Best Lineup of 2020? By Austin Kim 2.20.20

A Cold Offseason

During the first months of the offseason, the Dodgers struck out left and right. They missed out on the big free agent names - Anthony Rendon to the Angels and Gerritt Cole to the Yankees. Adding salt to that wound, the Dodgers lost some key pieces to free agency - Hyun Jin Ryu who had a Cy Young caliber season in 2019 to the Blue Jays and Rich Hill who was one of the more reliable postseason starters for the Dodgers to the Twins. The winter seemed extra cold in Los Angeles.

Still Elite

However, even with the loss of some pieces from their rotation and failing to acquire an elite bat during the winter meetings, pundits still had the Dodgers as favorites to win the NL West by a wide margin. Some even indicated that the NL pennant is the Dodgers' to lose. How was this possible? The answer for the Dodgers is and always has been depth. Speaking strictly from the offensive perspective, the Dodgers essentially have the same team as they did last year. With the Dodgers not securing a big name during free agency, fans quickly forgot how great the Dodgers have been for the past 7 years. Muncy, Turner, Bellinger, and Seager will continue to act as the heart of the lineup that is now supplemented by up-and-comers ready to prove themselves in Will Smith and Gavin Lux who both showed shadows of greatness last season. In addition to the players already mentioned, the Dodgers have a plethora of both position and utility players ready to step in and make an impact: Joc Pederson, Kike Hernandez, Chris Taylor, Matt Beaty, and Edwin Rios just to name a few. Even without a big free agent signing this winter, the Dodgers were still in prime position to win the division and make a deep run in the playoffs with the same formula of depth. Having 2019 NL MVP Cody Bellinger helps too. I can understand why some fans may have been disappointed. It's true that the Dodgers came agonizingly close to winning the World Series two out of the last three years, but it's hard to argue that the lineup in either of those years were better than how good it could be this year.

Mookie's Arrival

Notice in the group of players that Alex Verdugo is missing. That's because earlier this month the unthinkable happened. Fans had basically given up that the Dodgers would do anything of significance this off-season and then the team casually traded for Mookie Betts which ended up sending Verdugo who could have been a key contributor this year to the Red Sox. Mookie is the 2018 AL MVP and multi-year All-Star and Gold Glove winner. With his inclusion, the Dodger lineup went from being great to even greater. Any doubts about the Dodgers winning the NL pennant this year were put to bed.

The Lineup

Let's preview the lineup that the Dodgers may now employ most regularly.

1. Mookie Betts, RF
2. AJ Pollock, LF
3. Justin Turner, 3B

4. Cody Bellinger, CF
5. Max Muncy, 1B
6. Corey Seager, SS
7. Gavin Lux, 2B
8. Will Smith, C
9. Pitcher's spot

Let's walk through the lineup. Mookie Betts adds legit power and baserunning from the leadoff spot. The Dodgers never had a cornerstone like Betts at the leadoff spot in recent years. He will provide consistency and get on base often for the 2, 3, and 4 hitters if he isn't hitting homers himself. Assuming AJ Pollock gets back into even 75% of his 2015 form (and that is a non-trivial assumption), he adds another tough out. Next is Turner, who hits for average and can hit the occasional long ball. His mechanics are too good to not put the ball in play. Cody Bellinger is last year's NL MVP and had a career high in homers (47). Muncy is fresh off a new contract extension, which was a reward from upper management for his impressive performances and improvement both in the regular season and postseason in the past two years. Corey Seager regressed a little bit in 2019 due to injuries and his penchant to swing at every first pitch, but he is a two-time Silver Slugger and if he can stay healthy, I fully expect him to make a bigger impact with his bat than he did last year. Sure, in the playoffs, the rookies Lux and Smith's production was far below expectations, but with hitting coach Rob Van Scoyoc, the hope is that they will become more consistent because they've already shown an ability to hit the ball well for stretches of the season. It is important to note that they were both rookies and had recently been called up to the MLB by that point. The learning curve is steep in the Big Leagues, unless you are Mike Trout.

Prediction
In 2019, the team hit 279 home runs (a National League record) and scored 886 runs (second most in franchise history; most since 1953 when they scored 955). The only difference is that they've now added Mookie Betts. I wouldn't necessarily say that it's a foregone conclusion that the Dodgers hit more home runs or score more runs than they did last year, but I will bet that any fan will be more confident in the Dodgers lineup than they will be in any other team's this year. This lineup has true potential to be the best lineup in all of baseball in 2020. LA is hopeful that this is the lineup to bring that World Series trophy back to LA in 2020.

They say preparation is the key to success. It's nice to see that the players are already doing work at Spring Training: