

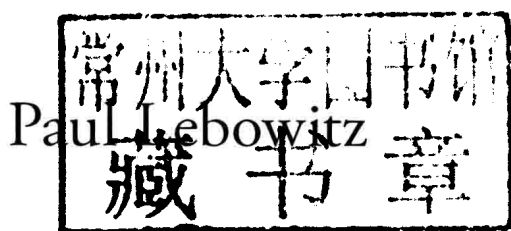
Paul Lebowitz's  
2011

**BASEBALL**  
**GUIDE**

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO THE 2011 BASEBALL SEASON

# Paul Lebowitz's 2011 Baseball Guide

A Complete Guide to the  
2011 Baseball Season



iUniverse, Inc.  
Bloomington

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# American League East Predicted Standings

	Wins	Losses	GB
1. Boston Red Sox	100	62	---
2. New York Yankees	89	73	11
3. Tampa Bay Rays	86	76	14
4. Toronto Blue Jays	83	79	17
5. Baltimore Orioles	66	96	34



## *Boston Red Sox*

2010 Record: 89-73; 3<sup>rd</sup> place, American League East.

### 2010 Recap:

The Red Sox had built their 2010 club based on pitching and defense and eschewed the usual purchasing and/or trading of big-ticket free agents and stars to try a stat zombie tenet of run prevention. Early in the season, the pitching was injury-riddled and struggled; and the defense wasn't as good as it was supposed to be.

Injuries to Mike Cameron, Josh Beckett, Jacoby Ellsbury, Dustin Pedroia and Kevin Youkilis would've been a convenient excuse for the Red Sox to finish as a .500 team. Instead, spurred by above-and-beyond performances from Adrian Beltre, Clay Buchholz and Jon Lester; a renaissance from David Ortiz; and with unsung youngsters and fill-ins Ryan Kalish, Daniel Nava, Darnell McDonald and Bill Hall, they finished close to a playoff spot.

Only the presence of two superior (and healthier) teams, the Yankees and Rays, kept the Red Sox from what would've been a heroic berth in the playoffs.

### 2011 ADDITIONS:

1B Adrian Gonzalez was acquired from the San Diego Padres.

LF Carl Crawford was signed to a 7-year, \$142 million contract.

RHP Bobby Jenks was signed to a 2-year, \$12 million contract.



RHP Dan Wheeler was signed to a 1-year, \$3 million contract with 2012 club option.

RHP Matt Albers was signed to a 1-year, \$875,000 contract.

RHP Jason Bergmann signed a minor league contract.

LHP Andrew Miller was acquired from the Florida Marlins, was non-tendered and signed a minor league contract.

RHP Alfredo Aceves signed a 1-year, split contract for \$650,000 in the big leagues; \$200,000 in the minors.

INF Drew Sutton signed a minor league contract.

LHP Dennys Reyes signed a minor league contract.

Pitching coach Curt Young was hired.

## 2011 SUBTRACTIONS:

3B Adrian Beltre was not re-signed.

C/1B Victor Martinez was not re-signed.

INF/OF Bill Hall was not re-signed.

3B/1B Mike Lowell retired.

2B/OF Eric Patterson was traded to the San Diego Padres.

1B Anthiny Rizzo was traded to the San Diego Padres.

RHP Casey Kelly was traded to the San Diego Padres.

OF Reymond Fuentes was traded to the San Diego Padres.

LHP Scott Schoeneweis was released.

INF Felipe Lopez's option was declined.

LHP Dustin Richardson was traded to the Florida Marlins.

C Dusty Brown was not re-signed.

RHP Taylor Buchholz was non-tendered.

RHP Fernando Cabrera was not re-signed.

3B Jack Hannahan was not re-signed.

OF Jonathan Van Every was not re-signed.

Pitching coach John Farrell was hired to manage the Toronto Blue Jays.

2011 PROJECTED STARTING ROTATION: Josh Beckett; Jon Lester; John Lackey; Clay Buchholz; Daisuke Matsuzaka; Tim Wakefield.

2011 PROJECTED BULLPEN: Jonathan Papelbon; Bobby Jenks; Daniel Bard; Dan Wheeler; Hideki Okajima; Matt Albers; Scott Atchison; Michael Bowden; Felix Doubront.

2011 PROJECTED LINEUP: C-Jarrod Saltalamacchia/Jason Varitek; 1B- Adrian Gonzalez; 2B-Dustin Pedroia; 3B-Kevin Youkilis; SS-Marco Scutaro; LF-Carl Crawford; CF-Mike Cameron; RF-J.D. Drew; DH-David Ortiz.

