The Hardball Times Graphical Report

July 21, 2010

Welcome to the Hardball Times Graphical Report. In these pages, you'll find division standings and graphs highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each team. First, though, here is one of this week's highlights from THT Live. Be sure to check for new content daily at www.hardballtimes.com. (All stats courtesy of Fangraphs.com).

Bengie Molina and the cycle

by Jeff Sackmann

Last Friday, Bengie Molina hit for the cycle. Yep, you can pick your jaw up off the ground now.

The very idea of Molina hitting for a cycle is crazy enough, but it goes further. First, his home run was a grand slam. That's only the eighth time in baseball history a player has hit for a cycle including a grand slam. Second, he only got four at-bats—he came out for a pinch-runner after legging out his triple. Third, his three extra-base hits were nearly all of what the Rangers produced; a Nelson Cruz double was the fourth and only other XBH for Texas.

I wrote an article a few weeks back about the odds of a cycle. It certainly seems as if the odds of Molina getting a cycle are about as low as it gets. But as it turns out, they aren't quite that bad. (And now, the odds of Molina hitting for the cycle this year are 100%.)

In the most recent public run of CHONE hitter projections, Sean did just over 1500 players. I used the same process I described in my article to calculate the odds of the cycle for everybody. Ranking all the hitters CHONE projected by "cycle odds," Molina comes out 845th. Nothing to brag about, but not as bad as you'd expect for one of the slowest players in the game. Below him are guys like Ryan Garko, Edwin Encarnacion, Tony Gwynn, and Chipper Jones.

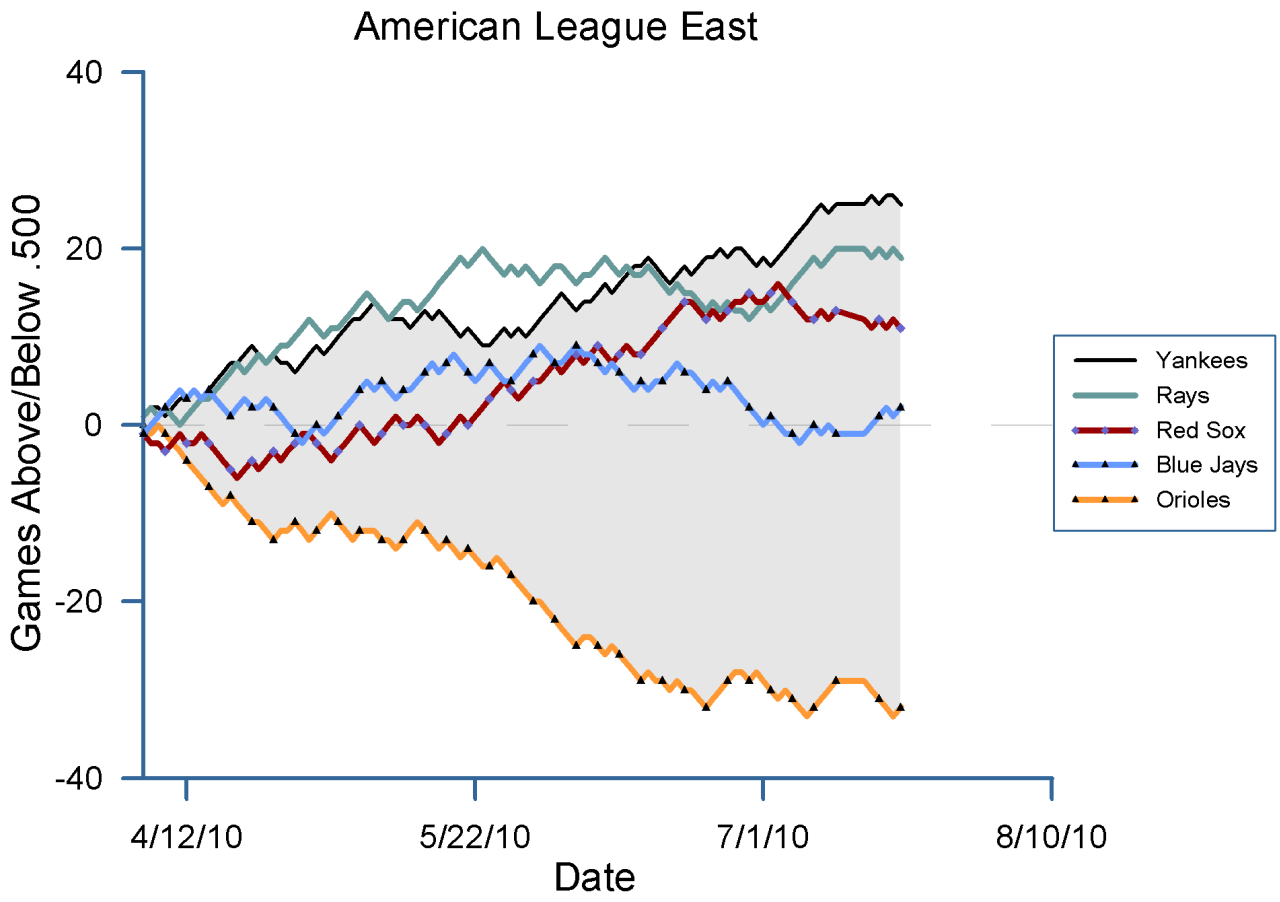
A player's chances of hitting for the cycle depend heavily on his likelihood of hitting a triple, but it isn't just that. Obviously, it helps to be a good hitter (you gotta get four hits!), and you need to have some power. That's why Gwynn ranks so low—he has a relatively good shot at getting the triple in any given game, but for him, the home run is the challenge. Molina isn't a great hitter, nor is he a monster power hitter. But he is reasonably good at everything relevant except for the triple.

