**Washington Times**

**A (very) late look at the 2009 NL Cy Young**

Sunday, March 7, 2010 - [Baseball's Labyrinth](http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/baseballs-labyrinth/) by Arjuna Subramanian

WASHINGTON D.C., March 7th – The 2009 NL Cy Young voting was one of the closest MLB awards’ race ever.  It was therefore also one of the most controversial awards in baseball history.  All but two of the thirty-two ballots featured Giants ace Tim Lincecum, and two Cardinals, Adam Wainwright and Chris Carpenter, in some order.  The voters were even taking shots at each other.  Sports Illustrated’s Jon Heyman heavily criticzed ESPN’s Keith Law, who placed Atlanta’s Javier Vazquez second, and Baseball Prospectus’ Will Carroll, who decided on Arizona’s Dan Haren for third.  Both had left Carpenter off their ballots entirely.  Heynman and others contested that Carpenter would have won if the two afore-mentioned writers had placed Carpenter on their ballots.

When the results came out for the NL CY, I looked for a database of the complete ranked ballots, but came up empty.  Now, thanks to [Brian Walton of The Cardinal Nation Blog](http://thecardinalnationblog.com/2009/11/20/would-an-expanded-nl-cy-young-award-vote-bring-a-different-result/), and [Tom Tango of InsideTheBook.com](http://www.insidethebook.com/ee/index.php/site/comments/help_nl_cy_young_ballots/#comments), I have one, which allows to write the following analysis.

I’m going to run the voting, using the actual ballots, using five different methods, the actual voting (a modified Borda count), a traditional Borda count, instant-runoff voting, a simple plurality vote, and what I feel is the most interesting, a Condorcet vote.

First up are the real results.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  Name | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | Actual Voting |
| Tim Lincecum | 11 | 12 | 9 | 100 |
| Chris Carpenter | 9 | 14 | 7 | 94 |
| Adam Wainwright | 12 | 5 | 15 | 90 |
| Javier Vazquez | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Dan Haren | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

The voting uses a 5-3-1 points system (a Borda count).  The first thing that jumps out is, naturally, how close the vote was, with the top three all within 10 points.  The major problem with this system is that it sells Wainwright incredibly short.  He ended up in an interesting conundrum where the voters either had him as the best of the three, or worst of three.  The modified system, weighted toward first and second hits him with a hard penalty for this.  On the other side of things, it rewards Carpenter as a sort-of compromise candidate, of the three, he gets the least number of first place votes, but capitalizes on second-place enough to move ahead of Wainwright, falling just short of winning.

A traditional Borda count (3-2-1 weighting) would balance out some of the compromise/penalty issue.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  Name |  1st |  2nd |  3rd | Actual Voting | Hypothetical Voting |
| Tim Lincecum | 11 | 12 | 9 | 100 | 66 |
| Chris Carpenter | 9 | 14 | 7 | 94 | 62 |
| Adam Wainwright | 12 | 5 | 15 | 90 | 61 |
| Javier Vazquez | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 2 |
| Dan Haren | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Nothing changes.  But the voting becomes closer.  (Mathematically, it must, the same votes, a closer point system).  It helps Wainwright come within a point of taking second, but there aren’t any shakeups.  The systems for these first two both come from the same concept, so they’re much alike, but the next one is a category of it’s own.

Instant runoff voting works with a system that redistributes votes so none get wasted.  It starts by tallying all the first place votes, then the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated and his votes are transferred to the second-place choices specified on the ballots, and so on.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | First Round | Second Round | Third Round |
| Tim Lincecum | 11 | 18 | Winner |
| Chris Carpenter | 9 | eliminated |   |
| Adam Wainwright | 12 | 14 |   |

Once again, Lincecum prevails.  But this one’s much more interesting.  With the least first-place votes, Carpenter, our compromise candidate, is eliminated.  His nine votes are redistributed, two to Wainwright, and seven to Lincecum.  This gives Lincecum 56.3% of the vote, a majority, and the victory.  Once again, Wainwright is hurt by his all-or-nothing tally, but compromise Carpenter is bumped down.

The only way it seems that Wainwright can win, is a simple (and flawed) plurality vote.  You don’t really need to visualize the results, but I like making charts.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Votes |
| Adam Wainwright | 12 |
| Tim Lincecum | 11 |
| Chris Carpenter | 9 |
| Javier Vazquez | 0 |
| Dan Haren | 0 |

The flaws with this system are pretty easy to explain.  Being limited to one vote in a three-horse race such as this one doesn’t make any sense at all.  It favors Wainwright and his 37.5% of first place votes, but it isn’t a true majority.  Plurality is the most flawed voting system.  One person, one vote, may be catchy, but it isn’t practical.

The Condorcet system, which pits every candidate in head-to-head matches against each other, is prone to cycles.  The goal is to produce a candidate who defeats all the other candidates in simple one-on-one matches.  And this ballot produces an especially vicious cycle.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|   | Lincecum | Carpenter | Wainwright | Vazquez | D. Haren | Condorcet |
| Lincecum | N/A | Tie | Win | Win | Win | Deadlock |
| Carpenter | Tie | N/A | Tie | Win | Win | Deadlock |
| Wainwright | Loss | Tie | N/A | Win | Win | Deadlock |
| Vazquez | Loss | Loss | Loss | N/A | Win | Loss |
| Haren | Loss | Loss | Loss | Loss | N/A | Loss |

Our three aces all end up in what’s effectively a deadlock.  Lincecum beats everyone except Carpenter, with whom he ties.  Carpenter beats the two minor candidates, but ties both Lincecum and Wainwright.  Wainwright defeats the minor candidates, loses to Lincecum, and ties Carpenter.  Ouch.  Technically, Lincecum should win again, by virtue of his win over Wainwright, but the race is to close to call.

In conclusion, it appears that the voters did get it right.  The order might need minor tweaking, but Tiny Tim deserved his repeat award.

Now, Jon Heyman, please apologize to Keith Law.  (Carroll took exception to Heyman calling him a “dumb sportswriter”, Heyman then apologized to him, but not to Law).

*Resources:* [*Would an expanded NL Cy Young Award vote bring a different result?*](http://thecardinalnationblog.com/2009/11/20/would-an-expanded-nl-cy-young-award-vote-bring-a-different-result/)*, November 20th 2009, Brian Walton*

*Gaming the Vote: Why Elections Aren’t Fair (and What We Can Do About It), Hill and Wang Publishing, Ó2008 by William Poundstone*