Knowledge is playoff power

Derek Jeter: The Yankees shortstop is hitting .509 (28-for-55) when he swings at first-pitch fastballs. **What he doesn't want you to know:** He's hitting just .113 on pitches low and away.

Albert Pujols: The Cardinals slugger is almost equally effective when hitting ahead (.329 batting average) and behind (.325) in the count. **What he doesn't want you to know:** He'll chase sliders low and away when behind in the count.

Johan Santana: The Twins ace held opposing batters to a .106 average when throwing a changeup while ahead in the count. **What he doesn't want you to know:** He has a tendency to hang his slider.

Scores of scouts go to detailed lengths for any postseason edge

By Paul White
USA TODAY

Striking out Mike Piazza. Beating Randy Johnson in a playoff series. Hitting a home run that will become immortalized. Winning the World Series. Those are just some of the feats players on eight major league teams will be trying to duplicate as baseball's postseason begins today. Many of 2006's October accomplishments will come, as in previous years, thanks to eight anonymous teams of baseball specialists—the advance scouts.

The men with the bats, balls and gloves will become part of the game's lore. Those with the radar guns and clipboards will have to be satisfied with quiet thank-yous.

"Without these men," says general manager Ken Williams, whose Chicago White Sox won the 2005 World Series, "with what they told us when we all sat around a table, I don't think I'd be looking at the trophy we have here."

They've been on the road for much if not all of September. They can tell you which batter never swings at the first pitch, which pitcher is having trouble getting his curveball over the plate, maybe even what sign from the third-base coach means bunt.

Major league teams routinely scout the opposition, a decades-old process that only recently has gone high-tech. Where managers used to get a thick binder full of everything short of which finger the

Please see COVER STORY next page

**Today's games**

**Oakland at Minnesota**
199 p.m., ESPN
**Starting pitchers:** A's LH Barry Zito (16-10, 3.83 ERA) vs. Twins LH Johan Santana (19-6, 2.77)

**St. Louis at San Diego**
4:09 p.m., ESPN
**Starting pitchers:** Cardinals RH Chris Carpenter (15-8, 3.09) vs. Padres RH Jake Peavy (11-14, 4.09)

**Detroit at New York Yankees**
8:05 p.m., Fox
**Starting pitchers:** Tigers LH Nate Robertson (1-3, 3.84) vs. Yankees Chien-Ming Wang (19-6, 3.65)

All times Eastern
time (at games) as we used to.”

Many teams purchase reports from private scouting services that watch every team all season, providing information such as charts showing where hitters hit the ball and grids identifying in what parts of the strike zone they're more likely to hit it.

They also receive printouts of every player's situation and against every opposing player. All are combined with traditional written reports from the scouts.

"It's incumbent upon us to mix them together," Dombrowski says.

Still, many baseball executives say there's no substitute for sitting, radar gun in hand, behind home plate — that's where you'll find a dozen or more scouts at games.

"Sometimes a scout in the stands might be able to pick signs from the other dugout," says Kevin Towers, San Diego Padres vice president and general manager. "Oh, yeah, that's critical. In the past, we've been able to do that pretty well."

"We see the subtleties," says Mack "Shooty" Babbitt, longtime scout of the Atlanta Braves and now with the Arizona Diamondbacks.

It's the little things

Occasionally, those subtleties can help make his team's future.

Remember Kirk Gibson's home run for the Los Angeles Dodgers off Cal Ripken Jr. in the 1988 World Series? Gibson knew from a report provided by Dodgers scout and former big-league manager Steve Rogers when Eckersley tended to throw his late-breaking slider, the pitch the hobbled Gibson hit for his game-winner.

New York Yankees scouts noticed before the 2000 World Series that Piazza, then with the Mets, almost never swung at the first pitch. Yankee pitchers almost always threw strike one across the middle of the plate to Piazza, repeatedly getting ahead in the count.

Piazza hit two homers in the series, neither of which affected the outcome of games. But the Yankees, who won the series 4-1, got him out in several key situations.

When the Baltimore Orioles upset the Seattle Mariners in a 1997 American League Division Series, they twice beat Johnson, who was 20-3 during the season, scoring eight runs and hitting three batters against him in 13 innings. Orioles players lauded their scouts but were careful not to reveal how they did it.

