



# More Than Rotation Decision

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Though not complete, the decision of who will be the St. Louis Cardinals fifth starter in the rotation is drawing near with Jaime Garcia, Marco Gonzales, and Carlos Martinez delivering a battle to the finish.

Garcia is continuing to answer his biggest question—health, with good results after 150+ pitches over his last two outings.

Gonzales has allowed just one run in 12.2 innings and opponents have hit just .182 against him.

Martinez has also fared well with opponents hitting just .190 and has 10 strikeouts in his 11 innings of work.

From a performance standpoint, all three of made worthy cases for their place on the big league roster.

For the sake of discussion, let's assume Jaime Garcia is the fifth starter. Gonzales goes to Memphis where the 23-year old lefty can pitch every fifth day and be just a phone call away when needed. Martinez shows even more evidence of his growing maturity and accepts the return to the bullpen, also knowing that a future rotation spot awaits.

That is a relatively easy path with minimal resistance to follow, except for one issue.

The move of Martinez to the bullpen makes an already crowded situation overflow.

Of the expected 12-man pitching staff, five spots are spoken for in the starting rotation.

Trevor Rosenthal, Jordan Walden, Matt Belisle, and Seth Maness are looked at as right-handed options which raises the count to nine.

Randy Choate and Kevin Siegrist are on point from the left. That raises the arms count to 11.

Martinez makes 12, which means Carlos Villanueva and Sam Freeman are likely gone from the organization.

Villanueva, who was signed to minor-league deal with an invite to Spring Training, doesn't have sensational numbers with 10 hits and five runs allowed in 7.2 innings—but has pitched better than the numbers look as four of those runs came in one outing. Carlos has eight strikeouts and only one walk, he also provides veteran experience and a willingness to pitch in whatever role is asked.

Freeman has had a couple cups of coffee with the Cardinals and continues to show flashes from the left side. Consistency has been his biggest nemesis—that and lack of innings this spring as he's pitched only four innings in four games. He's also out of options. Not making the big league roster means an opportunity for another team to sign the hard-thrower.

Again three spots for one pitcher.

And the one with the most flexibility from a roster management standpoint is Martinez.

So the bigger question may not be can Carlos Martinez handle a return to the bullpen, but can he handle a return to the minors?