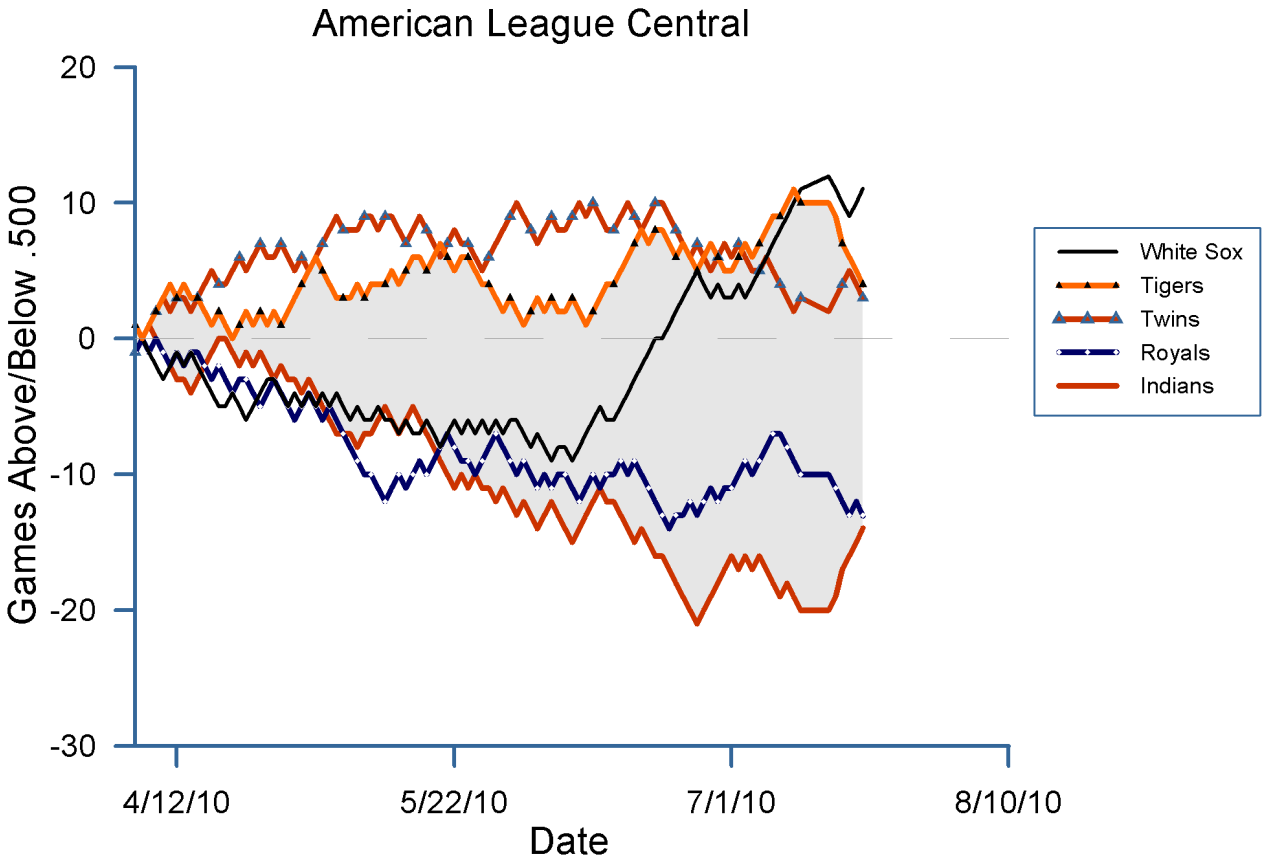
Bengie's chances of a cycle in 150 games, given his current skill level, are about 0.42 percent. That's less than one-eighth the chance of Curtis Granderson. But hey, it's better than his brother Jose, who isn't projected to hit any triples. As a result, his chances of hitting for a cycle are a nice, round zero.

