



Yesterday, [Rob looked at those in the National League](#) that could be buyers at the trade deadline. Today, he looks at the American League – Maury Brown

The American League playoff chase is playing out similarly to the race in the National League: two teams in the East fighting for the league's top record, a 4-team cluster in the Central, and a 55-56 win team trailed by 3-4 games in the West. Eight teams in the NL have a realistic shot at a playoff berth, whereas the AL has 9 teams in the hunt. Today, we'll look at the needs of those contenders, and which pieces they might add to put themselves in position to play in October.

1) Boston Red Sox

Needs: SP, RF

- The best offense in baseball doesn't need a whole lot of tinkering. Boston's team OPS is a ridiculously high .812, and that's with Carl Crawford struggling before missing the last month. Once he returns, fill-in Josh Reddick (.357 AVG, 1.043 OPS) might take at bats from the regressing J.D. Drew (.225 AVG, .637 OPS). Drew and Darnell McDonald have both been pretty awful, and GM Theo Epstein might want to bring in a veteran outfielder in case Reddick is unable to keep up his red-hot pace. Pirates' outfielder Matt Diaz has always hit lefties well, and a team featuring Crawford, Adrian Gonzalez, David Ortiz, and Jacoby Ellsbury will certainly see

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a lot of lefty specialists in late-game situations. If Boston wants to aim higher, switch-hitting Mets outfielder Carlos Beltran would look good in right field. The underwhelming starting rotation needs a jolt. John Lackey has been a colossal disappointment since signing with the Sox before the 2010 season, leaving Jon Lester and Josh Beckett as the only two reliable starters. ESPN's Jerry Crasnick recently tweeted that the Braves are "willing to listen" to offers for Derek Lowe, and the Red Sox would seem to be a good fit. Lowe has always been a second-half pitcher, and thrived in his previous stint in Boston. Atlanta probably wouldn't ask for much in return if Boston is willing to eat about half of the \$22 million or so owed to Lowe through the 2012 season, as he likely wouldn't crack the Braves' playoff rotation and his departure would give Atlanta some payroll flexibility. \$11 million for a season and a half of Lowe isn't a bad deal when you're paying Lackey \$16 million a year. The Red Sox have already [kicked the tires on Ubaldo Jimenez and Hiroki Kuroda](#)

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2) New York Yankees

Needs: SP, OF

- The Yanks will probably try to get in on Lowe or Jimenez, too. Considering [Bartolo Colon's](#) recent return to mediocrity, the rotation is paper-thin after

[C.C. Sabathia](#)

. I can't see the Yanks adding any less than 2 starting pitchers, for the simple fact that GM Brian Cashman would be ill-advised to trust the fate of their season in the hands of Colon,

[A.J. Burnett \(and his 5.67 postseason ERA\)](#)

, or

[Freddy Garcia](#)

. A reunion with Royals outfielder

[Melky Cabrera](#)

would be shrewd, with

[Andruw Jones](#)

appearing to be near the end of the road. Alex Rodriguez went on the DL recently, and

[Alex Gordon](#)

's ability to play outfield and both corner infield spots would come in handy. Gordon wouldn't come cheap, either in prospects or arbitration following the season, but the Yankees are in perpetual win-now mode and have never hesitated to deal prospects or spend a little extra cash for the sake of chasing another title. Expect an addition to the bullpen as well, as

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[Rafael Soriano](#)

has been injured for a while now and didn't exactly light the league on fire when he was healthy. Manager Joe Girardi will want to keep the workloads of David Robertson and Mariano Rivera to a minimum if he can help it. San Diego's

[Chad Qualls](#)

and

[Luke Gregerson](#)

would both be useful pickups.

3) Tampa Bay Rays

Needs: RP, Bench

- Any team that has [Kyle Farnsworth](#) closing games has serious bullpen problems, even if he's done a nice job so far this year. His 4.28 career ERA suggests that this year's 1.89 is an aberration. The Rays have been linked to [Colby](#)

[Rasmus](#)

, and

[B.J. Upton](#)

's latest failure to hustle Monday night might be enough to punch his ticket out of town.

[Rasmus probably needs to get out of St. Louis](#)

, and a straight-up Upton-for-Rasmus deal could benefit both teams. With Desmond Jennings waiting in the wings at AAA, the Rays might prefer to trade Upton for some much-needed relief. Upton's natural ability and relative youth is still attractive to a number of teams, and the Marlins [are expected to send closer Leo Nunez packing.](#)

Nunez will be likely be a "Type A" free agent following this season, allowing the Rays to add to their already-stacked farm system if and when Nunez signed elsewhere. Struggling Orioles DH

[Vladimir Guerrero](#)

would be a solid bat to bring off the bench, assuming Baltimore is willing to eat most of the \$4 million owed to him for the rest of the 2011 season.

4) Cleveland Indians

Needs: 2B, SP

- Nobody saw Cleveland contending for the AL Central, but unexpected performances from the starting rotation and bullpen have the Indians leading Detroit by a game for the division lead.

[Orlando Cabrera](#)

has been terrible at the plate, posting a .610 OPS. Dodgers' utilityman

[Jamey Carroll](#)

's ability to play three different infield positions would be valuable, especially considering the struggles endured by rookie

[Lonnie Chisenhall](#)

at the hot corner.

