

Winter Meetings Preview – American League

Winter Meetings 2019

1st Place: Toronto Blue Jays

The Jays will continue beating teams the way they have been for the past few years – by doing it with pitching. Toronto boasts the top starting rotation in the league. Their pen isn't too shabby either, as they boast dominant lefty Josh Hader. But they do need to add a couple more electric arms for the pen.

Their offense will be scrappy enough to squeak out enough runs to win most games, but it will never be pretty. Hitting stars like Anthony Rizzo, Buster Posey, Brian Dozier, and Odubel Herrera are not as strong as they have been in years past. Toronto did add slugger Nolan Arenado in a big trade to bolster the offense.

Winter Meetings Activity:

Toronto only has 5 draft picks (surprisingly) – a 1st, a 3rd, and three 4th's. They will have to invest the top 2 picks on relievers if they hope to solidify this team's vaunted pitching staff. That means the offense will be what it already is. But they do have \$125+ in salary to spend should they see fit in going after any offensive players in free agency.

What Marchie could do: Use his bottom 1st rounder to take an electric reliever like a Jose LeClerc, and continue adding to the pen in later rounds. Free agency could be where he improves a couple of his offensive positions.

2nd Place: Kansas City Royals

The long, long rebuilding seems to be finally over! KC has assembled what is likely the top or near-top offense in the league. Judge, Dahl, the soon to be drafted Acuna, Turner, Chapman, Choo, the list goes on. The pitching isn't too shabby either. They added a true ace in Justin Verlander, to further strengthen an already good rotation. The pen is fairly solid as it stands with Sean Doolittle and Jeremy Jeffress as co-closers.

Winter Meetings Activity:

KC is in the enviable position of going into the WM's with a full lineup ready to go. Which means that anything they do at the Meetings is only going to further strengthen this team. KC has 6 draft picks, and \$130 in salary. It should be a two-team race in the AL between KC and Toronto.

What could Mike G do: He has four 3rd round picks – this is where he upgrades the bullpen and picks up a couple of young potential players for future depth, a luxury you have when your team is already set before the Meetings. In free agency, sky's the limit. Do they add an impact bat like a Joey Votto, even though they have Matt Olson at 1st? Do they go after a Clayton Kershaw and further fortify their rotation? Money is no object.

3rd Place: California Angels

The Angels continue to grind out wins and playoff appearances, as they alternate between relying on their pitching one game, to relying on their hitting the next. They always seem to have just enough pieces in order to find ways to win. This year's edition features some strong hitters in guys like Jed Lowrie, Justin Smoak, Nelson Cruz, Jean Segura, and David Peralta. But then the hitting nose dives to the likes of Josh Harrison & Billy Hamilton.

On the pitching side, they will need 2 additional starting pitchers, and depth in the bullpen behind closer Roberto Osuna and set-up man David Robertson.

Winter Meetings Activity:

They have 4 draft picks, but 3 of these are in the first 2 rounds. This will be huge. They also have about \$50 in salary.

What Mike T could do: Use his 7th overall 1st rounder to take Miguel Andujar, solving the abyss at 3rd base and adding yet another hitter to the lineup. Use the high 2nd rounder to grab a starting pitcher, and the bottom 2nd on a reliever. In free agency, he can add one more relief pitcher and another starting pitcher.

4th Place: Seattle Mariners

Coming off a season when pretty much everything went wrong, Seattle suddenly looks to be back. Their resurgence is led by the starting rotation. They feature Blake Snell and Gerrit Cole at the top, but they are 5-deep and set. They have a bona fide closer, and a deep bullpen. The problem is the offense. Their best hitter is Giancarlo Stanton, and he is not what you'd call a top impact bat. And it gets a lot worse from there. And they have no 1st baseman and no CF'er. Shoring up the offense will be the challenge, and will either make or break the M's season.

Winter Meetings Activity:

They have 5 draft picks, with 3 of these in the first 21 selections. They also have about \$175 in salary.

What Menas could do: Use his 1st overall to take either Shohei Ohtani or Juan Soto, which adds a big bat to the offense. The two high 2nd's will yield something of value – either a dominant set-up man to add to the pitching, or 2 hitters. They will have to figure out what positions they can fill best through the rookie draft, and which positions can be filled through free agency. Speaking of spending some money for a change, how good would Joey Votto look on this team, batting ahead of a Soto and a Stanton? If Seattle comes to the Meetings prepared and ready to wheel and deal, they can transform this team from a borderline playoff team into a Top 3 AL club with serious contender status.