"Scouts are scouts," says Towers, who scouted for the Padres and Pittsburgh Pirates before he became Padres general manager in 1995. "They like to show you how much they know.

"How many advance scouts clubs deploy for postseason purposes can be a matter of whom you ask. The Yankees have a reputation of sparring no expense and unleashing a swarm on other playoff teams.

A few years ago, Minnesota Twins manager Ron Gardenhire said, "We see them out there. The glare of their (World Series) rings bothered our outfielders."

All Yankees GM Brian Cashman will say about his team's playoff scouting is, "At least one guy per team." As for how early the Yankees begin scouting, he adds, "I'd rather not say."

Two October's ago, when they were playing the Boston Red Sox in the American League Championship Series, Yankees scouts were shuttling between Houston and St. Louis watching the NLCS. That's the same number the White Sox had watching the Astros and Cardinals in 2005.

Radar, DVDs part of scouts' arsenal

New York state of mind: Dodgers scouts Vance Loveace, left, and John Barr take notes during a Mets-Nationals game Saturday in Washington.

New York Yankees ticket office gives him a list at every home game of which scouts requested the free tickets teams provide behind home plate.

"The other night, I saw five Mets scouts on the list," Towers says. "Wow!"

But Mets GM Omar Minaya says, "We have two guys, maybe three. One guy maybe is looking at pitching, the other at hitters and maybe we have a fielder," who would be watching an aspect of the team about which the Mets want extra information.

Information overload

Regardless of how many scouts are where, their charge is to miss nothing and provide answers for any eventuality.

In some cases, knowledge can be detrimental.

"You get to a point where you're getting too many pieces of information," Minaya says. "Sometimes I think we all might have a tendency to overthink.

"For me, it's too much information," Yankees center fielder Johnny Damon says. "They tell you the pitcher's going to throw you a 2-2 (count) cutter, and he doesn't. Then you're mad at the scout. I'd rather go with instinct."

Damon says he figures the coaches have digested the information and they'll move him in the field if they think it's necessary.

But getting caught with too little information is a more frightening proposition to some teams.

Williams spared no expense in scouting the White Sox's 2005 playoff opponents.

"I wasn't going to leave anything to chance," he said last October while the White Sox swept the Astros in the World Series, holding the Houston offense to 12 runs in 41 innings. He still won't divulge the details of his scouting.

"We had people out there almost uncomfortably early. And we were a little unorthodox."

Williams even had his own team picked apart. One of his scouts watched the White Sox and prepared a report as if it were for another team.

Let's go to the videotape

With so much information and so little preparation time available, making reports digestible is crucial.

This year, no playoff team knew its first-round opponent more than three days before its first postseason game. Most had barely 48 hours notice.

"What I want to know is how they're swinging," says Gardenhire, who was in regular contact with two Twins scouts tailing the Yankees before Minnesota learned it would be playing Oakland. "What guys are hot? What guys are not? We know (Yankees manager Joe) Torre does different things in the playoffs. They've been much more aggressive this year than the past."

Gardenhire says having former Twins manager Tom Kelly scout the Yankees is a significant asset because Kelly "tells me what I should be looking for."

For instance, is the manager more likely to call for a hit-and-run or a pitchout with certain ball-and-strike counts on the batter? But for some players, all the binders and printouts can't substitute for a little TV time.

"I'd rather just watch a pitcher on video, like I do all season," Damon says. "Watch his mechanics, see if he's tipping his pitches."

Players have become so accustomed to using video that teams are altering their preparation. Nearly every team has a video coordinator who creates packages tailored to each batter or pitcher.

The Padres are one of the few teams that didn't use an advance scout for much of the season; they change course in preparing for the postseason and its games of greater importance.

Still, pitcher Trevor Hoffman says much of his team's success can be attributed to the combination of coach Tony Muser and video coordinator Mike Tompkins determining how to position fielders.

How crucial are these subtle adjustments? A couple of steps by a fielder in a playoff game, it can be argued, could change the fate of a franchise.

Williams says his team's 2005 World Series championship should be a reminder to teams that have gotten away from traditional scouting methods, replacing eyes with cameras and statistical reports.