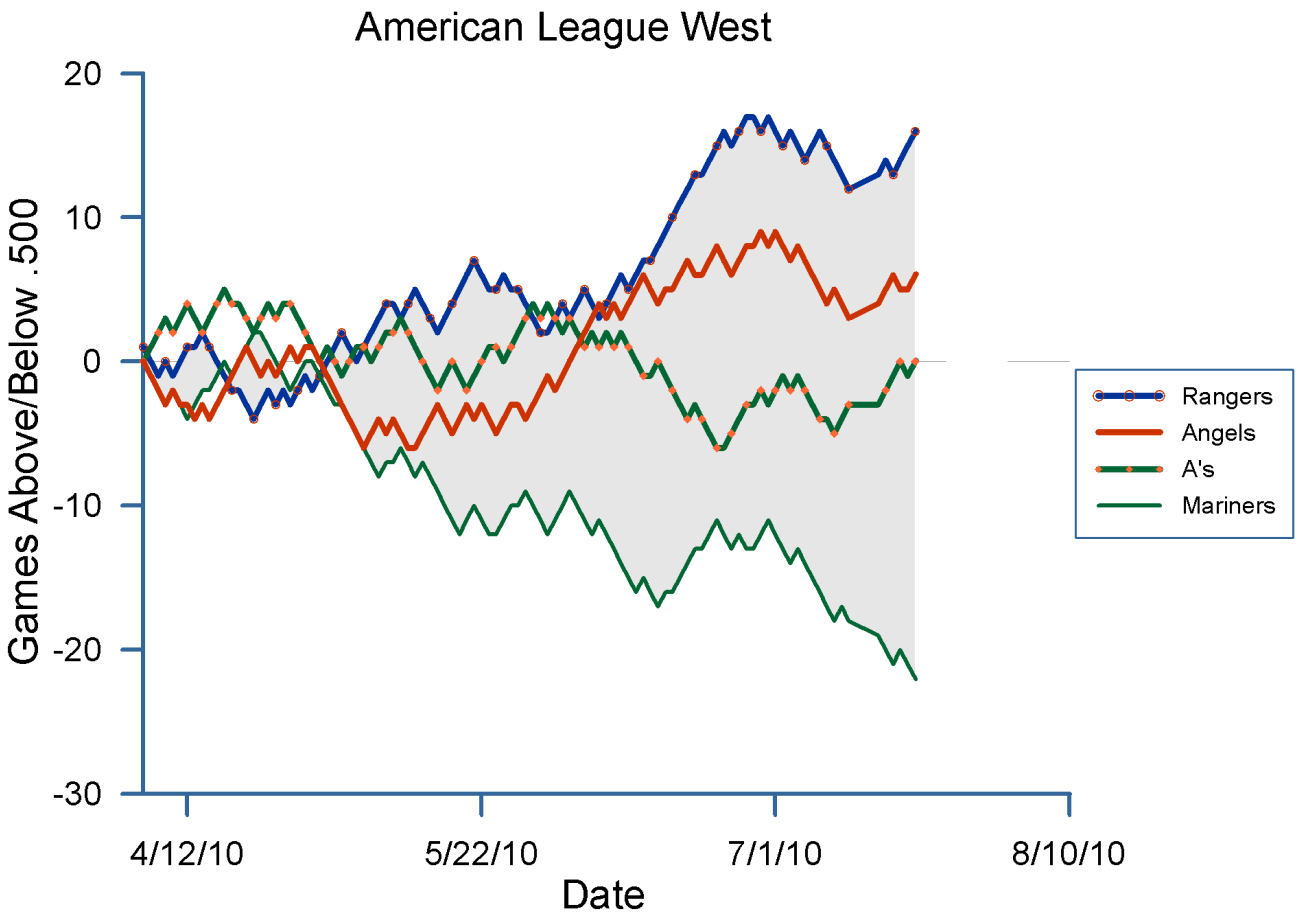
Division Standings

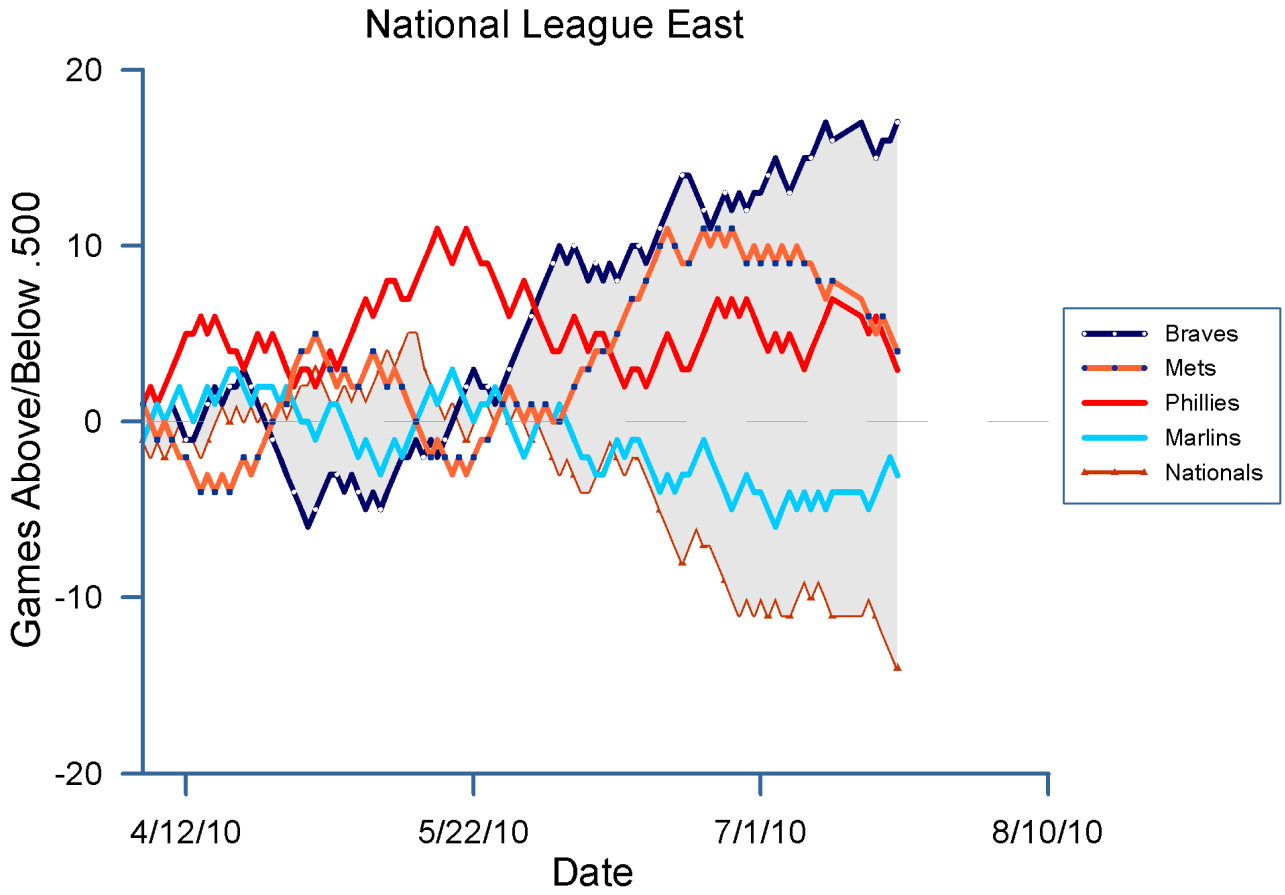
7/21/2010									Win Probability Added		
American League East				**RS**	**RA**	**PWINS**	**DIFF**	**Close**	**Bat**	**Starters**	**Bullpen**
NYY	58	34	.630	490	381	57	1	23-15	4.20	6.25	1.55
TBR	56	37	.602	481	370	58	-2	24-20	0.17	4.07	5.26
BOS	53	41	.564	498	435	53	-0	25-24	0.20	2.96	2.84
TOR	48	46	.511	438	418	49	-1	17-25	0.20	1.33	-0.54
BAL	30	63	.323	341	501	30	-0	18-26	-9.44	-5.25	-1.81
American League Central											
CHW	52	41	.559	423	388	50	2	25-23	-1.86	4.11	3.24
DET	48	44	.522	415	427	45	3	21-19	0.97	-2.27	3.30
MIN	49	45	.521	439	406	50	-1	21-20	-1.49	0.86	2.62
KCR	40	53	.430	403	474	39	1	22-25	-5.78	-2.07	1.35
CLE	40	54	.426	395	455	41	-1	19-22	-4.94	-1.94	-0.11
American League West											
TEX	55	39	.585	490	396	56	-1	27-21	3.30	0.37	4.34
LAA	51	45	.531	441	451	47	4	26-17	-3.36	3.45	2.91
OAK	47	47	.500	395	383	48	-1	21-21	-5.31	3.60	1.71
SEA	36	58	.383	312	406	36	-0	20-27	-9.22	2.80	-4.58
									Win Probability Added		
National League East				**RS**	**RA**	**PWINS**	**DIFF**	**Close**	**Bat**	**Starters**	**Bullpen**
ATL	55	38	.591	429	360	54	1	23-20	5.06	0.19	3.26
NYM	49	45	.521	408	377	50	-1	20-31	-3.17	4.50	0.67
PHI	48	45	.516	434	405	50	-2	21-17	-0.15	1.88	-0.23
FLA	45	48	.484	416	406	48	-3	26-25	-3.77	2.84	-0.56
WSN	40	54	.426	379	436	41	-1	26-27	-6.22	-1.54	0.76
National League Central											
STL	53	41	.564	428	346	56	-3	23-22	0.97	3.85	1.18
CIN	53	42	.558	463	405	53	-0	30-24	4.23	1.72	-0.45
CHC	43	52	.453	406	441	44	-1	19-30	-6.04	1.41	0.13
MIL	43	52	.453	452	503	43	0	21-18	0.33	-2.66	-2.16
HOU	38	56	.404	336	472	33	5	17-18	-4.69	-3.30	-1.01
PIT	33	60	.355	319	501	28	5	24-24	-7.40	-7.26	1.16
National League West											
SDP	54	38	.587	403	318	56	-2	28-20	-1.14	3.34	5.79
SFG	52	42	.553	417	345	55	-3	19-23	-0.25	4.09	1.17
COL	51	42	.548	452	405	51	-0	24-23	-1.39	2.10	3.78
LAD	49	45	.521	439	427	48	1	23-20	2.15	-1.55	1.39
ARI	36	58	.383	430	534	37	-1	19-25	-2.67	-0.99	-7.35