5th Place: Oakland A's

They say that all dynasties eventually have to come back down to earth, as that type of success in the world of salary caps and 10-year player careers is not sustainable. Oakland has been at the top for a long time, although they have had a couple of down years before, but always seem to get back up fairly quickly. We shall see if they do the same with this squad.

The A's advantage was always pitching, yet, looking at this roster, its hard to find much of it. Sure, Madison Bumgarner is back, but how much can one expect from a lefty? But where would this team be without Walker Buehler? Still, Oakland needs 2 more starting pitchers, and at least 2 relievers. More bleeding on offense, as all that is left from an intimidating run-producing machine is JT Realmuto and Jose Ramirez. Oakland has starters for all 9 positions, but they could use upgrading in several of these.

Winter Meetings Activity:

They have 3 draft picks, all of their own, which will be in either the 15th or 16th slot. They also have about \$70 in salary.

What Pete could do: The 1st rounder is a coin flip – take a starting pitcher in hopes of getting you into the final playoff spot next fall, or, say screw it and grab an underager. It will be very telling to see what Pete does with this pick. If Oakland does try to get the team into a playoff spot, a pitcher with the 1st round pick, and a reliever with the 2nd rounder figure to make sense. In free agency, an upgrade over their current offensive options may be the way to go, or at least sign a couple of platoon partners.

6th Place: Chicago White Sox

The Sox continue to struggle with finding quality pitching, which is a shame because their offense has been in the top 3 each year the past several seasons. But that elusive pitching is what holds them back. This year they enter with 2 solid starters in Mike Foltnewicz and Joe Musgrove, but need to find 3 warm bodies to fill out the rotation. Luckily the bullpen is a strength for this team. So it would seem they have to make a full-court press on finding starting pitchers.

Winter Meetings Activity:

They have 3 draft picks, a 1st, a 2nd, and a 4th. They also have about \$70 in salary.

What Neil could do: The 1st rounder screams Jack Flaherty for a team that desperately needs front line pitching. The 2nd rounder can also net them a good starting pitcher, say a Derreck Rodriguez sort. And in free agency, they can add a couple more offensive pieces, especially an upgrade at 1st base.

7th Place: Boston Red Sox

The Red Sox magical 2-year run which included a World Series Championship and then 1 hit away from a repeat World Series appearance seems to be coming to a thud. Their pitching is in disarray, and their offense is littered with singles hitters. It will take multiple Winter Meetings to sort out this mess.

Winter Meetings Activity:

They have 2 draft picks, a 1st, a 2nd. They also have about \$45 in salary.

What Cam could do: This has to be about rebuilding. The team is covered at all positions, its just that none of them are very good. So leave the starters as is for this season, but grab yourself some youth. The 1st rounder is sitting at #9. Take the best young player available. Same with your 2nd rounder. In free agency, perhaps it makes sense to stay away from any large contracts, setting yourself up for a run in a year's time.

8th Place: Cleveland Indians

Their young GM wheeled and dealt his way to a championship-caliber team the past 3 seasons, but alas, the team was unable to get to the promised land, and now, the rebuilding begins. They do have the advantage of starting their rebuild with a few superstars in Jose Altuve, Carlos Correia, and Kris Bryant, so this rebuild may not take several years. They still have some nice trade chips to cash in, but they would have to replace whatever position they deal, and, they do need a 1st baseman, outfield help, and an entire bullpen other than closer just to field a team.

Winter Meetings Activity:

They have 2 draft picks, a 2nd and a 4th. They also have about \$120 in salary.

What Allan could do: Luckily for Cleveland fans, the Indians have only 2 draft picks, and only one of them has much value, so the chances of Cleveland being tempted to take a 1-year wonder are slim. This has to be a future-only player. As for free agency, the Indians have the payroll room to be players, and that could be a problem. Allan can't resist the bright lights and rarified air of a Vegas casino, he just wants to be in the centre of the action. Signing aging free agents to long contracts is not the right move for where this team is at. The smart thing would be to sign no one and save the spending space for next winter when the team should be in a position to contend for a playoff spot.

Projected Standings (based on anticipated winter meetings moves)

1. Toronto	48-29	---
2. Kansas City	47-30	2.0
3. California	43-34	7.0
4. Seattle	41-36	10.0
5. Oakland	39-38	13.0
6. White Sox	38-39	14.0
7. Boston	28-49	22.0
8. Cleveland	24-53	28.0