"These are some of the most important members of your organization," Williams says. "These days, for whatever reason, scouting isn't looked at the same way. It's less appreciated. That confounds me."

By David Cone, USA TODAY

Contributing: Bob Nightengale, Rod Beaton

• Hear Tommy Lasorda talk about what he wanted to learn from a scout when he was the Dodgers manager, at baseball.usatoday.com

By David Cone, USA TODAY

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By David Cone, USA TODAY

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See today's insert
Playoff pitching staffs limp onto center stage

By Mel Antonen
USA TODAY

NEW YORK — Pedro Martinez is out with a torn rotator cuff in his right shoulder. Randy Johnson will pitch with a herniated disk in his back. Brad Radke hopes his separated shoulder stays together, and Rich Harden is returning from strained elbow ligaments. And the Detroit Tigers gave up 43 runs in a season-ending five-game losing streak.

Baseball’s postseason starts today, amid looming pitching questions for most of the eight teams that are taking aim at winning the World Series.

Johnson, 43, will pitch for the New York Yankees in Game 3 of the Division Series on Friday in Detroit. He had an epidural during that time, the Cardinals rotation had a 5.37 ERA. Martinez, the New York Mets have a rotation of Orlando Hernandez, Tom Glavine, Steve Trachsel and possibly John Maine. Harden left the Oakland Athletics rotation in early June and returned for the final two weeks. He will throw a bullpen session today in Minneapolis.

Contributing: Jorge L. Ortiz

— Bodley: Can Tigers, Cards recharge? SC
— O’Connor: Time is now for A-Rod, 6C
Athletics vs. Twins
Game 1: Today at Minnesota, 1:09 p.m. (ESPN)

Oakland’s power sources limited

Jason Kendall isn’t the prototypical leadoff hitter, but he’s crucial to the Oakland offense. Not only is he hitting better, .332 since July 22, but he sets the tone of extending pitch counts. He’s one of three A’s, with Frank Thomas and Nick Swisher, and only 33 major league regulars who average more than four pitches per plate appearance. “When Oakland gets strike one, they’re in trouble,” the scout said. “You have to throw strikes.”

Thomas is Oakland’s “only slam-dunk power guy,” in our scout’s view. That means pitching around the designated hitter makes sense. Swisher is Oakland’s only other 30-homer man this year, but he’s never been in the playoffs. Eric Chavez has the next-best career power credentials but is a .224 post-season hitter with one homer in 85 at-bats. Injuries already have contributed to his worst power year since he was a rookie in 1999. But Thomas’ presence could help. “He always seems to play better as the second banana,” the scout says of Chavez.

Keep an eye on Barry Zito’s off-speed pitches. “He’s no more than an 85 mph-88 mph guy,” the scout says. “It’s a great fallacy that he’s more than that.” His curve and his changeup have to be working for him to be successful. More patient teams give him the most trouble.

Dan Haren, who could start Game 3 or 4, can be dominating, but he looks tired in the second half. He has allowed 40 runs in 42⅓ innings over his last seven starts. His velocity is down, and his splitter is inconsistent. Hitters are fouling it off, so his pitch count is going up. When he’s on, he gets ahead with the fastball before getting hitters to miss the splitter.

A groin injury put closer Huston Street on the disabled list for three weeks in late August and early September. That could be a blessing, because Street’s arm angle had dropped 5-6 inches before the injury, an indication he might have been fatigued from his 57 appearances before he went on the DL Aug. 19. He didn’t allow a run in his first eight games after returning.

Rich Harden, who could start Game 3 or 4, is the wild card. He’s the best pitcher on the staff, but the question is how much stamina he can build after spending most of the season on the DL. He’s pitched just 11⅔ innings after spending 108 days on the disabled list but dominated hitters with a fastball in the 95 mph-98 mph range. His breaking pitches haven’t been as sharp as in the past.

Projected lineup
C Jason Kendall
CF Mark Kotsay
RF Milton Bradley
DH Frank Thomas
LF Jay Payton
3B Eric Chavez
1B Nick Swisher
2B Mark Ellis
SS Marco Scutaro

A’s ace: Barry Zito uses his fastball to try and get ahead of hitters.

