

Pennants

the White Rat himself admits that he doesn't have enough pitching to keep pace with Montreal or New York.

N.L. West — I'm proudly sticking with the San Francisco Giants here, with the Houston Astros being the only possible threat to the boys by the bay.

The Giants' acquisition of Steve Bedrosian from the Phillies, though costly in the long run, turned Roger Craig's final question mark — the bullpen — into an exclamation point. With Craig Lefferts and Bedrosian, the Giants will have an excellent left/right combination to shut the door on those occasions when Rick Reuschel, Mike LaCoss, Don Robinson and (eventually) Kelly Downs can't go the distance. Will Clark, Kevin Mitchell, Brett Butler and Robby Thompson will create more than enough offense for this team to win handily.

The Astros (-3) have Mike Scott, Jim Deshaies and an excellent bullpen, but a contending team needs at least three reliable starters. Offensively, Kevin Bass and Glenn Davis won't be enough down the stretch.

A.L. East — First of all, to everyone who has told me they picked the Orioles back in April — Bullstuff. I didn't. I picked the Toronto Blue Jays, and I still do.

The Blue Jays (-4 1/2) have all of the necessary elements to win in this bastion of mediocrity. John Cerutti, Jimmy Key, Dave Steib and Mike Flanagan — with Todd Stottlemyre waiting in the wings — will keep the Jays in games while the likes of Jun-

ior Felix, Kelly Gruber, Ernie Whitt, George Bell, Tony Fernandez and Fred McGriff pull out the victories at the plate and in the field. Duane Ward and Tom Henke are dependable, hard-throwing stoppers.

The Orioles have found a dazzling stopper in Gregg Olson, but their starting staff won't give him enough opportunities in August and September. Also, don't be surprised to see Mickey Tettleton & Co. fade in the heat of a pennant race.

The other teams in contention enter August with at least one glaring

need — the Cleveland Indians (-5 1/2), starting pitching and a scrappy offense; the Boston Red Sox (-5 1/2), pitching of all kinds; the New York Yankees (-7), starting pitching; and the Milwaukee Brewers (-8), help for Paul Molitor and Robin Yount.

A.L. West — Figuring against a repeat, I picked the Kansas City Royals to dethrone the Oakland A's, and it's still a possibility. But the off-season addition of Mike Moore, the mid-season acquisition of Rickey Henderson and the development of pitcher Todd Burns make it difficult

to pick against the A's (-2) this late in the season. After all, they're tied for first, even without production from Jose Canseco, Walt Weiss and Dave Henderson through the first 100 games.

The California Angels (tied for first) are pitching their way to prominence, but it's unlikely that Bert Blyleven, Chuck Finley and Kirk McCaskill can duplicate their first-half performances. They also need someone to spark the offense on those occasions when Devon White can't do it alone.

The Royals (-6 1/2) have plenty of pitching to get the job done, but they need someone, anyone (George Brett?), to take some pressure off Bo Jackson and Danny Tartabull.

The Texas Rangers (-6 1/2) have the offense and the closer needed for a parade to the top, but Kevin Brown and Nolan Ryan can't start every day.

There you have it, my revised picks for baseball's stretch run.

Of course, if either or both of my original picks — the Royals and the Mets — grabs a flag in the end, you'll know I was only kidding.



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