



NATIONALS

Barry Svrluga's analysis and projected batting order

1
2B
Felipe Lopez

2
SS
Cristian Guzman

3
3B
Ryan Zimmerman

4
RF
Austin Kearns

5
CF
Ryan Church

6
1B
Dmitri Young

7
LF
Kory Casto

8
C
Brian Schneider

9
P
Starting Pitcher

[3B] Ryan Zimmerman Backup: Ronnie Belliard

Here are the standards Zimmerman set during a stellar rookie year in 2006: He hit more doubles (47) than all but one rookie in National League history (Brooklyn's Johnny Frederick in 1929); only two NL rookies since 1953 drove in more than his 110 runs (and their last names are Piazza and Pujols); and, by GM Jim Bowden's estimation, "he should have won the Gold Glove." Can those results be matched in his second full year? Last season, no player in baseball had as many at-bats (198) with runners in scoring position as did Zimmerman, so his .323 batting average in such situations led to 85 of his RBI. He no longer has Alfonso Soriano hitting in front of him, nor does he have Nick Johnson hitting behind him. Yet Zimmerman has a simple plan for improving his numbers. "I think if I cut down on my strikeouts, I'll walk more," he said. Only two players in the National League who hit fewer than Zimmerman's 20 homers struck out more than his 120 times. The bigger burden, though: being the face of the franchise. The answer from within: No problem. "I'm telling you," Acta said, "this kid's special."



IMPACT
PLAYER

2006 STATISTICS			
Games: 157	Average: .287	Doubles: 47	OBP: .351
At-bats: 614	Hits: 176	Triples: 3	Slugging: .471
Runs: 84	RBI: 110	Homers: 20	Steals: 11
		Errors: 15	

VITAL STATISTICS		
Number: 11	Age: 22	Experience: 1 year 32 days
Height: 6-3	Bats: Right	Throws: Right
Weight: 210		Salary: \$400,000

[C] Brian Schneider Backups: Jesus Flores, Robert Fick

By this point, entering his sixth full major league season, we should know what Schneider is — a .256 career hitter who, last season, chimed in with a career-high 55 RBI despite a woefully slow start. But Acta wants more. "He should have 65, 70 RBI — easy," Acta said. Never mind his career high in homers is 12 (in 2004); he's supposed to hit at least 15 this year. Thus begins a significant season for Schneider — offensively, defensively and in the clubhouse. He will be counted on not only to be more consistent at the plate, but with the outright upheaval on the pitching staff, he is expected to take charge of a starting rotation that could be wildly unstable. "We don't have a veteran presence on the mound," Acta said, "somebody that could probably overrule him in game-calling. He's taken that seriously and getting it done." Schneider, 30, also must reestablish himself as one of the National League's premier defensive catchers. "I know it's a big year for me," he said, "and I think I'm ready."



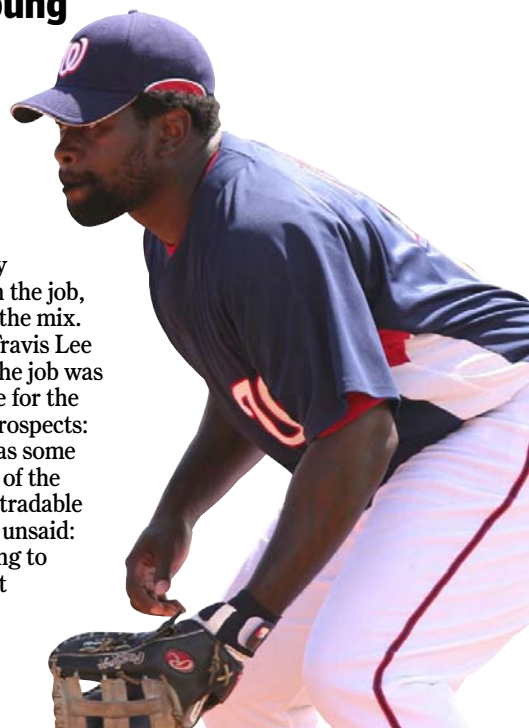
IMPACT
PLAYER

2006 STATISTICS			
Games: 124	Average: .256	Doubles: 18	OBP: .320
At-bats: 410	Hits: 105	Triples: 0	Slugging: .329
Runs: 30	RBI: 55	Homers: 4	Steals: 2
			Errors: 5

VITAL STATISTICS		
Number: 23	Age: 30	Experience: 5 years 125 days
Height: 6-1	Bats: Left	Throws: Right
Weight: 196		Salary: \$3.5 million

[1B] Dmitri Young Backup: Robert Fick

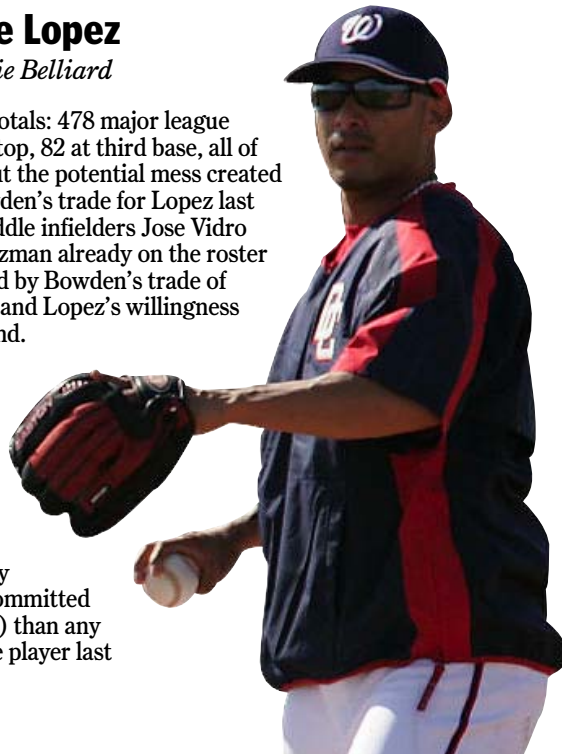
He arrived this spring as an overweight, troubled veteran stuck on the back fields — an afterthought. But because prospect Larry Broadway couldn't win the job, Young was thrust into the mix. When fellow veteran Travis Lee opted for retirement, the job was Young's. The best hope for the Nationals' long-term prospects: Young shows he still has some power from both sides of the plate, and he becomes tradable in July or August. Left unsaid: This team is really going to miss Nick Johnson, out indefinitely with a broken leg.



2006 STATISTICS			VITAL STATISTICS	
Games: 48	Doubles: 4	Walks: 11	Number: 21	Height: 6-2
At-bats: 172	Triples: 1	Strikeouts: 39	Age: 33	Weight: 245
Runs: 19	Homers: 7	OBP: .293	Experience: 10 years 8 days	Bats: Switch
Hits: 43	RBI: 23	Slugging: .407	Throws: Right	
Average: .250	Steals: 1	Errors: 3	Salary: \$500,000	

[2B] Felipe Lopez Backup: Ronnie Belliard

Lopez's career totals: 478 major league games at shortstop, 82 at third base, all of 12 at second. But the potential mess created by GM Jim Bowden's trade for Lopez last July — with middle infielders Jose Vidro and Cristian Guzman already on the roster — was alleviated by Bowden's trade of Vidro to Seattle and Lopez's willingness to move to second. "I know it's best for the team," Lopez said, and Acta and Bowden have raved about Lopez's attitude. Lopez also was a sloppy shortstop. He committed more errors (28) than any National League player last year.



2006 STATISTICS			VITAL STATISTICS	
Games: 156	Doubles: 27	Walks: 81	Number: 2	Height: 6-1
At-bats: 617	Triples: 3	Strikeouts: 126	Age: 26	Weight: 185
Runs: 98	Homers: 11	OBP: .358	Experience: 4 years 27 days	Bats: Switch
Hits: 169	RBI: 52	Slugging: .381	Throws: Right	
Average: .274	Steals: 44	Errors: 28	Salary: \$3.9 million	