Telling statistics
- While Barry Zito’s curveball is considered his out pitch, he throws a first-pitch fastball 57% of the time.
- The A’s are hitting .291 on artificial turf, 35 points better than their .256 average on natural grass.
- The majority of designated hitter Frank Thomas’ 39 home runs came on fastballs middle-low and inside, but he struggled on fastballs up and in.
- Opponents are hitting .190 against reliever Justin Duchscherer with runners on base, .276 with the bases empty.
Minnesota underrated on offense, in bullpen

- Minnesota keys off its starting pitching, and Cy Young Award favorite Johan Santana's performance is crucial. The best way for hitters to approach him is to try to milk him for as many pitches as possible. He has a good changeup, but hitters are better off taking it as often as they can. The problem is that his other pitches are so dominating, it's not easy to lay off the change-up. "Santana is one of the few guys who can neutralize the Yankees in Yankee Stadium," the scout says. "More so than (Oakland's) Barry Zito, because Santana has more dominating stuff."

- The middle of the Minnesota batting order — Joe Mauer, Michael Cuddyer and Justin Morneau — has had a huge year, but the Twins have become more like a National League club while they've been hot in the second half of the season. Second baseman Luis Castillo runs bunts and steals and is doing all those things like he did with the Florida Marlins in the 2003 World Series title run. The development of third baseman Nick Punto as a good No. 2 hitter allows the Twins to be more aggressive and keep the other team guessing. "They're a better offense than people give them credit for," the scout says.

- The only way to approach the Twins' big hitters is with velocity. "You've got to throw it by them inside," the scout says. Morneau is "on the David Ortiz-Travis Hafner track," the scout says. "They all had holes inside, but Morneau is doing what those other guys did. He's slowly closing the holes."

- Their role players on offense have gone overlooked but could be important in the playoffs. Designated hitter/outfielder Rondell White has had a strong second half, hitting .321 since the All-Star break, and left fielder Jason Tyner has made major improvements. "He's much stronger now," the scout says of Tyner. "He used to be nothing but singles, but he's learned how to 'inside-out' the ball better and hit to the opposite field. Now he hits a lot of balls in the gaps."

- Joe Nathan is the second-best closer in the league behind Mariano Rivera. Francisco Rodriguez can be as good, but Nathan is more consistent. He's unusual because he has three pitches he can throw for strikes all the time so he always has a way to get hitters out. Most closers rely on one or two pitches. In fact, the scout says, the entire bullpen throws strikes more consistently than most teams' relievers.

Scouting: Twins

- Scouting reports compiled by Paul White. In addition, one scout each from the American League and National League provides USA TODAY's analysis. The scouts requested anonymity because of competitive reasons.

- The information for the "Scouting" graphics and portions of the material in "Telling statistics" is provided by Baseball Info Solutions, which collects data for 11 teams, various player agents and computer game developers. The information for these features has been gathered by analyzing video of every game played this season. For more information, go to www.baseballinfosolutions.com.

Telling statistics

- Center fielder Torii Hunter has won five consecutive Gold Gloves, but this season he had nine more defensive misplays and errors than good fielding plays, the second-worst ratio among playoff center fielders.

- Opposing batters are hitting .287 against Johan Santana when they're ahead in the count.

- Reliever Denny Reyes is holding left-handers to a .148 batting average, a .219 on-base percentage and a .205 slugging percentage.

- Reliever Juan Rincon likes to pitch up and in on right-handed batters with his fastball and come back with sliders low and away.

- Rincon finished with a 2.91 ERA but was hit hardest in August (.356) and September (.333).
Pitcher fatigue may result in early exit for Detroit

"This is the most vulnerable good club," our scout says, because too many of their pitchers "have hit the wall." Justin Verlander isn't coming close to the 98 mph he was throwing earlier in the season. "Strength matters, and it just catches up to kids who haven't played in September before," the scout says. That applies to the bullpen as well as the starting rotation. Relievers Joel Zumaya and Jason Grilli haven't been as sharp late in the season.

Even if second baseman Placido Polanco is playing at only 80%-90% because of his bad shoulder, he's still crucial to the Detroit attack. He's a perfect No. 2 hitter on a team that has too many players who swing and miss a lot.