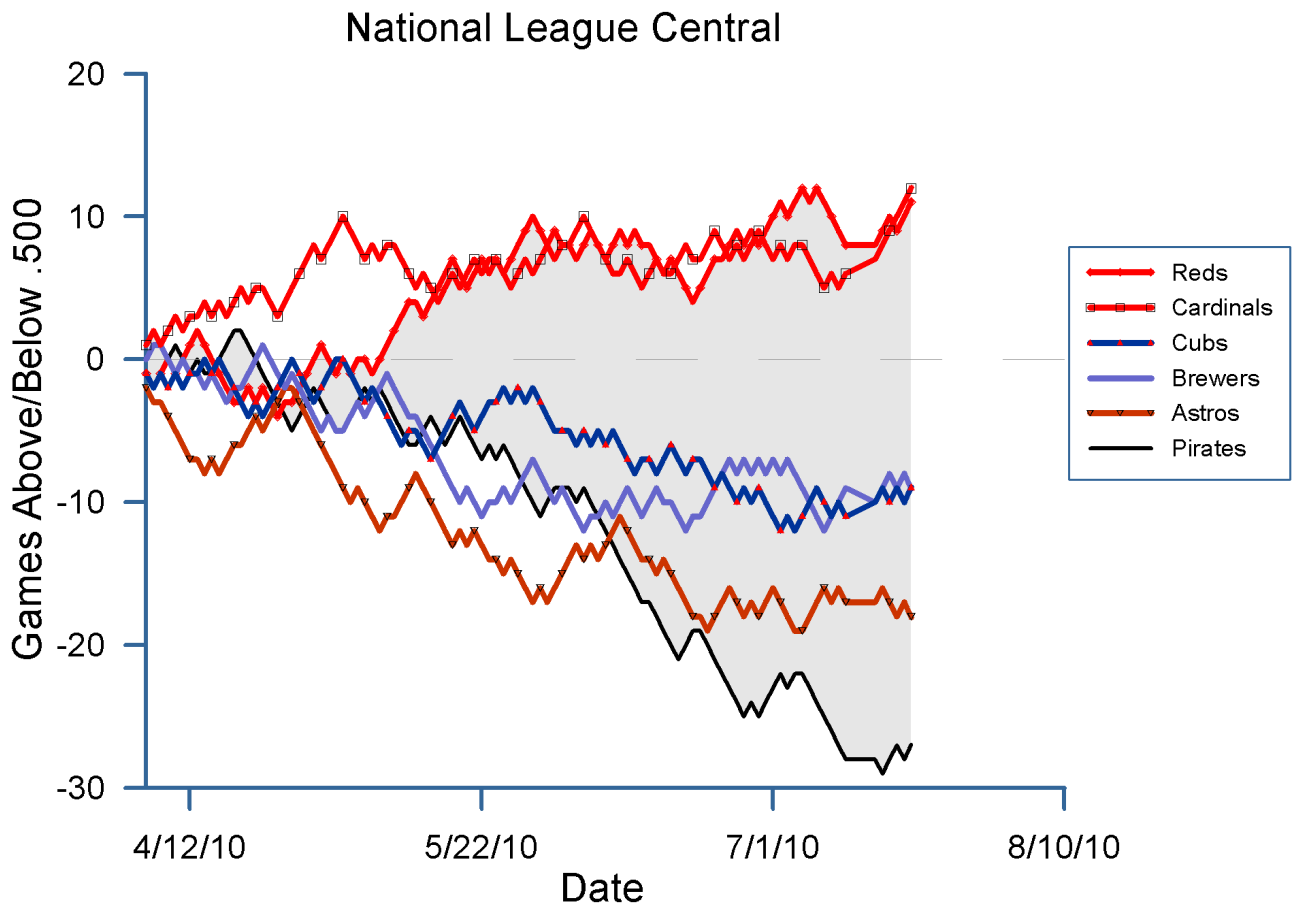
Notes: "PWins" stands for Pythagorean Wins (based on each team's runs scored and allowed). "Diff" is the difference between actual and Pythagorean wins. "Close" is each team's records in games decided by two runs or less.