[SS] Cristian Guzman Backup: Josh Wilson

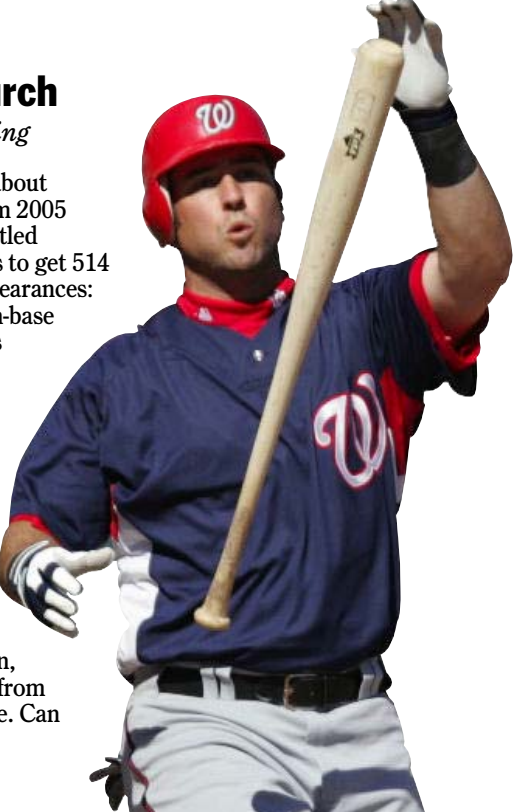
Perhaps nothing exemplifies the state of the Nationals' development better than that Guzman, who has a career on-base percentage of .298, is slated to be the second batter every game. How bad was Guzman's 2005 (before he missed all of last season with a shoulder injury)? Only one regular since 1992 (Kansas City's Neifi Perez in 2002) posted a lower on-base plus slugging percentage than Guzman's .574. Here's what the Nationals would accept: the player from 1999 to '04, the one they signed for four years, \$16.8 million, a .266 average and .303 on-base percentage. Still, the NL average for No. 2 hitters in 2005: a .269 average and .331 OBP.



2005 STATISTICS			VITAL STATISTICS	
Games: 142	Doubles: 19	Walks: 25	Number: 15	Height: 6-0
At-bats: 456	Triples: 6	Strikeouts: 76	Age: 29	Weight: 195
Runs: 39	Homers: 4	OBP: .260	Experience: 6 years 41 days	Bats: Switch
Hits: 100	RBI: 31	Slugging: .314	Throws: Right	
Average: .219	Steals: 7	Errors: 15	Salary: \$4.2 million	

[CF] Ryan Church Backup: Chris Snelling

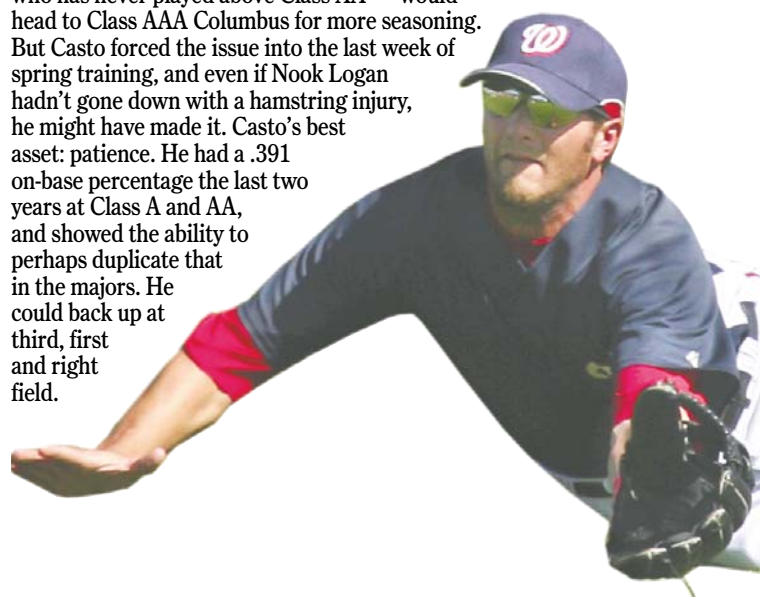
Much has been made about Church's numbers from 2005 and 2006, when he battled injuries and demotions to get 514 major league plate appearances: a .282 average, .359 on-base percentage, 19 homers and 77 RBI. "That's a pretty good season," Acta said. Nook Logan's groin injury gives Church the job in center — temporarily. Logan, a defensive whiz who is a suspect hitter, is supposed to be the center fielder all season, provided he improves from the left side of the plate. Can Church hang on to an everyday job?



