

# Our Best Strategies for MLB Betting

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by Sports Insights

# Welcome to Sports Insights

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Baseball may be referred to as America's Pastime, but it's also the sport which can turn the highest profit for sharp bettors. The MLB season is long and this gives you even more opportunities to take advantage of your edge and maximize your units won.

Baseball is a great sport to be good at, and we've got it down to a science. See how you can use our edge to become a sharper bettor and make baseball your most profitable sport.

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## 1. Betting against the public

Prior to the start of every season, we analyze games from our historical database to break down the sweet spot for contrarian betting. Although our past systems have been incredibly lucrative, blindly betting against the public isn't necessarily an effective strategy.

Looking at every game played since the start of the 2005 season, betting against the public hasn't been a profitable strategy until we reach the 20% threshold. Over the past 12 seasons, teams receiving less than 20% of moneyline tickets have gone 1,185-1,778 (40.0%) with +40.55 units won.

Although the ROI increases as we look at games with increasingly one-sided public betting, the win rate actually drops. That's because casual bettors love taking winning teams, and they are willing to lay the juice to take the league's best teams and top pitchers. That has historically created value on larger underdogs.

The Pinnacle MLB steam move (which we'll discuss in more depth in just a bit) has been incredibly profitable and it's one of the best identifiers of sharp money. Since sportsbooks will only adjust their lines based on public money in games where sharp money isn't involved, we examined the same contrarian strategies when no Pinnacle steam moves had been triggered on the public side.

When there's no sharp money on the other side, teams receiving less than 30% of moneyline tickets have gone 4,136-5,779 with +79.72 units won. When the Pinnacle steam move has been triggered on the other side, teams receiving less than 30% of moneyline tickets have gone just 474-769 with -79.56 units lost. If you're going to fade the public, it's crucial to make sure you're not betting against the sharps.

Casual bettors have a greater impact on line movement in baseball than they do in other major sports, and that's largely based on long grind of the 162-game regular season. Additionally, it's easier for sportsbooks to move a moneyline a few cents than it is to adjust a point-spread — particularly if you're dealing with a key number.

Since 2005, the majority of moneyline bettors (more than 50%) have taken the underdog in just 18.47% of all games. Looking at games with drastic one-sided public betting, it becomes abundantly clear that public bettors prefer taking favorites. Of the 11,158 games in which one team received less than 30% of moneyline tickets, 10,693 were underdogs and just 464 were favorites.

Our past research has found that underdogs have provided added value in games with high totals, as the increased scoring leads to more unpredictability and variance, which has benefitted the team getting plus money. A high total can be defined by any game where the over/under is 8.5 or greater, so we examined whether our previous strategies could be improved by focusing on underdogs in these high-scoring games.

Not surprisingly, this alteration caused the ROI to spike at every data point.

PUBLIC BETTING	RECORD	WIN RATE	UNITS WON	ROI
<50%	5,224-6,949	42.9%	+103.15	+0.8%
<40%	3,879-5,411	41.8%	-6.99	-0.1%
<35%	3,152-4,340	42.1%	+136.31	+1.8%
<30%	2,269-3,169	41.7%	+126.20	+2.3%
<25%	1,307-1,935	40.3%	+30.21	+0.9%
<20%	590-848	41.0%	+63.41	+4.4%

There are many additional trends that you should take into consideration before implementing a contrarian strategy. Although monitoring the ticket count is more important in college athletics where the number of bets ranges dramatically from game to game, there's still increased value fading the public in the day's most heavily bet games. Sportsbooks are more likely to adjust their moneyline in games where they have significant liability, so it's imperative that bettors target heavily bet games with extremely one-sided public betting.

## 2. Underdogs with high totals

Our past research has found that underdogs perform exceptionally well in games with high totals, as the increased scoring leads to more unpredictability and variance. That levels the playing field and disproportionately benefits the team getting plus money.

