




ST. LOUIS CARDINALS

National League Central



x11



x23
NL

11202
FRANCHISE WINS

71-91
2023 SEASON

5th
DIVISION

#22
FARM SYSTEM RANK

St. Louis, MO - Busch Stadium (46,000)
Manager: Oliver Marmol (164-160, 3rd Season)

Rebounding From Rare Down Year

Cardinals fans hardly know how to deal with the season that unfolded in 2023. The last time St. Louis had a season with a win percentage of .438 or worse was in 1995 and even then the Cardinals didn't finish last place in the division like the 2023 team did. To find the last time the Cardinals finished last, you have to turn the clock back all the way to 1990. What went wrong for the redbirds in 2023 and can those issues be easily fixed in time to compete in a winnable division in 2024?

Batting

The St. Louis offense actually started the season relatively strong but faded down the stretch as injuries took their toll and the team's position in the standings certainly didn't help add any motivation. The lineup that manager Oliver Marmol put forth on Opening Day never played together again that season. The .989 fielding percentage, tied for third in MLB, was a misleading stat considering the Cardinals had an outs above average as a team of -6. **Jordan Walker** is a microcosm of that fielding statistic. Even though he was sent down to the minors after a month into his rookie season, his bat impressed and the 6'6" outfielder hit .276 with an OPS of .787 and showed some pop. His oWAR was 1.6 but he had so many struggles in right field that his -2.1 dWAR gave him an overall WAR of -0.1. In layman's terms, his bat did not make up for his poor defense. At just 22 years old, he has plenty of opportunity for growth. **Alec Burleson** had similar defensive struggles in left. On the flip side of Walker and Burleson is **Nolan Arenado** who finally saw his perfect streak of ten straight Gold Glove awards come to an end. He was still an All Star and while his offense came back to earth following a 2022 season in which he finished third in NL MVP voting, he hit 25+ home runs for the third straight season and drove in 93. 2022 MVP **Paul Goldschmidt** had a far more modest season in 2023, too, but in 13 big league seasons he has never finished with an OPS of below .800.

Wilson Contreras had the unenviable task of replacing future hall of famer Yadier Molina and while he provided an upgrade offensively, there was a bit of early season controversy in how he was managing the pitching staff. Longtime Giant **Brandon Crawford** is hopeful that a change of scenery will help him extend his already impressive playing career after his worst season at the plate in 2023. Rookie **Masyn Winn** is waiting in the wings at shortstop. Fan favorite **Matt Carpenter** is back for his second stint with the club and figures to be utilized off the bench. **Brendan Donovan** has quickly proven his ability to play multiple positions on defense and hit for a high average at the top of the lineup. **Lars Nootbar** and **Tommy Edman** will both factor into the St. Louis lineup, but both will start the season on the injured list.



Nolan Arenado

Photo via Sports Illustrated

Pitching


The Cardinals are hoping to take advantage of **Sonny Gray's** career best season in 2023. The right hander has been an All Star for three of the four teams he has pitched for and while a hamstring injury will cause him to miss his first couple of starts (including Opening Day), he has otherwise been fairly durable and pitched 175+ innings for the fourth team in his career. Nobody allowed fewer home runs per nine innings than Gray and the move to the relatively pitcher-friendly Busch Stadium shouldn't have too much of an impact, in theory. His FIP of 2.83 also led the majors but it seems very unlikely that he'll be as "fortunate" in 2024. The "silver lining" to Gray's injury is that **Zack Thompson** should again be given the opportunity to start and he was arguably the Cardinal's best rotation guy in the final two months of the season. **Miles Mikolas** has been a workhorse for the Cardinals and he topped 200 innings for the third time in his career thanks to a league-leading 35 starts. Unfortunately, his ERA grew to 4.78 in 2023, his worst mark as a Cardinal. Remarkably, **Kyle Gibson** threw 192 innings for Baltimore and his 33 starts were the most in the American League. His ERA of 4.73 is nearly identical to Mikolas'. **Lance Lynn** is back for his second stint with St. Louis and while his season numbers are dubious, he did pitch much better with the Dodgers in the regular season but got roughed up in the postseason. **Steven Matz** has been hampered by injuries in his first two years in St. Louis but showed promise last year and pitched to a 3.86 ERA.