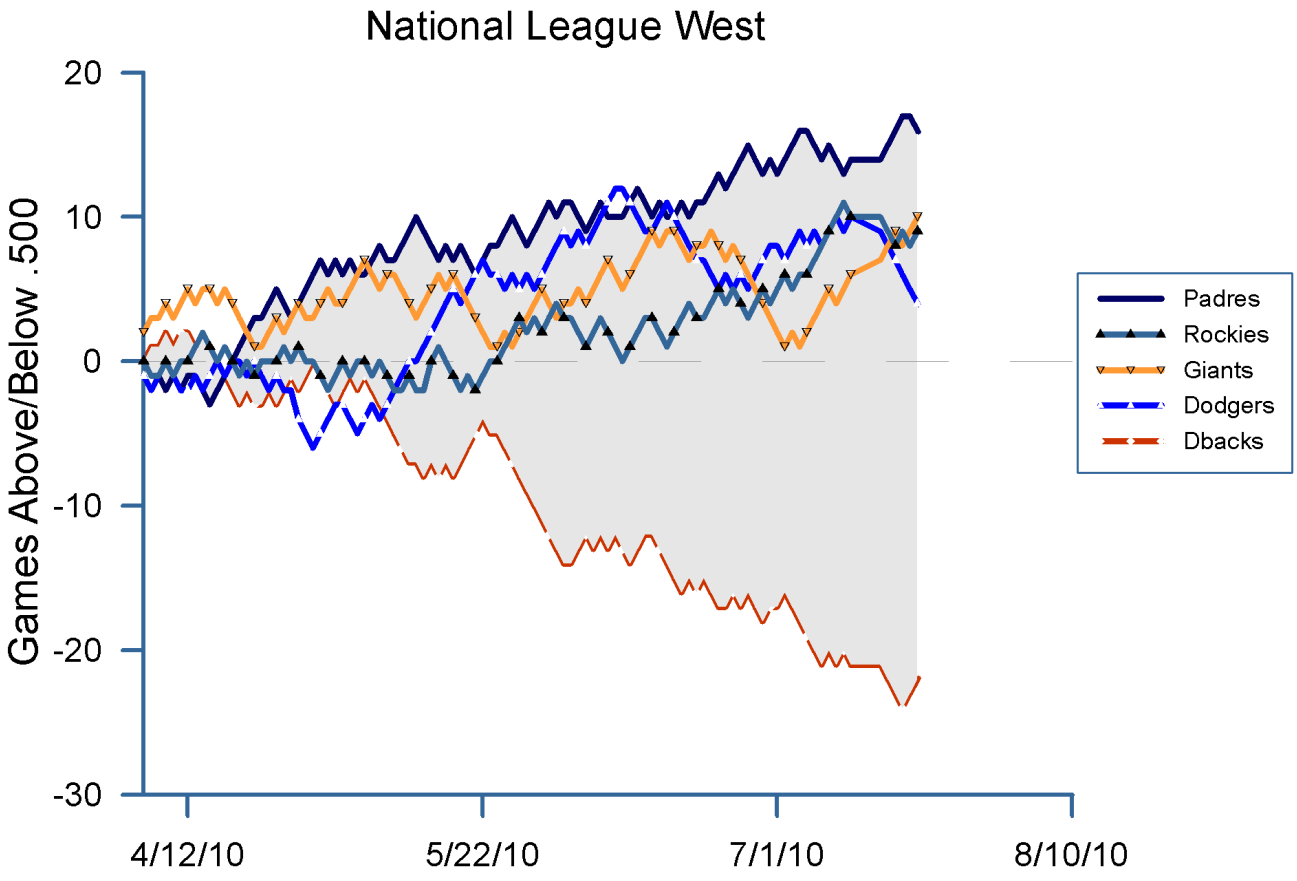

American League East
40
20
0
-20
-40
Games Above/Below .500
4/12/10
5/22/10
7/1/10
8/10/10
Date
Yankees
Rays
Red Sox
Blue Jays
Orioles


American League Central
20
10
0
-10
-20
-30
Games Above/Below .500
4/12/10
5/22/10
7/1/10
8/10/10
Date
White Sox
Tigers
Twins
Royals
Indians


American League West
20
10
0
-10
-20
-30
Games Above/Below .500
4/12/10
5/22/10
7/1/10
8/10/10
Date
Rangers
Angels
A's
Mariners


National League East
20
10
0
-10
-20
Games Above/Below .500
4/12/10
5/22/10
7/1/10
8/10/10
Date
Braves
Mets
Phillies
Marlins
Nationals


National League Central
Games Above/Below .500
20
10
0
-10
-20
-30
4/12/10
5/22/10
7/1/10
8/10/10
Date
Reds
Cardinals
Cubs
Brewers
Astros
Pirates