Since the start of the 2005 season, underdogs have gone 7,398-9,645 (43.4%) with +17.98 units won and a 0.1% return on investment (ROI) when the closing total is 8.5 or higher. Conversely, underdogs have gone just 5,222-7,287 (41.8%) with -457.93 units lost and a -3.7% ROI when the closing total is 8 or less. That doesn't mean you should be blindly taking every underdog when the closing total is at least 8.5, but it does indicate the 'dogs offer added value in these high-scoring games.

It's also worth noting that underdogs have historically provided tremendous value in divisional rivalries, as the familiarity between teams also levels the playing field and benefits the team getting plus money. Over the past twelve seasons, underdogs have gone 5,735-7,472 (43.4%) with +41.72 units won and a 0.3% ROI against divisional opponents. Against all other opponents, underdogs have gone just 6,885-9,431 (42.2%) with -482.66 units lost and a -3.0% ROI.

This strategy is not meant to be a standalone system; merely one factor for you to consider when handicapping games. However, when you combine these two strategies and examine divisional underdogs in games with high totals, the results improve substantially.

Divisional underdogs have been significantly more profitable in games with high totals. Since 2005, underdogs have gone 2,375-3,247 (42.2%) with -130.23 units lost with a -2.3% ROI when the closing total is 8 or less. When the closing total is at least 8.5, divisional underdogs have gone 3,360-4,224 (44.3%) with +172.95 units won and a +2.3% ROI.

Some sports fans find the 2,430-game MLB regular season to be long and taxing, however, more games means more opportunities for you to take advantage of your edge and maximize units won. Getting plus-money on underdogs also means that you can win less than 50% of their wagers and still churn out profits. We don't recommend taking every divisional underdog when there's a high total, but it's a valuable factor which you should consider when placing a wager.

### **3. Steam moves you should follow**

A steam move means there's a sudden, drastic and uniform line movement across the entire sports betting marketplace. Steam is the result of a sudden overload of money placed at multiple sportsbooks and is an excellent indicator of sharp money.

Used properly, Steam Moves are an easy way to identify which games sharp bettors are hammering. That said, not all steam moves are created equal.

Contrary to the mainstream narrative, betting lines don't originate in Las Vegas – they originate from market-setting offshore sportsbooks like CRIS and Pinnacle. These sportsbooks cater to professional bettors and accept significantly higher limits

than square books like Bovada, Sports Interaction or Sportsbook.com. Typically these market-setting sportsbooks will be the first to move their lines, and other offshore books will move on air solely because they want to be in line with CRIS and Pinnacle.

Since the lines at these market-setting sportsbooks are much sharper, they have historically produced the most profitable steam moves and reverse line movement alerts. They're also typically the first to move, which means they trigger far and away the most alerts. By reacting quickly and following these steam moves before the rest of the market can adjust, you can realize significant gains over the long baseball season.

Over the past 10 seasons, the CRIS steam move has gone 1032-945 (52.2%) with +75.1 units on the moneyline. That means if you bet \$100/game, you would have earned over \$7,500 by following this simple strategy.

Most sportsbooks charge -110 juice on every game, which means football and basketball bettors need cover the spread at a 52.38% rate in order to break even. That's not the case for baseball. Due to the plus-money payout on moneyline underdogs, you can win less than 50% of your bets and still turn a profit.

While following the CRIS steam move has been fairly lucrative, we have found that Pinnacle tends to adjust their lines far more frequently throughout the day. This leads to a higher volume of steam moves being triggered and greater profits for baseball bettors. In fact, if you bet \$100/game, you would have earned over \$30,000 by following every Pinnacle MLB steam move over the past decade.

There's a common misconception that you need to have an account at the market-setting sportsbooks in order to capitalize on these steam moves, but that couldn't be further from the truth. After a steam move is triggered and the line moves, much of that value is lost. Having access to multiple sportsbooks allows you to shop for the best line and find books that are still hanging bad numbers. Consistently getting the better number and beating the closing line is crucial to long-term success in sports betting.