Polanco also is the steady defender the Tigers need in the infield. Detroit was 14-21 while he was out. "This team lost a lot of games in the infield," the scout says. "(Shortstop) Carlos Guillen is steady, but he needs to concentrate all the time." But the scout adds that third baseman Brandon Inge has become a sleeper Gold Glove candidate.

It's tough for Detroit to score when Curtis Granderson isn't playing well. He had a strong first half but has been expanding his strike zone throughout the second half and has 173 strikeouts. Because the Tigers are so home run oriented, it's crucial for them to find other ways to score, especially at the top of the order. As long as Granderson is striking out at a high rate, pitchers don't have to throw strikes.

Try not to throw the ball near the middle of the plate against Marcus Thames and Craig Monroe. "They wear out (pitchers') mistakes," our scout says. "But they also don't hit good pitchers."

A key pitcher could be Wilfredo Ledezma, who probably will fill a long-relief role. He has pitched less than most of the others and looks strong enough to step in and keep the Tigers in a game if a starter gets knocked out early.

Jim Leyland is one of the few managers who can make a difference in the playoffs. "He handles pitchers better than anyone else," the scout says. "And it's just as important that he got Pudge (Ivan Rodriguez) to play hard for him. That really helps the pitching staff. Pudge is the most underappreciated good player in the game right now."

Scouting: Ivan Rodriguez

Ivan Rodriguez's hot and cold zones against left- and right-handed pitchers:

- Very good
- Good
- Bad

Source: Baseball Info Solutions

Getting to 'em early: Most of Carlos Guillen's homers come in his first at-bat against a pitcher.

Telling statistics

- Opponents are hitting .400 (8-for-20) against Nate Robertson on a 3-and-1 count.
- Thirteen of Carlos Guillen's 19 home runs came in his first at-bat against a pitcher in a game.
- Justin Verlander throws a fastball when behind in the count 82% of the time; opponents are hitting .410 in such situations.
- Magglio Ordonez is hitting .364 against changeups, .213 against sliders.
- Joel Zumaya led the major leagues with 231 pitches of at least 100 mph, ahead of the New York Yankees' Kyle Farnsworth (25) and Verlander (19).

Projected lineup

2B Placido Polanco
LF Craig Monroe
1B Sean Casey
RF Magglio Ordonez
SS Carlos Guillen
C Ivan Rodriguez
CF Curtis Granderson
3B Brandon Inge
DH Omar Infante/Marcus Thames
New York's weakness could be veteran arms

If they don't win, our scout says, "it will be because their veterans have failed them on the mound." Mike Mussina is the key. He doesn't have the velocity he did when he was younger but can be the most complete pitcher on the staff when he's on, "If he can be the real Mike Mussina," the scout says, "he takes pressure off Randy (Johnson). Randy get can lesser lineups out just on stuff, but he tends to get frustrated now when people start to hit him."

Game 1 starter Chien-Ming Wang is the Yankees' best pitcher now, as long as he keeps his sinker down. He has "a heavy, heavy sinker," the scout says, "at 92 to 93 mph. Plus, he has a splitter-changeup combo. Sometimes he elevates the sinker and then he gets in trouble." A big factor in Wang using the sinker is the work first-base coach Tony Pena has done with catcher Jorge Posada, whose improved ability to block balls give Wang more confidence to keep the sinker down, even if it bounces. The offense is the most well-rounded and potent in the AL since the Cleveland Indians' in the mid-1990s, the scout says. It has speed, power and depth. Johnny Damon is the addition this season who adds the speed and the potential to distract pitchers.

The best way to approach the Yankees hitters is to "pitch to contact," that is, throw strikes and rely on your defense. Otherwise the Yankees' patient approach makes pitchers go deep into too many counts and get tired. A pitcher with a real good fastball can throw it by them, but, the scout warns, "don't make a mistake." That's especially true of first baseman-DH Jason Giambi, who teams must pitch inside to have a chance of getting him out.

The two outfielders who have been injured much of the season -- Gary Sheffield and Hideki Matsui -- could make the Yankees impossible to stop. "This is (Derek) Jeter's time of year," the scout says, but expect Sheffield to "play like a manpossessed. He needs a payday, so he'll be doing everything he can to show the Yankees they should keep him next year."