2006 STATISTICS			VITAL STATISTICS	
Games: 71	Doubles: 17	Walks: 26	Number: 19	Height: 6-1
At-bats: 196	Triples: 1	Strikeouts: 60	Age: 28	Weight: 220
Runs: 22	Homers: 10	OBP: .366	Experience: 1 year 152 days	Bats: Left
Hits: 54	RBI: 35	Slugging: .526	Throws: Left	
Average: .276	Steals: 6	Errors: 2	Salary: \$395,000	

[LF] Kory Casto Backup: Chris Snelling

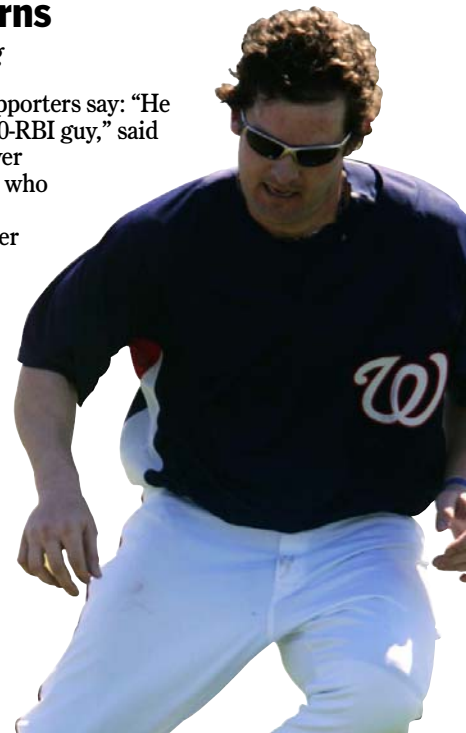
The easy bet when spring began was that Casto — who has never played above Class AA — would head to Class AAA Columbus for more seasoning. But Casto forced the issue into the last week of spring training, and even if Nook Logan hadn't gone down with a hamstring injury, he might have made it. Casto's best asset: patience. He had a .391 on-base percentage the last two years at Class A and AA, and showed the ability to perhaps duplicate that in the majors. He could back up at third, first and right field.



2006 MINOR LEAGUE STATISTICS			VITAL STATISTICS	
Games: 140	Doubles: 24	Walks: 81	Number: 5	Height: 6-1
At-bats: 489	Triples: 6	Strikeouts: 104	Age: 25	Weight: 195
Runs: 84	Homers: 20	OBP: .379	Experience: None	Bats: Left
Hits: 133	RBI: 80	Slugging: .468	Throws: Right	
Average: .272	Steals: 6	Errors: 16	Salary: \$380,000	

[RF] Austin Kearns Backup: Chris Snelling

Here is what Kearns's supporters say: "He should be a 30-homer, 100-RBI guy," said Nationals director of player development Bob Boone, who managed Kearns in Cincinnati. Kearns's career highs: 24 homers and 86 RBI, both set in a career-high 150 games last year, when he was traded at the all-star break by the Reds. The Nationals, who signed Kearns to a three-year, \$17.5 million contract, clearly believe he has the potential to be part of the future. But to truly make his mark, his career batting average of .265 and slugging percentage of .463 must go up.



2006 STATISTICS			VITAL STATISTICS	
Games: 150	Doubles: 33	Walks: 76	Number: 25	Height: 6-3
At-bats: 537	Triples: 2	Strikeouts: 135	Age: 26	Weight: 245
Runs: 86	Homers: 24	OBP: .363	Experience: 4 years 145 days	Bats: Right
Hits: 142	RBI: 86	Slugging: .467	Throws: Right	
Average: .264	Steals: 9	Errors: 7	Salary: \$3.5 million	