#### **4. Umpires to keep an eye on**

Although you should never place a wager solely based on the home plate umpire, there are certain umps with pronounced tendencies that can occasionally be exploited by opportunistic bettors. As an example, umpires with tight strike zones are beneficial if you bet the over, while umpires with large strike zones are beneficial if you bet the under. Similarly, some umpires seemingly cave under pressure and give the benefit of the doubt to the home team.

Baseball utilizes a four-man umpire crew for every series. Typically the assignments aren't announced until one or two hours before the first game of a new series, and

officials will rotate clockwise for the subsequent game. That means that the second base umpire will work first base the following day and home plate the day after that. When the officials are announced prior to the start of a new series, lines will often move to account for the tendencies of the officiating crew.

The tables below, which utilize closing lines from Pinnacle, display the five most profitable active umpires for home teams, road teams, underdogs, favorites, overs and unders since the start of the 2005 season.

### Best Home Umpires

UMPIRE	RECORD	UNITS WON	ROI
Lance Barksdale	229-150	+45.23	11.9%
Alfonzo Marquez	207-145	+26.51	7.5%
Ted Barrett	231-171	+21.49	5.3%
John Tumpane	81-49	+19.21	14.8%
Andy Fletcher	207-156	+18.20	5.0%

### Best Away Umpires

UMPIRE	RECORD	UNITS WON	ROI
Tom Hallion	200-189	+28.40	7.3%
Paul Nauert	188-192	+20.67	5.4%
Scott Barry	141-144	+17.81	6.3%
Jerry Meals	188-207	+16.46	4.2%
Joe West	197-212	+16.30	4.0%

### Best Underdog Umpires

UMPIRE	RECORD	UNITS WON	ROI
Joe West	204-205	+58.65	14.3%
Jeff Nelson	188-194	+48.13	12.6%
Jerry Meals	186-209	+39.99	10.1%
CB Bucknor	183-202	+39.40	10.2%
Brian Gorman	160-186	+25.36	7.3%

### Best Favorite Umpires

UMPIRE	RECORD	UNITS WON	ROI
Mike DiMuro	179-97	+32.54	11.8%
Tim Timmons	242-145	+48.13	12.6%
Lazaro Diaz	242-152	+25.19	6.4%
Marty Foster	227-139	+23.92	6.5%
Phil Cuzzi	240-147	+23.39	6.0%

### Best Over Umpires

UMPIRE	RECORD	UNITS WON	ROI
Sam Holbrook	184-148	+28.64	8.6%
Jerry Meals	197-171	+18.87	5.1%
Adrian Johnson	153-128	+17.32	6.2%
Dana DeMuth	185-161	+17.29	5.0%
Gabe Morales	51-33	+16.00	19.0%

### Best Under Umpires

UMPIRE	RECORD	UNITS WON	ROI
Ron Kulpa	210-156	+39.05	10.7%
Bill Miller	217-169	+30.96	8.0%
Lance Barksdale	196-162	+23.32	6.5%
Phil Cuzzi	201-166	+21.26	5.8%
James Hoye	181-152	+18.20	5.5%

Looking at our historical database, Joe West has been the most profitable umpire for underdogs. Over the past 12 seasons, underdogs have gone 204-205 with +58.65 units won when West is behind home plate. Also known as "Cowboy Joe," West has an MLB record 39 years of experience and isn't shy about making his presence known. Based on these numbers, West seems to level the playing field which logically has benefited the team getting plus money.

The majority of bettors have taken the over in 75.7% of games in our historical database, which has created contrarian value on the under. Our research found that the under has gone 14,265-13,847 (50.7%) over the past 12 seasons, and Ron Kulpa has

been the top under umpire over that stretch. Kulpa's professional umpiring career began in 1992, and, unfortunately, our historical database doesn't go back that far. However, the under has hit in 57.8% of games officiated by Kulpa since 2005.

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