Scouting: Bobby Abreu

Bobby Abreu's hot and cold zones against left- and right-handed pitchers:

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As for Matsui, "if he gets hot, it's over," the scout says. The indication is whether Matsui is using the whole field, especially hitting the ball to left-center. When he's not swinging well, he's pulling the ball all the time.

The forced rest for closer Mariano Rivera in September because of a tender arm could be a big help. That and the Yankees' big lead in the AL East kept manager Joe Torre from using Rivera in two-inning situations as he has done in crucial pennant-race and playoff games in the past.

The Yankees bullpen "is OK," the scout says, "but not as good as Minnesota's," so Rivera probably will be asked to pitch more than an inning at a time if he's physically up to it and the Yankees are in close games.

Rivera is the team's difference-maker as long as he's healthy.

Series schedule

Game 1: Today at New York, 8:19 p.m., Fox
Starting pitchers: Tigers LH Nate Robertson (13-13, 3.84 ERA) vs. Yankees RH Chien-Ming Wang (19-6, 3.63)

Game 2: Wednesday at New York, 8:09 p.m., ESPN
Starting pitchers: Tigers RH Justin Verlander (17-9, 3.63) vs. Yankees RH Mike Mussina (15-7, 3.51)

Game 3: Friday at Detroit, 8:09 p.m., ESPN
Starting pitchers: Yankees LH Randy Johnson (17-11, 5.00) vs. Tigers LH Kenny Rogers (17-8, 3.84)

Game 4*: Saturday at Detroit, TBA

Game 5*: Saturday at New York, TBA
All times Eastern, * if necessary

Telling statistics

- Derek Jeter has a team-leading .369 average with two outs and runners in scoring position.
- Jeter is hitting .395 on pitches up and in.
- Bobby Abreu is hitting .276 (8-for-29) lifetime against Tigers pitching.
- Chien-Ming Wang throws a fastball on his first pitch 74% of the time.
- Jorge Posada's .774 catcher-block percentage (blocked balls divided by passed balls plus wild pitches plus dropped third strikes plus blocked balls) is the worst among playoff catchers.

Projected lineup

Top heavy: Johnny Damon scored 115 runs leading off.

CF Johnny Damon
SS Derek Jeter
RF Bobby Abreu
1B Gary Sheffield
DH Jason Giambi
3B Alex Rodriguez
LF Hideki Matsui
C Jorge Posada
2B Robinson Cano
Cardinals vs. Padres
Game 1: Today at San Diego, 4:09 p.m. (ESPN)

Hitters need patience vs. pitchers

Scouting: Albert Pujols
Where Albert Pujols puts the ball in play — shown in dark zones — against left- and right-handed pitchers:

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Telling statistics

- Albert Pujols hit .365 in day games this year and averaged a home run every 8.1 at-bats, as opposed to .313 and 13.4 at bats per homer in night games. Games 1 and 2 in San Diego are 1:09 p.m. PT starts.
- Catcher Yadier Molina hit .197 at Busch Stadium this season, and his .216 average is 61 points lower than the next-worst starting catcher in the playoffs, Jorge Posada.
- Adam Wainwright, who could get opportunities to close games, relies on his curveball to finish off batters when ahead in the count. He held right-handed hitters to a .182 average.
- Chris Duncan figures to sit if the Padres start David Wells; he's hitting .170 against left-handers, .318 against right-handers.

Light-hitting catcher: The Cardinals need Yadier Molina, who finished the season hitting .216, to provide some offense.