[Ty Wigginton](#)

's pop and versatility is useful enough to ignore his defensive shortcomings. The rotation has overachieved, but it still isn't playoff-caliber. Houston's

[Wandy Rodriguez](#)

would be a nice fit. A Lowe-for-

[Grady Sizemore](#)

trade would benefit both Cleveland and Atlanta. Sizemore's once-promising career has been derailed by injuries, and the Tribe might be ready to give

[Michael Brantley](#)

the full-time duties. Lowe, meanwhile, would bring a playoff-tested veteran presence that Cleveland's rotation currently lacks. The Braves make this trade because Sizemore is still a productive player when healthy, and his considerable upside is worth giving up their \$15 million number four starter for.

5) Detroit Tigers

Needs: 3B, SP

- [Brandon Inge](#) is 1 for his last 27, and needs to be replaced at third base ASAP. Florida's [Gr](#)

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[eg Dobbs](#)

and Carroll would be upgrades. In a perfect world,

[Cubs' third baseman Aramis Ramirez](#)

would drop his no-trade clause, but he continues to refuse to do so. That defense scares me, and GM Dave Dombrowski might want to look for a late-inning, glove-first replacement or two. Other than Inge and center fielder

[Austin Jackson](#)

, the Tigers' lineup is defensively-challenged. Staff ace

[Justin Verlander](#)

is a prototypical number one starter, but the rest of the rotation sports ERAs in the mid-fours with high WHIPs (Walks + Hits/ Innings Pitched). Detroit is

[reportedly interested in Lowe](#)

, and the staff's mediocre performances have essentially forced Dombrowski to make a move.

6) Chicago White Sox

Needs: 3B, SP

- I get that Ramirez won't waive the no-trade clause because he doesn't want to uproot his wife and kids, and this would give him an opportunity to stay home and still contend for a playoff spot. The Sox' home at U.S. Cellular Field is a 10-mile drive from Ramirez' current home, Wrigley Field, and his arrival would mercifully relegate the overmatched [Brent Morel](#) to a reserve role.

[Alex Rios](#)

and

[Adam Dunn](#)

don't deserve to continue playing, but their contracts probably ensure that they will.

[Jake Peavy](#)

was supposed to be the ace who would anchor the staff, but his inability to stay healthy has left a gaping void at the top of the rotation. The thin starting pitching market has a lot of band-aids, but no real cures. Even if they add an arm (and they should), Chicago's fate will likely rest on whether Rios and Dunn can regain their past all-star form and allow the South Siders to simply out-hit their opponents. Kenny Williams isn't afraid to pull the trigger on a blockbuster, though, so don't be surprised if he makes a big move in the next week and a half.

7) Minnesota Twins

Needs: SS, RP

- It's hard to believe we're even talking about the Twins when one considers the fact that they've gotten just about nothing from franchise cornerstones [Joe Mauer](#) , [Justin Morneau](#) , and [Francisco Liriano](#) . When [Denard Span](#) and [Jason Kubel](#) return from their rehab assignments, Minnesota will add a couple of productive bats. The pitching staff is a bit of a train wreck. The Twins have the 6th highest ERA in baseball, and now [Scott Baker](#) , the team's de facto ace, is injured. I don't see this team staying in contention for the Central much longer, but if they plan to, they need to upgrade the shortstop position immediately. The [Tsuyoshi Nishioka](#) experiment is officially a failure, but the alternatives are limited. Most teams not in the playoff picture have young shortstops who are integral parts of those teams' future plans, and the others aren't worth acquiring.

8) Texas Rangers

Needs: RP, SP

- The defending AL champions are stacked up and down the lineup, so don't expect any movement there. Outside of closer [Neftali Feliz](#) , the pitching staff has more holes than [Denzel Washington at the end of Training Day](#) . I wouldn't feel comfortable sending anyone in their rotation other than [C.J. Wilson](#)

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to the mound in a playoff game. ESPN Top-100 prospect

[Jurickson Profar's](#)

path is blocked by all-star shortstop Elvis Andrus, so the team might dangle Profar in the hopes of acquiring an ace, similar to the fashion in which they traded

[Justin Smoak](#)

last year in order to pick up

[Cliff Lee](#)

for their deep playoff run. Unfortunately for the Rangers, nobody of Lee's caliber is on the market this year. Jimenez is their best shot at a premier starter, but nobody is entirely sure that Colorado is actually shopping him and the Rockies have their own shortstop under contract through the 2020 season. In the pen,

[Arthur Rhodes](#)

is finally beginning to pitch like the 41-year-old man he is. Nunez would be a good 8th-inning option for manager Ron Washington.

9) Los Angeles Angels

Needs: OF/DH, 3B

- This team has the frontline starting pitching to shut down the high-powered lineups of New York and Boston, but they'll have to figure out a way to score some runs in the process. [Vernon Wells](#)

,
[Torii Hunter](#)

, and
[Bobby Abreu](#)

are all on the downside of their careers. The hope in the organization is that recently called-up uber-prospect

[Mike Trout](#)

, who ESPN's Keith Law ranked as the number one prospect in baseball entering this season, is ready to contribute in a big way. Those are some big expectations to throw on the shoulders of a teenager. I'd like to see a reunion with Guerrero. He was immensely productive in his previous stint in Anaheim (they play in Anaheim, not Los Angeles; enough with the LA nonsense), and is exactly the type of run-producer that their lineup lacks. I'm not a huge fan of

[Alberto Callaspo](#)

, or anyone whose on-base percentage is higher than their slugging percentage for that matter.

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If the Mets decide to commit to

[Jose Reyes](#)

long-term, they might be willing to listen to offers for

[David Wright](#)

. The Angels have a slew of promising arms that the Mets would covet, and

[rookie Tyler Chatwood](#)

would assuredly be part of any potential deal for Wright. I don't see this move happening, but I also can't see the Angels beating out Texas for the West without making drastic changes to their lineup

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