



## **We're Going Streaking!**

### **Why You Shouldn't Mess With Teams on a Roll**

**By Hansel Wei**

What makes a winning baseball team? Is it pure talent? Starting pitching? Their opponents? All of these elements play a role, but when a team gets on a real roll, and rattles off several wins (or losses) in a row, there are many intangibles involved that go well beyond the box score. Winning generates enthusiasm, just as losing dampens it. Team spirit, and the willingness to buy into the team's agenda, are both factors that, if positive, can push a team in the right direction, but if negative, can lead them to sink like a rock.

We know that lines are set based on public perception. A few weeks into last season, the Yankees found themselves in last place in the AL East, but even as they continued to drop games that they "should" have won on paper, they remained favorites in most of their contests because they still were considered a top team by the betting public. I've already discussed how linesmakers do *not* attempt to show who *will* win – rather, they base their odds on the public's perception of who *should* win, and attempt to create balanced action. Public perception, however, is slow to react. You don't have to be.

It's easy to see either a "bad" team on a hot streak or a "good" team on a losing streak and think that the law of averages says that eventually the team will stop playing above or below its capacity and regress to where it "should" be. As a serious sports bettor and someone who's been around the wagering community for a long time, I strongly advise you not to think this way. More often than not, trying to pick the end of streaks (ie, betting on a hot team to lose or a cold team to win) will lose you money.

For instance, consider the Florida Marlins. A "bad team," you might say? Think again. Although their eight-game win streak ended against Baltimore on Wednesday, and they remain a poor 31-38 overall, they're 9-1 in their last 10, and in rebounding from that loss Thursday night, they won the game in exactly the way that a streaking team does – by grit, determination, and a little luck. Take a closer look at their record – before the eight game win streak, the Fish had won 18 of 24. What we've got here is a young team starting to bond and come together, and go out every night convinced that they can win the game. Why should the team's play at the beginning of the season affect whether or not you bet on them today? So throw out that 31-38 record, and instead look at stats like their current 20-7 run.

Similarly, why back a “good” team on a losing streak? Sure, a team sitting atop their division at 45-25 might look intimidating, but what if they’re just 2-8 in their last 10? Of particular importance is when a team on a losing streak is FAVORED to win – if you’re serious about winning, think long and hard before you *lay* money on a team that is riding a cold streak. You shouldn’t care about what uniform the players you’re betting on are wearing (ie, nothing about putting on pinstripes makes the Yankees magically a better team), and you shouldn’t care about who a team beat three months ago. If a team has lost a string of games and yet is favored, red flags need to go up, and you’ve got to ask yourself: *why* are they favored? Frequently, I find the answer to this question is public perception.

Take the Atlanta Braves, for example. Yes, the mighty Braves – winners of 16 straight NL East Division crowns... and losers of ten in a row! In a recent game against Toronto, the Braves had lost eight in a row, but because Tim Hudson was on the mound, went into the game as -144 favorites! The Braves had simply not proven to me that this was warranted, and so I turned a play on the Blue Jays at +136 into a nice payday. The same thing had happened the night before, with the Jays cashing at +119. Yet because the general public continues to think, “It’s the Braves! They can’t *keep* losing!” the Braves remain favorites or very slim dogs when there is no logical reason this should be the case.

In the end, our task as sports bettors is to decide which factors are important and which factors should be disregarded. A team’s overall record often can be misleading, especially later in the season when an overall record may not adequately reflect a team’s current status, and *particularly* in baseball, where the team plays so many games. Similarly, don’t be fooled by a team’s reputation, positive or negative. The worst teams in every sport win games and get hot; the best teams in every sport go cold. “Being the Colts” didn’t seem to help at the end of last season, now did it? Streaks and public perception need to be weighed very carefully. Factoring both into your wagering decisions will pay dividends in the long run.

**Until next time, do yourself a favor...**

**Keep Doing Thing’s Hansel’s Wei.**