2011 BENCH: OF-Jacoby Ellsbury; INF-Jed Lowrie; OF-Darnell McDonald; OF-Ryan Kalish; OF-Daniel Nava; OF-Josh Reddick.

2011 POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTORS: 1B-Lars Anderson; INF-Yamaico Navarro; RHP-Junichi Tazawa; RHP Robert Coello; RHP-Alfredo Aceves; LHP-Dennys Reyes.

## ASSESSMENTS MANAGEMENT:

There are always the relentless defenders of everything GM Theo Epstein does as if it's part of some master scheme to conquer the baseball world.

Few see it for what it is as the Red Sox and Epstein occasionally and conveniently forget what they said in the past to repair holes that their reliance and experimentation with stat zombie tenets like "run prevention" have created.

Much like the winter of the 2006-2007 season when a missed playoff spot caused the Red Sox to toss money at each and every one of their problems and were rewarded with a World Series win, the strategy of pitching and defense was put aside as was the attempt to sign affordable and pluggable players like Adrian Beltre and Mike Cameron.

In the winter of 2010-2011 the Red Sox went to the checkbook and got the best that money could buy.

By signing Carl Crawford and trading for Adrian Gonzalez, the Red Sox got the best of both worlds. They acquired excellent defenders and MVP-caliber bats to bolster a lineup that was productive despite the injuries, but needed to replace Adrian Beltre and Victor Martinez;

they also needed to make the lineup more intimidating. As much as it's said that the Red Sox "still had the second best offense in the American League in 2010", there was something missing and it was *not* due to injuries.

They were streaky; they were able to be pitched to.

Despite the aforementioned above-and-beyond the call work of the youngsters and journeymen bench players, the Red Sox were smart enough to strike when they had the opportunity. Epstein jumped in on Gonzalez and gave up youngsters who weren't going to contribute to the current Red Sox club. Because they've been so smart with their draft picks, they were able to surrender top prospects like Casey Kelly to get Gonzalez.

Epstein is one of the best GMs in baseball, but it's not due to any evil, long-range plan to rule the world. In fact, when the Red Sox have gotten into trouble it was when they relied on shaky ideas like the "closer-by-committee"; held fast to the storyline that they didn't have the money to make major mid-season acquisitions as they claimed in 2006; or went with "run prevention".

There's nothing wrong with covering up one's mistakes with money. In fact, that's what *has* to be done. It's the height of selfishness and arrogance to cling to that which isn't working. Epstein addressed every need—the lineup and bullpen—the Red Sox had. He did it by spending on Crawford, Bobby Jenks and Dan Wheeler; and by trading young players for Gonzalez.

No one's going to notice how they did it if they play up to their potential and Epstein and his staff will get the credit. It's not exactly a stat zombie how-to manual.

Who cares?

For a manager with two World Series wins to his credit, Terry Francona probably did the best job of his career in 2010.

There was every excuse in the book for the team to fall apart as the injuries mounted and the blueprint of the front office was decimated. But rather than make excuses, the Red Sox continued to win and a major part of that was the way Francona handles his clubhouse.

Contrary to the popular notion that he's the "best" manager in baseball, he does have flaws. Francona is still enacting the edicts of the

front office; it's one of the main reasons (along with the World Series wins and handling the Boston media) that he's survived as long as he has. He's entrenched now, but he's not in a strategic class with a Tony La Russa who can win with less talent because of his strategic acumen and the work of his pitching coach, Dave Duncan.

That said, there's probably not a better manager *for the Red Sox* than Francona. He knows his place and generally makes the correct moves. In the hierarchy of the Red Sox, Francona is what he is. When he got the job, it was because he was willing to take short money for the opportunity; he'd do as he was told by the front office; and he was an agreeable choice for Curt Schilling to okay a trade to Boston. Now he's a major part of their success.

Much like Epstein, what difference does it make that he's not La Russa? He's Terry Francona and he's got two championship rings and players throughout baseball respect him, like him and want to play for him.

## STARTING PITCHING:

Josh Beckett and John Lackey were supposed to be the veteran anchors of the starting rotation with terrific post-season pedigrees. Both were disappointing.

Beckett started only 21 games in 2010 due to a back injury and when he pitched, he was terrible for long stretches. His numbers were across-the-board awful. He allowed 151 hits in 127 innings; gave up 20 homers; and he walked 45 in those 127 innings a year after walking 55 in 212 innings.

Having signed a \$68 million contract extension to forgo his pending free agency, the Red Sox need Beckett to rebound into the pitcher he was from 2007-2009.

If he's healthy, he's young enough (31 in May) that he can regain his form; I'd be concerned about the injury issues he's had in recent years. If it was an elbow or shoulder, that would be one thing; but he's had issues with his oblique and his back. This is not something to dismiss.