The bullpen struggled last season, and not for a lack of effort by the front office to add arms, some of them quite expensive. Even more money has been utilized to bolster the bullpen in 2024 and the additions include **Andrew Kittredge** and **Keenan Middleton** as well as rookies **Riley O'Brien** and **Ryan Fernandez**. **Ryan Hensley** returns to the closing role after a solid but shortened season due to forearm issues.

The Bottom Line

On offense, there's no shortage of experience, Arenado, Goldschmidt, Crawford, and Carpenter have a combined 6,195 hits, 986 home runs, and 3,571 RBI in their collective careers. Unlike the division rival Cincinnati Reds who stole a league-leading 190 bases, the Cardinals don't possess loads of speed and will again be somewhat reliant on the long ball to score runs. Likewise, the rotation is full of veteran arms. Many of the starters made most, if not all, of their starts but will the Cardinals really be that fortunate in 2024? Even then, the results were somewhat mixed. In order to move on from 2023's disappointment, the Cardinals need to get younger and develop that talent, which could mean they are "sellers" yet again at the trade deadline.

2024 Projection: 77-85, 4th in NL Central



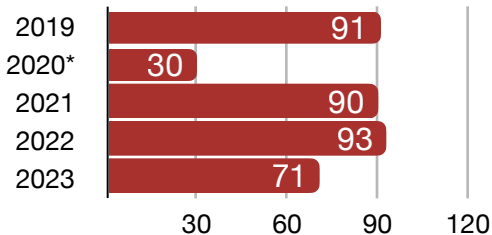
2023 MLB Ranks
RPG - 4.44 (19th)
HITS - 1376 (14th)
HR - 209 (12th)
ERA - 4.79 (24th)
SO - 1215 (29th)
FD% - .989% (3rd)

Paul Goldschmidt



Photo via Sports Illustrated

CARDINALS 5-YEAR WIN TREND



29.5 < Number to Know

The average age of the St. Louis Cardinals in 2023 (oldest in NL Central), a number that could go up with the additions of veterans like Lance Lynn, Brandon Crawford, and Matt Carpenter.

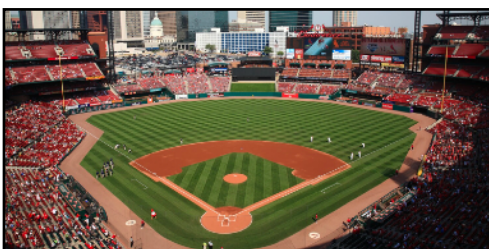


Photo via AFAR

PROSPECT TO WATCH Masyn Winn - SS

Let's throw out the small MLB sample size of 37 games that Masyn Winn produced in 2023. When he made his debut on August 18th against the New York Mets and registered his first career hit, the Cardinals were just beginning their final slide that saw the team finish 20 games below .500 for the first time in nearly three decades. Yes, he did have some major struggles at the plate and posted just a .172 average but certain statistics such as whiff and chase rates indicate that he was simply pressing in his time in the big leagues. He has Gold Glove potential at shortstop with a cannon for an arm, and what better mentor to have at shortstop than Brandon Crawford, a player with four Gold Gloves, a Silver Slugger, and three All-Star appearances?



Photo via Sports Illustrated

Projected Lineup		'23 AVG
33	Brendan Donovan	DH .284
46	Paul Goldschmidt	1B .268
16	Nolan Gorman	2B .236
28	Nolan Arenado	3B .266
40	Willson Contreras	C .264
41	Alec Burleson	LF .244
18	Jordan Walker	RF .276
3	Dylan Carlson	CF .219
35	Brandon Crawford	SS .194

Projected Rotation		'23 ERA
54	Sonny Gray	SP 2.79
39	Miles Mikolas	SP 4.78
44	Kyle Gibson	SP 4.73
31	Lance Lynn	SP 5.73
32	Steven Matz	SP 3.86
56	Ryan Helsley	CL 2.45

