

Bob Tewksbury and His 1992 Career Year

Digging through generally worthless “junk wax” baseball cards of 1987 to 1993, you’ll occasionally find a card released before a great season of a not-so-famous player. One of these is a 1992 Topps Stadium Club card of Bob Tewksbury. As it so happens, 1992 was the journeyman pitcher’s finest season, which happens to fall right in the Junk Wax era. Let’s take a look at Tewksbury’s 6.4 WAR career season with the 1992 St. Louis Cardinals.

The 1992 Cardinals didn’t do much; at 83-79, they placed 3rd in the National League East Division. Ozzie Smith, Ray Lankford, and even Bernard Gilkey were All-Star level players that year, but it wasn’t quite enough for them to make the playoffs. Tewksbury pitched like an ace that year, and he never again had a season quite like it, although he was decent in 1993 (2.7 WAR) and had two 3+ WAR years with the Minnesota Twins at the end of his career.

Interestingly, FanGraphs measures Tewksbury’s 1993 season more favorably than his 1992 season. That’s because FanGraphs uses FIP (Fielding Independent Pitching) for its WAR calculation rather than ERA. But for purposes of “Junk Wax Dynasty” we are focusing on results, which is why we’re using Baseball Reference’s ERA/RA9 (Runs Allowed/9) based WAR. FanGraphs has Tewksbury’s 1992 season being worth 4.0 WAR and his 1993 season at 4.3 WAR, thanks to an inflated BABIP (batting average on balls in play).

One thing that FanGraphs does show us, though, is that Tewksbury was probably a better pitcher than his Baseball Reference page may suggest. On Baseball Reference, Tewksbury was worth 21.3 wins in a 13 year career, 10 of those full seasons. But, FanGraphs sees him as worth 31.3 wins. That’s because in his “worst” years, he actually pitched better than the results would suggest.

Tewksbury only had a career strikeout rate of 4.04 K/9, but a walk rate of merely 1.45 BB/9. He rarely gave up homers (0.71 HR/9), but with a batting average of balls in play of .300, he relied heavily on his defense. So his career ERA of 3.92 belied an FIP of 3.65. So, in reality, he was actually a slightly-above average pitcher who just had some bad luck with defense behind him.

In retrospect, Tewksbury’s 1993 season is actually better peripherally than his 1992 season. In 1992, he had a strikeout rate of merely 3.52 K/9 but a walk rate of only 0.77 BB/9. His strand rate was a high 80.8% and his BABIP only .257, which are big reasons why his 2.16 ERA was a mirage compared to his 3.14 FIP. His 1993 season featured a 4.09 K/9 and a 0.84 BB/9. But he suffered from a .316 BABIP and a more “normal” 70.3% strand rate (career 68.5%).

Still, Tewksbury was actually the pitcher that a lot of teams thought that he was, a workhorse that kept you in games. Suffice it to say, the Yankees should’ve never traded Tewksbury for Steve Trout to the Cubs. Unfortunately for Tewks, he didn’t pitch well for the Cubs and spent a

lot of time in the minors until the Cubs let him go and the Cardinals picked him up. He pitched quite well for the Cardinals at AAA, and the rest is history.

If you're looking to build a team with players from only 1987-1993, consider adding a 1992 Bob Tewksbury to your pitching staff. Heck, even a 1993 Bob Tewksbury would make a fine fourth or fifth starter. At the very least, you know he'll do all he can to keep you in the game. While you're not going to find any Bob Tewksbury baseball card with much value, he does have his fans in the card collecting hobby. "Tewks" was definitely a mentally skilled pitcher, and perhaps, was pretty underrated in his time.

~ Amelia Desertsong