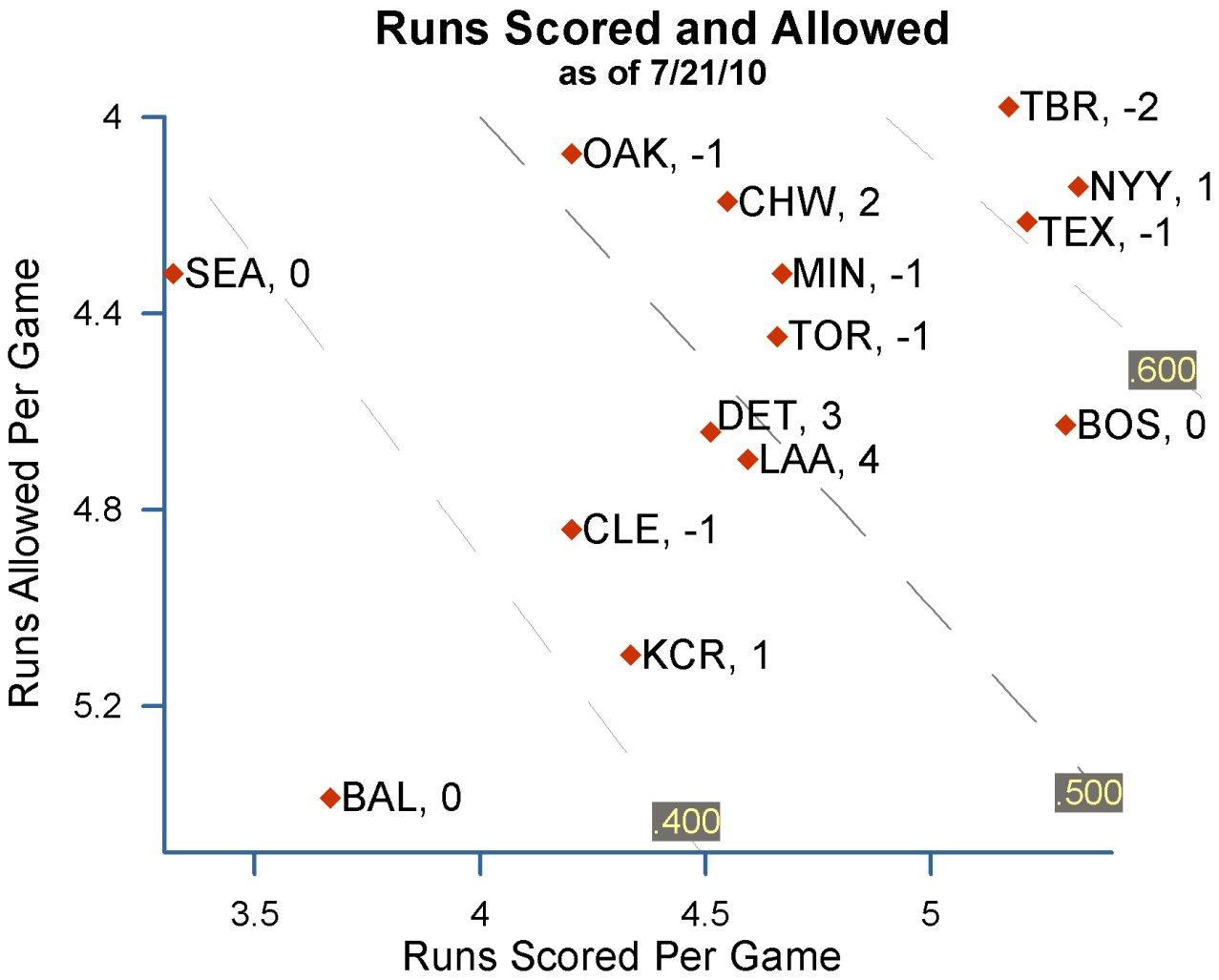

National League West
Games Above/Below .500
20
10
0
-10
-20
-30
4/12/10
5/22/10
7/1/10
8/10/10
Padres
Rockies
Giants
Dodgers
Dbacks

American League Diagnostic Graphs

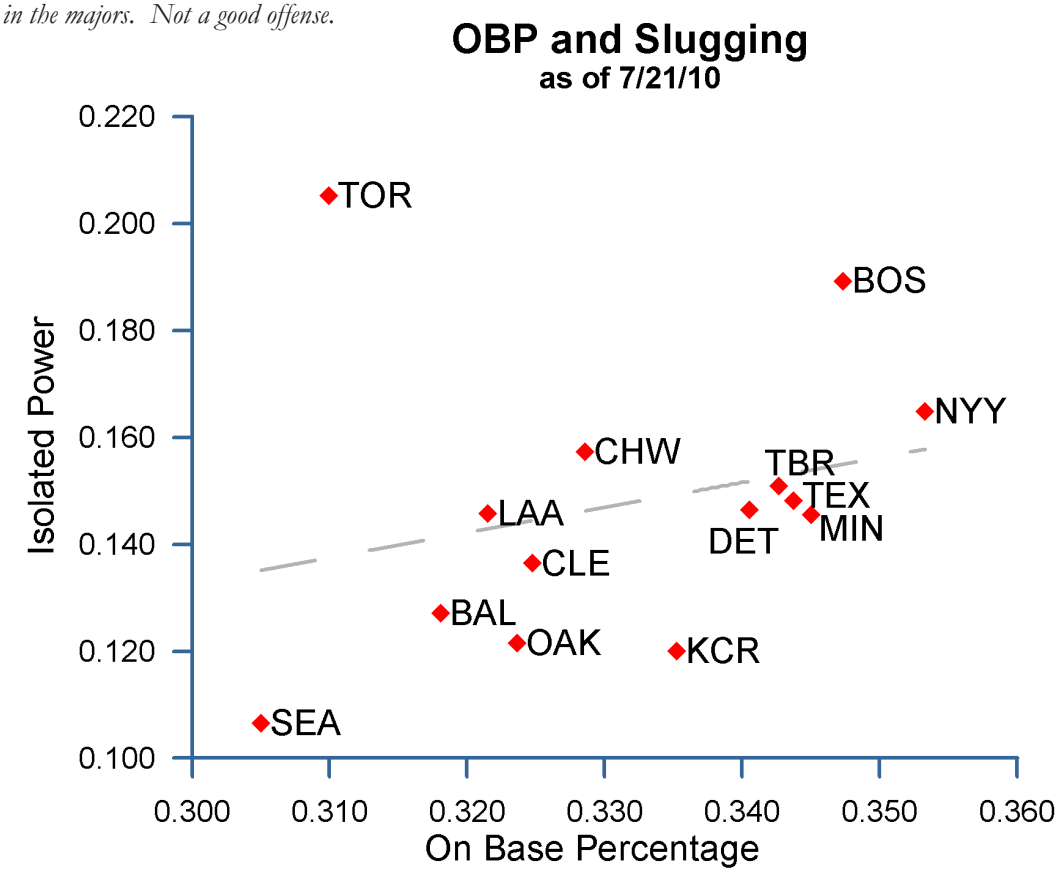
There are three graphs we like to use to get a handle on each team's strengths and weaknesses. Below is a graph of the average number of runs scored and allowed by each team. The graph is built so that the best teams are in the upper right-hand corner (lots of runs scored, fewer allowed) and the worst teams are in the lower left. High offense/bad pitching teams are in the lower right and low offense/good pitching teams are in the upper left. The dotted lines are "isotopes" and signify three different levels of winning percentage based on a number of runs scored and allowed anywhere on the graph. The number next to the team's label is its pythagorean variance–the number of wins it actually falls above or below its indicated place on the graph.