I'd expect Beckett to rebound and have at least an 170-190 inning year and 13-16 wins. It helps that the Red Sox have an excellent offense, defense and bullpen to support him when he runs into trouble. Mere

competence will get him 15 wins if things go as they should in other areas.

At the very least, after he missed time in his final two seasons with the Angels with shoulder problems, Lackey was durable for the Red Sox pitching 215 innings. For the most part, he was good enough in 2010. His numbers were blown up by a few starts (mostly early in the season) in which he got shelled. He's always allowed around a hit-per-inning and the bad starts made that look far worse than normal as he allowed 233 in 215 innings. His strikeout numbers and control were in line with what he usually delivers as well.

Lackey's about guts more than stuff; the transition from laid back Anaheim to crisis-a-day Boston couldn't have been easy despite his history of handling pressure. Lackey will have a bounce back year and win 15-18 games.

The true emerging stars of the Red Sox starting rotation are their homegrown lefty-righty duo of Jon Lester and Clay Buchholz.

Lester just turned 27 and has emerged as one of the top-tier pitchers in all of baseball. In 2010 he pitched over 200 innings for the third year in a row; he won 19 games; he struck out 225; his hits/innings-pitched ratio improved to 167/208; he only allowed 14 homers and finished fourth in the AL Cy Young Award voting.

He's improved every single full year he's been in the big leagues and is prepared to step forward as the ace in name and not simply the "ace of the future". He'll contend for the Cy Young Award and win 20 games for the first time.

Buchholz justified the Red Sox faith and their reluctance to include him in any trade (especially for Adrian Gonzalez who they got anyway).

Buchholz developed more slowly than Lester—partially because the Red Sox didn't have room for him in the rotation; partially because they were babying him. Now, at age 26, he too is blossoming into a top-of-the rotation starter. The beauty of the Red Sox depth is that he won't be required to throw 200 innings this season if they want to continue to incrementally increase his workload.

He went 17-7 with a sparkling 2.33 ERA and 142 hits allowed in 173 innings. He missed time in 2010 with a hamstring problem, but that should be of little concern going into 2011. There could be something of a sophomore slump since Buchholz just completed his first full season in the big leagues; a 2.33 ERA is hard to match for a young pitcher, but he doesn't *have* to repeat that work to be a successful starter with the Red Sox lineup and defense.

A columnist for NESN suggested that Daisuke Matsuzaka might be the "best no. 5 starter ever".

Yah.

That would make sense if he'd never seen Daisuke Matsuzaka pitch. Or if he even knew what he was talking about.

Considering the hype (stifling and absurd); the posting money (\$51 million); the contract (\$52 million); and his performance (mediocre), he's been a bust.

The problem with Matsuzaka isn't simply that the expectations were too high or that he cost too much money; the problem with Matsuzaka is that he's the type of pitcher who teases with a brush at greatness and then reverts back to what he is: a pitcher who can't throw consistent strikes, can't pitch deeply into games, nor be trusted to stay healthy.

This is before getting into his complaints over the training regimen in North America in comparison to those in Japan.

On the surface, he doesn't look that bad. His 2008 season of 18-3 was misleading because he was the beneficiary of an excellent team with a deep bullpen playing behind him; he was injured for chunks of 2009; and through August of 2010, he'd pitch 5-6 innings (with 100 or so pitches), give up 3 runs here, 4 runs there, 7 runs in this game; 0 runs in that game—and end up with a winning record.

But he can't be trusted. What's most aggravating about him is that lack of definition in his game. I'd rather have a pitcher who I at least know is going to go out there, give me 7 innings, give up 4 runs, gut his way through and do that every single time. With Matsuzaka, he almost no-hits the Phillies, then slowly degenerates back into the 3-4 runs in 5 innings pitcher he is.

He'll win 12 or more games on this team because they're so good, but don't think anyone's comfortable with him as the starting pitcher that day and I'm sure the Red Sox would love to be rid of him.

"The best no. 5 starter ever"?

Please.

With Matsuzaka's faults in mind and the injury histories of the other starters, it's nice to have Tim Wakefield still around just in case. Yes, he's 44. No, he can't pitch as often nor as well as he did when he was younger; but he's still able to start or relieve and is willing to do anything to help the team win. Wakefield's body has broken down in recent years, but he'll still be there when they need him and, given the club's history, they *will* need him at some point. And he'll deliver.

## BULLPEN:

Jonathan Papelbon and the Red Sox are entering their final season together. He's sick of them not respecting the work he's done with a long-term contract extension; they're sick of him being Jonathan Papelbon.