Projected lineup

SS David Eckstein
LF Chris Duncan
1B Albert Pujols
RF Juan Encarnacion
3B Scott Rolen
CF Jim Edmonds/Su Taguchi
2B Ronnie Belliard
C Yadier Molina
P Chris Carpenter

Pivotal: David Eckstein is "the engine that makes (the Cardinals) go," says a scout.
Scouting: Adrian Gonzalez
Where Adrian Gonzalez puts the ball in play — shown in dark zones — against left- and right-handed pitchers:

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Source: Baseball Info Solutions

By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

Defense, including Piazza, struggles a lot

- The Padres defense is a shortcoming. First baseman Adrian Gonzalez is underrated, but the rest of the infield, especially with shortstop Khalil Greene not 100% healthy, is below average.
- Catcher Mike Piazza still can change a game with one swing, but he has become has to come out of games early when the Padres are ahead. "I've never seen a guy who uses so much effort just to get up and down" behind the plate, the scout says. Teams should run as often as they can when he is catching.
- Piazza and Brian Giles are the only power threats, but the lineup is scrappy and versatile. Manager Bruce Bochy will try to take advantage of their ability to do little things like steal bases, advance runners and hit-and-run.
- Closer Trevor Hoffman remains generally effective, but he is relying more than ever on guile and knowledge of the hitters. He relies on deception, but his velocity is down several mph, giving hitters a better chance to identify the changeup and make better decisions about whether to swing.
- No. 1 starter Jake Peavy hasn't been as dominant as last year. His command hasn't been as sharp, but he's the only pitcher on the staff capable of taking over a game. He hides the ball well in his windup and will be more effective against teams from other divisions that don't see him as often. He's at his best when he keeps his arm up and creates a good downward plane to the bottom of the strike zone.
- The other pitchers in the rotation, especially Chris Young and David Wells, can be hit, but they can be effective because they're deceptive. Young's stuff isn't exceptional. Wells has been topping out at 86-87 mph and, the scout says, "his stuff is short," meaning that in addition to the lower velocity, he's not getting a sharp, late break on his off-speed pitches.

Scouting: Padres

- Game 1: Today at San Diego, 4:09 p.m., ESPN
  Starting pitchers: Cardinals RH Chris Carpenter (15-8, 3.09 ERA) vs. Padres RH Jake Peavy (11-14, 4.09)
- Game 2: Thursday at San Diego, 4:09 p.m., ESPN
  Starting pitchers: Cardinals RH Jeff Suppan (12-7, 4.12) vs. Padres RH Chris Young (11-5, 3.48)
- Game 3: Saturday at St. Louis, TBA
  Starting pitchers: TBA vs. Cardinals RH Jeff Weaver (8-14, 5.76) or RH Anthony Reyes (5-8, 5.06)
- Game 4*: Sunday at St. Louis, TBA
- Game 5*: Monday at San Diego, TBA
  All times Eastern; * if necessary

Telling statistics

- Catcher Mike Piazza has five home runs in 17 career at-bats against Jeff Suppan, the Cardinals' Game 2 starter.
- Mike Cameron is aggressive on first-pitch fastballs but struggles with fastballs high and inside. He struck out a team-high 142 times this season.
- Reliever Cla Meredith has no drop-off as he gets deeper into outings, holding hitters to a .169 average from pitches 1-15 and a .167 average from pitches 16-30.
- Closer Trevor Hoffman has held Cardinals hitters to a .227 average, but third baseman Scott Rolen could be trouble. He's 5-for-11 lifetime off the all-time saves leader, with three home runs.

Series schedule

- Game 1: Today at San Diego, 4:09 p.m., ESPN
  Starting pitchers: Cardinals RH Chris Carpenter (15-8, 3.09 ERA) vs. Padres RH Jake Peavy (11-14, 4.09)
- Game 2: Thursday at San Diego, 4:09 p.m., ESPN
  Starting pitchers: Cardinals RH Jeff Suppan (12-7, 4.12) vs. Padres RH Chris Young (11-5, 3.48)
- Game 3: Saturday at St. Louis, TBA
  Starting pitchers: TBA vs. Cardinals RH Jeff Weaver (8-14, 5.76) or RH Anthony Reyes (5-8, 5.06)
- Game 4*: Sunday at St. Louis, TBA
- Game 5*: Monday at San Diego, TBA
  All times Eastern; * if necessary

Productive: Mike Cameron has 22 home runs and 83 RBI for the Padres this season.

Projected lineup

LF Dave Roberts
RF Brian Giles
1B Adrian Gonzalez
C Mike Piazza
3B Russell Branyan/ Todd Walker
CF Mike Cameron
SS Geoff Blum/Khalil Greene
2B Josh Barfield
P Jake Peavy