PLAYER SPOTLIGHT Willson Contreras - C



2023 Statistics

GP AVG OPS HR RBI
124 .264 .826 20 67

Regardless of how Willson Contreras performed in 2023, the spotlight was always going to be focused on "Willy" considering he was the first Cardinal backstop not named Yadier Molina to start Opening Day since 2005. Cardinals fans were quick to identify his below-average rankings in pitch framing and blocking and he had to work through chemistry issues with the pitching staff. Despite some of the controversy, he turned in a very nice season offensively and hit 20 home runs while tying his career high of 27 doubles. Defense will continue to be an ongoing issue, but he's one of the best offense catchers in the game.

2024 Schedule

March/April 2024											
					LAD 4:10	LAD 10:10	LAD 9:10				
LAD 7:00	SD 9:40	SD 9:40	SD 4:10	MIA 4:15			MIA 2:15				
MIA 2:15	PHI 7:55	PHI 7:45	PHI 1:15			ARI 9:40	ARI 8:10				
ARI 4:10	OAK 9:40	OAK 8:40	OAK 3:37			MIL 8:15	MIL 2:15				
MIL 2:15	ARI 7:45	ARI 7:45	ARI 1:15			NYM 7:10	NYM 4:05				
NYM 1:40	DET 6:40	DET 6:40									

May 2024											
					DET 1:10		CWS 8:15	CWS 2:15			
CWS 2:15	NYM 7:45	NYM 7:45	NYM 1:15	MIL 7:40		MIL 8:10	MIL 7:15				
MIL 2:10	LAA 9:38	LAA 9:38	LAA 9:07			BOS 8:15	BOS 7:15				
BOS 2:15	BAL 7:45	BAL 7:45	BAL 1:15			CHC 8:15	CHC 7:15				
CHC 7:00	CIN 4:10	CIN 6:40	CIN 1:10			PHI 6:40					

June 2024											
										PHI 7:15	
PHI 1:35	HOU 8:10	HOU 8:10	HOU 8:10	COL 7:45	COL 8:15	COL 4:15					
COL 2:15		PIT 7:45	PIT 7:45	PIT 2:15	CHC 2:20	CHC 2:20					
CHC 2:20	MIA 6:40	MIA 6:40	MIA 12:40	SF 7:15			SF 2:15				
SF 2:15	ATL 7:45	ATL 7:45	ATL 7:15	CIN 7:45	CIN 8:15	CIN 2:15					
CIN 2:15											

July 2024											
					PIT 6:40	PIT 6:40	PIT 12:35	WSH 6:45	WSH 4:05		
WSH 1:35	WSH 4:05	KC 7:45	KC 7:45			CHC 8:15	CHC 2:15				
CHC 2:15	All-Star Break - Arlington, TX						ATL 7:20	ATL 7:20			
ATL 1:35	PIT 6:40	PIT 6:40	PIT 12:35			WSH 8:15	WSH 7:15				
WSH 2:15	TEX 7:45	TEX 7:45	TEX 2:15								

August 2024											
							CHC 8:05	CHC 2:20	CHC 2:20		
CHC 2:20		TB 7:45	TB 7:45	TB 7:15		KC 8:10	KC 7:10				
	CIN 6:40	CIN 6:40	CIN 6:40			LAD 8:15	LAD 7:15				
LAD 2:15		MIL 7:45	MIL 7:45	MIL 2:15		MIN 8:10	MIN 7:10				
MIN 2:10	SD 7:45	SD 7:45	SD 7:45	SD 2:15		NYG 7:05	NYG 1:05				

September 2024											
NYG 1:35	MIL 2:10	MIL 7:40	MIL 7:40			SEA 8:15	SEA 7:15				
SEA 2:15		CIN 7:45	CIN 7:45	CIN 1:15		TOR 7:07	TOR 3:07				
TOR 1:37	PIT 7:45	PIT 7:45	PIT 7:45	PIT 7:15		CLE 8:15	CLE 7:15				
CLE 2:15		COL 8:40	COL 8:40	COL 3:10		SF 10:15	SF 4:05				
SF 3:05											

HOME AWAY