



# Joe Kelly = 2015 Cy Young

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*The following was written by [Bradford Bruns](#) as a special contribution to St. Louis Baseball Weekly...*

Joe Kelly will take home the next American League Cy Young Award. Just ask him.

Never one to back away from a microphone or an impromptu dance-off during batting practice, the former Cardinal entertained East Coast scribes several days ago with an ... unexpected prediction.

“I’m going to win this year,” the righthander said at Boston’s Baseball Winter Weekend event. “That’s what I told the radio guys. They didn’t believe me, so sucks to be them.”

All right, obvious correction – it sucked to be the *Red Sox* last season. Beset by injuries to key sluggers and betrayed by ineffective pitching, they could barely compete in the AL East, let alone vie for another World Series championship.

As the non-waiver trade deadline approached, general manager Ben Cherington plotted the course for 2015. He finally moved three-time All-Star lefty and October linchpin Jon Lester. Jake Peavy migrated elsewhere, as did Andrew Miller, Stephen Drew and Felix Doubront. And, of course, John Lackey’s departure netted Allen Craig and the individual poised to bag a hurler’s dream honor.

Yes, facts are facts: Kelly finished 6-4 with a 4.20 ERA last season between Boston and St. Louis. He posted a 4-2 mark with a 4.11 ERA after the July 31 deal that sent tremors through the Cards’ clubhouse. The initial returns were solid, unremarkable.

His stuff, however, is no joke. Kelly still boasts the same front-line repertoire that secured him a spot in the Redbirds’ starting five 10 months ago. A [hamstring injury, which he sustained while attempting to leg out a bunt single in Milwaukee](#), greatly compromised what might have been a breakout campaign.

“Last year, getting hurt – it was horrible for me,” Kelly said at the annual fan festival. “Getting hurt, I was gone for three months and then traded. I felt like I didn’t even have a season last year. It’s something that I’m looking forward to this year. Hopefully – knock on wood – I’ll pitch the whole year healthy and get through it and be pitching in October and not having any arm problems or any leg problems. Just go out there and kick some butt.”

Barring a surprise wave of free-agent activity in the weeks ahead, Kelly will join Clay Buchholz, Rick Porcello, Wade Miley and, yes, Justin Masterson in the Red Sox’s drastically revamped rotation – as he should. The California-Riverside product also boasts arguably the highest upside the group, having never experienced a full year of starting.

He’ll receive that chance in Beantown. Although Boston boasts loads of young offensive talent (Mookie Betts, Rusney Castillo, Jackie Bradley Jr. and Garin Cecchini top the list), the throwers stationed in Pawtucket don’t exactly inspire tremendous confidence. Kelly can feel confident knowing that he’ll actually register 20-plus starts for the first time ever. In St. Louis, with Carlos Martinez and Marco Gonzales nipping at his heels, that was far from a certainty.

To make that leap into the elite stratosphere, though, Kelly must extend deeper into contests. In his first 48 starts in the bigs, he has tossed precisely six frames in 17 of them. Seven-inning outings have proven considerably harder to compile, with Kelly logging only four of those.

The main drawback: walks. A lot of them. Kelly issued 42 free passes in 96 1/3 innings last year and had 44 in 2013. Nonetheless, opposing hitters rarely square the ball up. Kelly’s mid-90s fastball speaks for itself. If the secondary offerings – his curveball and changeup, plus the sporadic slider – continue to evolve, you’re looking at a downright filthy arsenal. Locating additional offspeed pitches when he’s behind in the count would undoubtedly temper the bases on balls as well.

Lackey, meanwhile, came up aces in the NLDS, vanquishing Hyun-Jin Ryu and the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 3. The veteran postseason stalwart’s ready to assume a prominent role in the Cardinals’ forthcoming run, too, at the MLB minimum. John Mozeliak feels zero pangs of seller’s remorse, even though Craig’s run-producing high points and Kelly’s perpetually good spirits remain fond memories.

As Craig labors to find a home in the Red Sox’s overstuffed lineup at present, Kelly’s opportunity is clear. In Boston, he can be a top-of-the-rotation-type presence. He can be one of the primary faces of the historic franchise’s presumed resurgence. He can be a feared pitcher in the junior and a clown prince all at once.

Can he be the guy with a share of the league's finest hardware at the end of the season? We're a long way from initiating that conversation, but there's little doubt that Kelly is going to enjoy every step of the journey.

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