The Red Sox aren't going to sign him to a big contract and he's going to go elsewhere to get paid. I had thought (and said repeatedly) that the Red Sox were going to trade Papelbon this winter. I almost guaranteed it. In fact, I might have guaranteed it. But now, I think they'll keep him for the year to try and win another championship with the proven post-season closer on their side, then let him leave and take the draft pick compensation when he signs elsewhere.

On the field, Papelbon was inconsistent in 2010; but he was reliable for the most part. In truth, his ancillary numbers were consistent from 2009 (when he had a 1.85 ERA and 38 saves) to 2010 (when he had a 3.90 ERA and 37 saves). Papelbon's stats were nearly identical from one year to the next. His strikeouts, homers, hits per inning and walks were right in line with what he's always done. There were a few games in 2010 in which he got blasted and saw his ERA skyrocket.

Papelbon is a top-tier closer and he'll want to have a superb year to ensure a long-term deal with someone for a lot of money.

Erstwhile White Sox closer Bobby Jenks—another reliever with a post-season pedigree and a championship ring—signed with the Red Sox to be their set-up man. Jenks's fastball isn't the easy 100 it was earlier in his career as he effortlessly hit the triple digits with regularity and he's gotten progressively worse after emerging as a force in the White Sox championship run during the 2005 season. That said, he still throws very hard and perhaps the change-of-scenery will help him regain his form.

Jenks's strikeouts per innings pitched had declined precipitously from 2006 onward, but he was back over one-per-inning in 2010. Jenks throws strikes and doesn't usually allow many homers (3 in 52 innings last season); his ERA is bloated for a closer, but that stems more from his gacks. When he's off, he's *off* and gets ripped all over the place. But for the most part, he was reliable for the White Sox in his time there. He'll do fine as a set-up man with the Red Sox.

Had Papelbon been traded, Daniel Bard was seen as the heir apparent and new closer; he had some trouble in his save opportunities last season and that may have given the Red Sox pause before handing him the job especially if they had it in mind to craft the juggernaut they constructed this winter. A bad or unprepared closer can wreck any team's season as the Braves showed year-after-year in the 1990s and early-to-mid 2000s.

Bard's fastball is also up around the 100-mph range and he struck out 76 in 74 innings in 2010. He can be a bit wild with 30 walks in those 76 innings and he allowed 6 homers. With the presence of Jenks, there will be less pressure on Bard and the 25-year-old will learn how to be a big game reliever without the eyes of Boston upon him wondering if he can handle it.

Veteran Dan Wheeler signed a 1-year contract to further bolster the Red Sox bullpen. Wheeler also has closing experience and has pitched in many playoff games with the Rays and Astros. He's an intense competitor who throws strikes. He gives up too many homers and his slider is the key to his success.



Lefty Hideki Okajima was non-tendered by the Red Sox and then re-signed. The normally reliable Okajima had a bad year in 2010. His WHIP rose from 1.262 to 1.717; his normally solid numbers against both lefties and righties took a nosedive. Okajima regained his form over the last month of the season. With the fluctuating performances prevalent in the careers of veteran relievers, I'd expect a return to form from Okajima in 2011. Even with that, I'd probably like to have another veteran lefty in the bullpen to help him along.

Former Oriole and Astro Matt Albers signed a 1-year contract. I've always liked his fastball, but his results are what they are. Aside from 2008 when he had some success, Albers has always been inconsistent at best. He's wild; gives up too many hits and homers; and doesn't strike out batters with any great frequency. As an extra arm, he'll be fine with the Red Sox as long as they don't ask—or expect—too much.

Journeyman Scott Atchison was an unsung hero for the Red Sox in 2010. Atchison had brief shots with the Mariners and Giants before going to Japan. He returned to North America and pitched serviceably for the Red Sox. He's a veteran long reliever who probably won't have much work to do with the Red Sox starting rotation being as solid as it is, but he's good to have around as he'll do anything asked and give length in a game to rest the other relievers.

Michael Bowden is another of the Red Sox homegrown arms. The 24-year-old righty has been a starter in the minors and pitched quite well. There's not much room in the Red Sox current starting rotation for him unless Matsuzaka pitches so terribly that he gets pulled and Wakefield can't handle the full time job as a starter at this point in his career. Bowden can also be a long reliever with much more upside than Atchison.

Felix Doubront could be the second lefty (or first lefty) out of Francona's bullpen. He's lean and deceptive and dominated lefty bats in 2010. He's been a starter in the minors, but as said earlier, there's little room in the Red Sox starting rotation. Doubront is a sleeper as a lefty specialist.