 19 (NL Best) = **32.0**

PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES, 2007-11

5 NL Eastern Division Titles (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)
2 Pennants (2008, 2009)
1 World Series Win (2008)

ACHIEVEMENT

1 st place (x 3)	2 nd place (x 2)	3 rd place (x 1)	World Series (x 1)	Score
5 x 3 = 15	0	0	1 x 1 = 1	
+ 2 pennants = 2				
+ 2 NL1 (x .5) = 1				
18	0	0	1	19

ACHIEVEMENT SCORE = 19 / 5 years x 10 = **38**

DOMINANCE

100 Wins	8 Games Ahead	NL1/Runs Scored	NL1/Fewest Runs Allowed	Score
1	1	2	1	5

DOMINANCE SCORE = 5 / 20 (4 x 5 seasons) x 100 = **25**

PLAYERS

CORE REGULARS	WAR 2007-11	BEST at POSITION	Decade 2004-11	Last 50 yrs	20 th C +
1B Ryan Howard, 2005-11+	14.5	no	no		
2B Chase Utley, 2004-11+	28.7	2006-10 +?	2005-09	yes	yes
SS Jimmy Rollins, 2001-11 (?)	16.4	no	no		
CF Shane Victorino, 2006-11+	16.5	no	no		
RF Jason Werth, 2007-10	15.3	no	no		
C Carlos Ruiz, 2007-11+	10.5	no	no		
P Cole Hamels, 2006-11+	20.6	s/o	no		
P Jamie Moyer, 2007-10	4.2	no	no		
P Kyle Kendrick, 2007-11+ (-1)	1.8	no	no		
RP Ryan Madson, 2004-11 (?)	7.8	no	no		
TEAM WAR, 2007-11 = 197.9	136.3				
Core WAR= 68.9 % of Team 39.6 Av. Team WAR + 68.9 %	66/9 / 10 6.7	1.5 / 10 x 10 1.5	1 x 1 1	1 x 2 2	1 x 3 3

(?) = Rollins and Madson became free agents after the 2011 season.

PLAYERS SCORE = 6.7 (Base WAR) + 1.5 (Best at Position) + 6 (NL Best) = **14**

BEST PLAYERS IN SURROUNDING DECADE

(based on best consecutive years, informed by wins above replacement)

1998-2005 BRAVES		2007-11 PHILLIES
10 BEST NL POSITION PLAYERS, 1997-2006		10 BEST NL POSITION PLAYERS, 2004-11
Barry Bonds, OF, 1997-2004		Albert Pujols, 1B, 2004-11
Albert Pujols, 3B-1B, 2001-06		<i>Chase Utley, 2B, 2005-09</i>
Jim Edmonds, OF, 2000-05		Hanley Ramirez, SS, 2006-10
<i>Andruw Jones, OF, 1998-2006</i>		Troy Tulowitzki, SS, 2007-11
Todd Helton, 1B, 2000-04		Jose Reyes, SS, 2006-11 (-1)
<i>Chipper Jones, 3B-Of, 1998-2002</i>		Carlos Beltran, OF, 2006-11
Jeff Bagwell, 1B, 1997-2001		Brian McCann, C, 2006-10
Scott Rolen, 3B, 1998-2004		David Wright, 3B, 2005-10
Sammy Sosa, OF, 1998-2002		Matt Holliday, OF, 2007-11
Brian Giles, OF, 1999-2003		Chipper Jones, 3B, 2004-09
5 BEST NL PITCHERS+ BEST RELIEVER, 1997-2006		5 BEST NL PITCHERS+ BEST RELIEVER, 2004-11
Randy Johnson, 1999-2004		Brandon Webb, 2004-08
Curt Schilling, 1997-2002		Roy Oswalt, 2004-10
Kevin Brown, 1997-2001		Chris Carpenter, 2005-11 (-2)
<i>Greg Maddux, 1997-2001</i>		Tim Lincecum, 2007-11
<i>Tom Glavine, 1997-2002</i>		Matt Cain, 2007-11
Billy Wagner, RP, 1995-05 (-1)		Heath Bell, RP, 2007-11

BEST AT POSITION

1B	(92) Bagwell-----→ Helton-----→ Pujols-----→(?)
2B	Biggio-----→ Kent-----→ Utley-----→(?)
SS	(90) Larkin-----→ Furcal-----→ H.Ramirez-----→
3B	Chipper Jones-----→ Wright-----→ Rolen-----→
OF	(84) Gwynn-----→ Edmonds-----→ Holliday-----→ Sosa-----→
OF	(88) Bonds-----→ Beltran-----→
OF	(92) Walker-----→ Andruw Jones-----→ Braun-----→(?)
MP	Alfonzo, 3B/2B-----→ Pujols, OF/3B-1B---→ Berkman, 1B/OF----→(?)
C	Piazza-----→ McCann-----→(?) Kendall-----→
P	(88) Maddux-----→ Webb-----→ (Kershaw?)
P	(89) Smoltz-----→ Johnson-----→ Carpenter-----→(?)
P	K.Brown-----→ Oswalt-----→
P	P.Martinez-----→
P	Glavine-----→ Zambrano-----→ Lincecum-→(?)
P	Schilling-----→ Peavy-----→ (Cain ?)
RP	Hoffman-----→ Wagner-----→ Bell-----→(?)
	93 94 95 96 97 98 99 00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08 09 10 11