On the next page, you'll find two graphs. One breaks down each team's offensive strength by on-base percentage (OBP) and power (ISO, or slugging percentage minus batting average). The second graph breaks each team's defensive strength into pitching (FIP, which is based solely on strikeouts, walks and home runs allowed) and fielding (DER, which is the proportion of batted balls in play that have been turned into outs by the defense)..

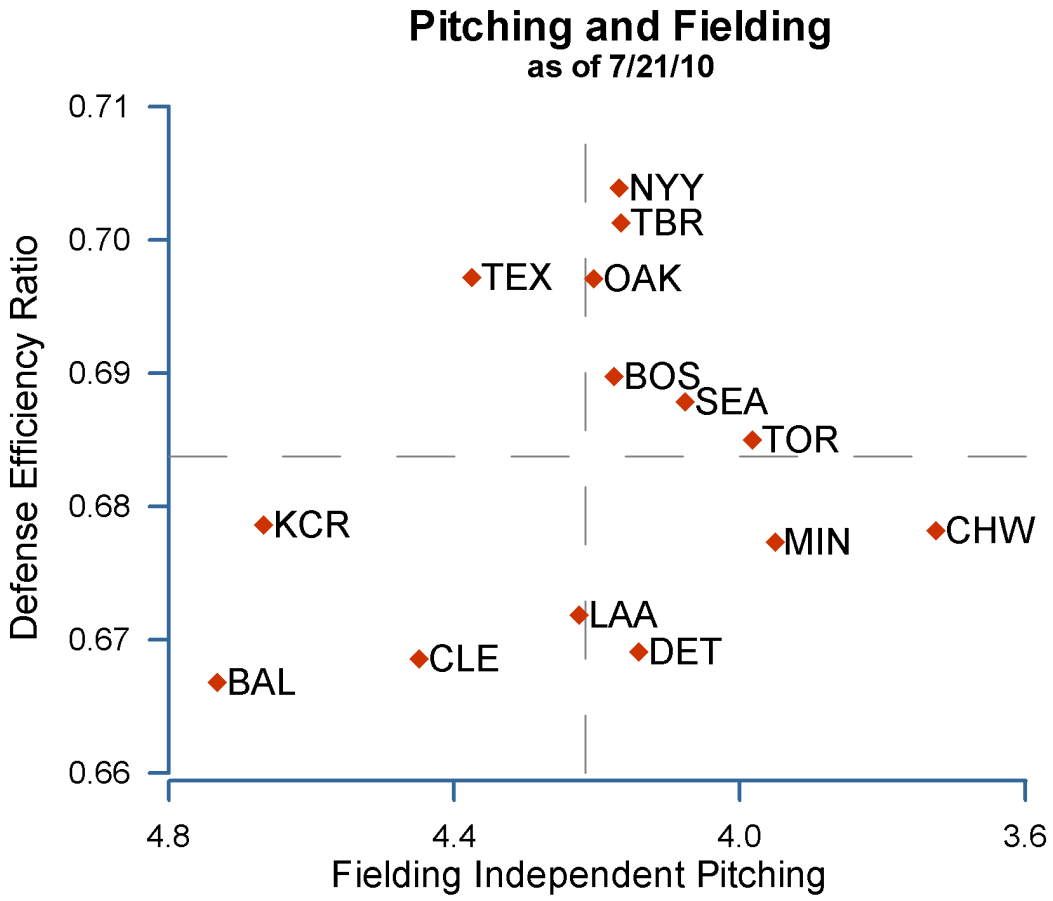
The Angels are not having a great year, but in one respect they continue to outperform the league: Their pythagorean variance is the largest in the AL (and the secret to their limited success). They won't catch Texas on their pythagorean variance, however.



The Royals lead the majors in batting average. That helps, because it boosts their on-base percentage, but the have the third-fewest walks and third-fewest home runs in the majors. Not a good offense.



The Orioles are to defense what the Mariners are to offense: terrible at both aspects of the craft.



