

## **2016 Preseason Power Rankings:**

*Overall Rank. Team (League Rank)*

1. Rockies (NL1) – The front office unanimously ranked the defending champions atop the rankings and this marks the first time in which the Rockies have been ranked in the top 4 of any preseason power rankings in the franchise era. This team proved that they can win in the biggest moments in 2015, and with the addition of the best pitcher in this era, the Rockies looked poised to win all over again in Season 14. It will be interesting to see how Blake Spencer manages a team with five legitimate players on the roster as the Rockies look to repeat.

2. Royals (AL1) – On paper, this could be the most balanced team in SWBL history, but there are still a lot of question marks. The biggest news for the Royals has been their new look roster this offseason. Gus signs Paul Castellano and his brother, Sam Skibbe to help improve upon the franchise's playoff woes, despite neither of them making it to the playoffs in 2015. Ty Butler continues to prove dominant in the medium-pitch style but will his new fatherhood be a distraction or will it give him inspiration to help the Royals win their first title?

3. Yankees (AL2) – Despite losing Scott for half a season in 2015, the Yankees still managed to make it to the SWBL Championship, losing a heartbreaker in extra innings. Now, Scott Pohle is back for a full season and is the front-runner to win the MVP award as the Yankees look to strike big. Sam Bakula continues to improve and is quietly becoming one of the best players in the league, while John Calloway continues to try to find that consistent magic he has shown before. The biggest offseason acquisition is the addition of Scott's twin brother, Kevin who finally rejoins the SWBL after many years away. Jackson Crosley is a candidate for CY Wiffle and now has time to concentrate on the mound with Kevin joining the pinstripes' lineup.

4. Phillies (NL2) – Chris Meador returns to his tenure as a league captain and puts together a roster that will be an instant competitor in the new look National League. In the offseason he signed Spencer Bogard and Edloe Donnan away from the Royals, while presumably drafting the best rookie since Ty Butler in Tyler Flakne; a wiffle veteran from Chris' favorite state, Minnesota. The National League has a battle on their hands as the Phillies get thrown into the mix as a serious buzz kill for the Brewers' and Rockies' playoff party.

5. Brewers (NL3) – The fifth spot in these power rankings is always the preseason “odd man out”. This spot is reserved for a possible contender, but on paper, might not have the tools to put them into the preseason playoff picture. With the drama surrounding the franchise in the Kyle Cornell saga, this team might take a hit on both sides of the ball if he doesn't actually play. Danny Bell, John Doerries, and rookie, Jimmy Stout will be there for added depth, and David Olderman continues to improve on the mound, but with PG and M-V-Pete on your team, anything is possible, and this team could make a serious run in 2016.

6. Athletics (AL3) – Despite being ranked lower in these power rankings, this could be the year that the Athletics finally break out for more than 3 wins. The biggest news is the return of Steve Hays to the roster from injury as he looks to bounce back into early form for his squad. In other news, the A's did not sign back the 2015 Rookie of the Year, Chris Costello, and put all of their faith in the runner up for the award last year, Mike Karl. Luke Bakula will continue to dominate and this team will hopefully give captain Alex Heck a more intriguing run towards their hope to #shocktheworld.

7. Expos (NL4) – Simple as this: The fourth team in the National League has gone 0-40 in the past four seasons. The Expos come back for their second season with the same looking roster but maybe a bit more experience to hopefully get them that elusive first win for the 4<sup>th</sup> NL team. While the Expos tried and missed out on the Brett Spencer sweepstakes, John Leicht was an animal in 2015 and looks to build on his success to lead this team to their first victory. Ultimately to win, this team needs to get SOMETHING from Kevin or either of the Matts if they want to find any success in Season 14.

8. Astros (AL4) – While the Astros might be the worst team the American League has ever had on paper, new SWBL captain, Bryan Benware might be the best new manager of a franchise the SWBL has seen. He is determined to build a team that can start winning now, and continue to improve into the future. The Astros missed out on a few offseason targets, but did land Rob Walters and Cam Branson to join Bryan and three rookies to make up their roster. They are the oldest team in the league and desperately need some pitching, but they hope to make up for it with past baseball experience and preparedness. With so much unknown about this team, here is what I think is the biggest difference between the Expos and Astros: In my opinion, the Expos can only beat the Astros to go 1-9, because teams know who they are. But due to the unknown, the Astros can, not just also beat the Expos, but might even have a chance to steal 1 more win from a team if they happen to overlook them on their schedule.

Good luck to all teams in Season 14.

Happy Wifflin'!