National League Diagnostic Graphs

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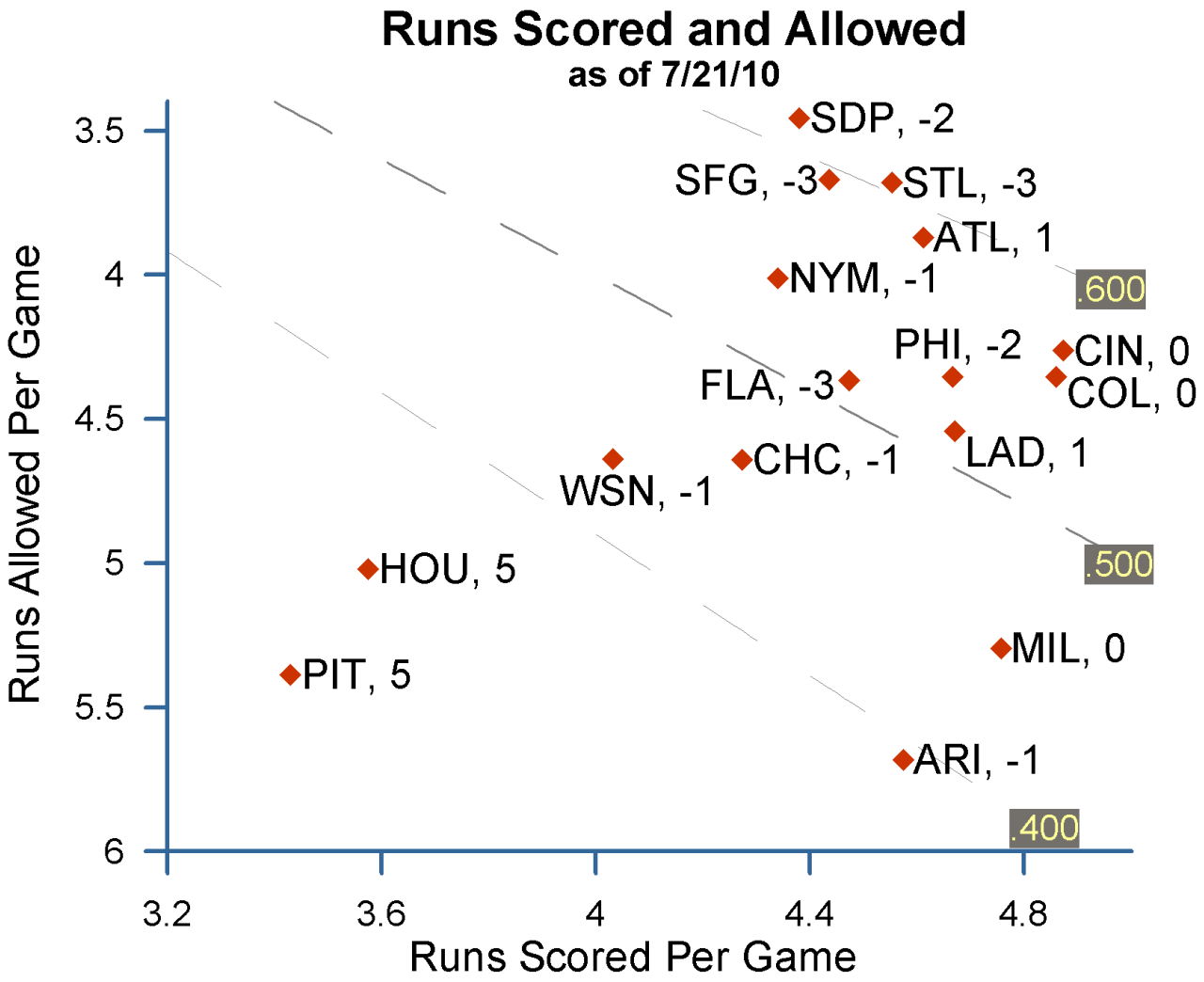
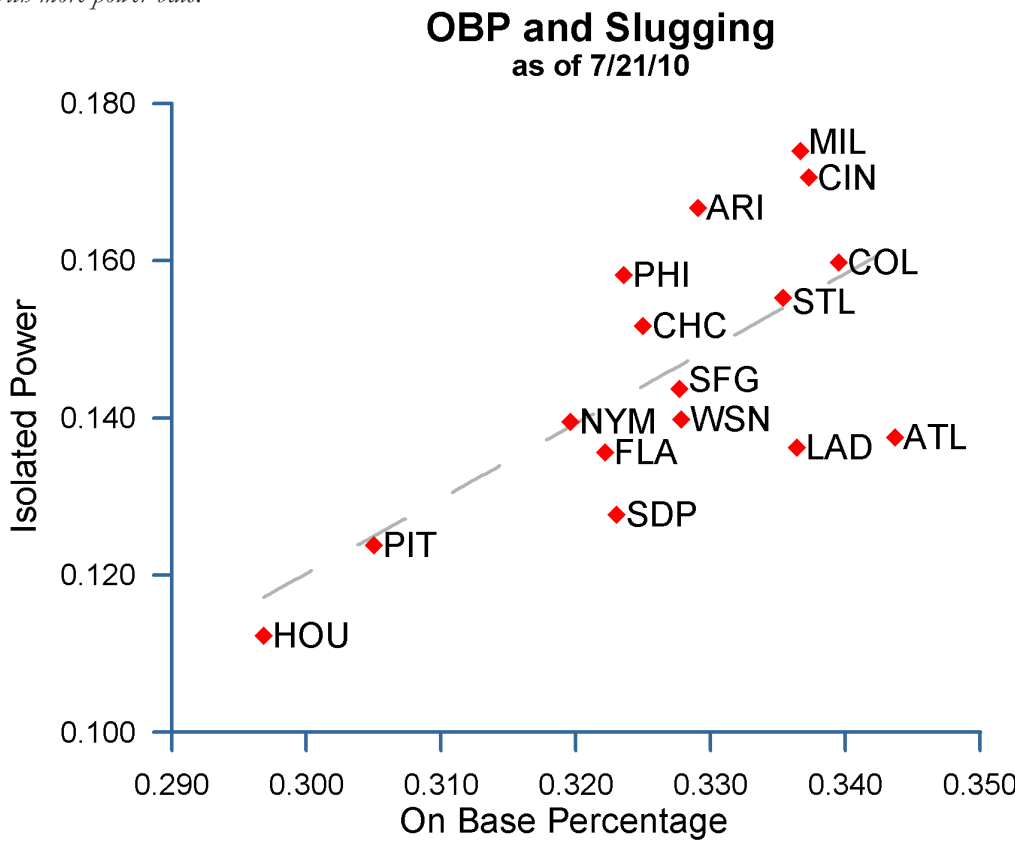
The three best teams in the National League, according to our graph, all have negative pythagorean variances, while the two worst teams have the best pythagorean variances in the majors. As a result, things are tighter than you might assume.



In gneneral, teams that are good at slugging also have good on-base percentages. Why walk someone with no power? Just think how much stronger the Braves would be with more power bats.



Houston's fine pitching has been undermined by its below-average fielding. Same deal wih the Dodgers and Marlins.