

# Around the NL

## TSN Numbers



Tapani

ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

- 0.96** Kevin Tapani's ERA before his April 24 game in Colorado. It was 4.91 after the game.
- 4** Batters hit by Pedro Astacio on April 22, tying a major league record. He got the 2-1 win.
- 5-5** St. Louis pinch hitters' performance in a 15-inning loss to Montreal.
- 6** Combined games under .500 the Braves and Mets were entering the week.
- 10** Years between starts at shortstop for Matt Williams of the Diamondbacks. He started there April 24.

## Coming attractions

Since when is a Cubs-Brewers matchup in early May interesting? Since the Cubs started 12-8 and the Brewers opened 10-10. Why are the Cubbies so tough? Their worst starting pitcher's ERA is 4.91. Milwaukee, meanwhile, has more punch than a *Rocky* movie. The four-game Battle of Cities Near Lake Michigan starts Monday at Wrigley Field. Keep an eye on Chicago's **Jeff Fassero**. The Cubs closer can do no wrong. ... Maybe Houston will be the cure for what ails Phillies 3B **Scott Rolen**. He is a lifetime .284 hitter, but he is batting barely above .200 this season. The Astros—against whom Rolen averages .303 for his career—host Philadelphia for a three-game set starting Monday.



ROBERT SEALE / TSN

## Prospect watch

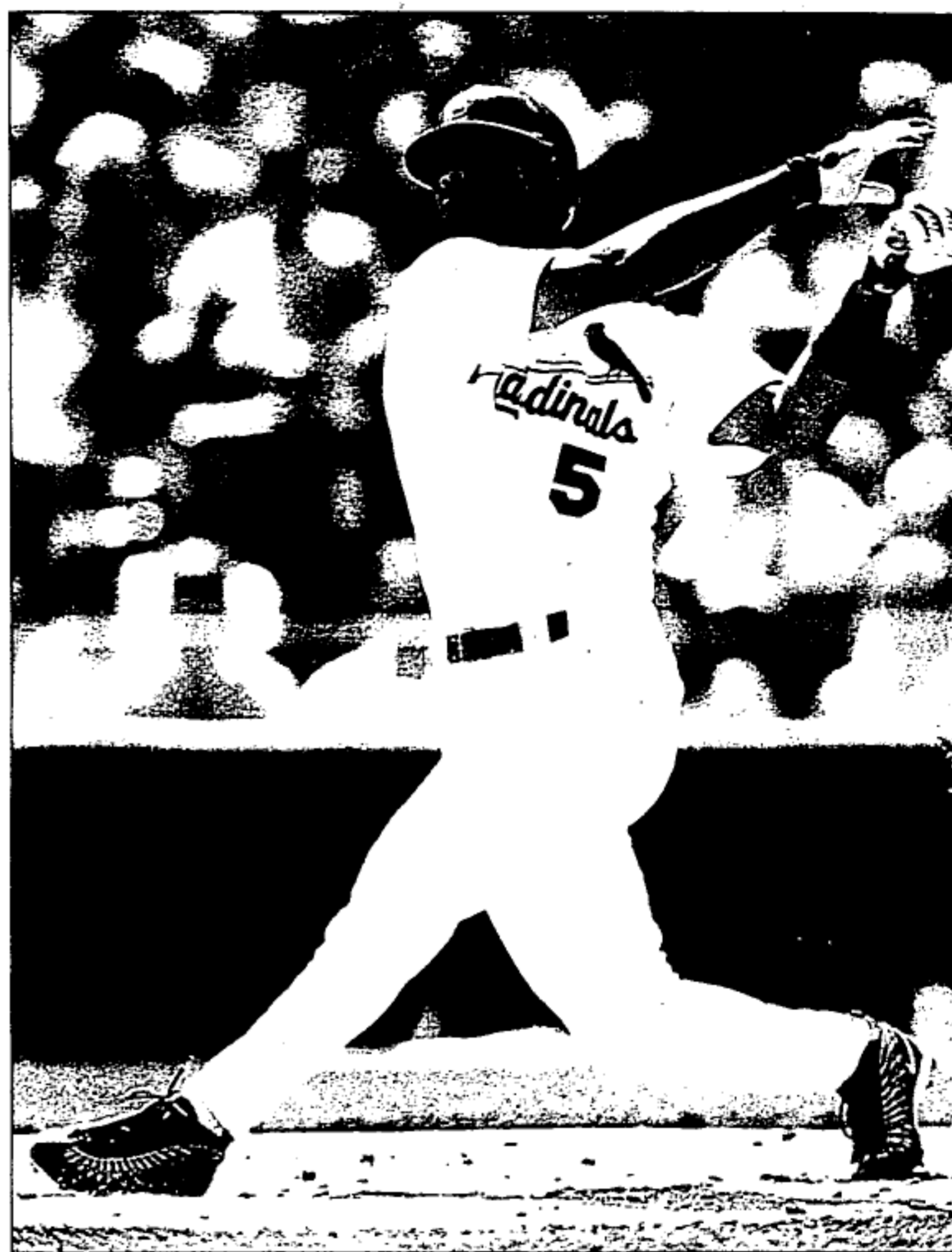
### Adam Dunn, OF, Reds

Dunn, who was a reserve quarterback at the University of Texas before being drafted in the second round by the Reds in 1998, quickly is developing into one of Cincinnati's top prospects. He is at Class AA Chattanooga, where he is hitting .333. At the end of last week, he was leading the Southern League in homers (five), RBIs (16), on-base percentage (.452) and slugging percentage (.623). Dunn, 21, has an exciting package of power and speed. Last season at Class A Daytona, he hit 16 homers and was 24-for-29 on steal attempts. He had 101 strikeouts but also coaxed 100 walks and led the Midwest League in on-base percentage (.428).

## Doghouse

Recently the Reds' **Dmitri Young** challenged some heckling fans to meet him after the game and, uh, work out their differences. According to the Associated Press, Young "waited outside the Reds' clubhouse for the fans, who never showed up." No kidding. Young is 6-2, 235 and is paid \$3.5 million a year to, among other things, turn on **Randy Johnson** fastballs. No report on any of the fans' vocations, but how much you wanna bet the fastest thing they have to turn on is a TV set on wheels? "They were just trying to be comedians," Young complained, "and we're trying to be professional." One would hope. Here's a tip, Dmitri: The next time someone offers you seven figures to do something you once did for free, there's a catch. In this case, it's that not everybody who shows up at your place of employment has as much accountability as you.

## The Book on: Albert Pujols



ALBERT DICKSON / TSN

It took the Cardinals' rookie third baseman/outfielder/first baseman all of a few innings to become a fan favorite in St. Louis.

On opening day, **Pujols** made a sensational running, barehanded grab-and-throw on a swinging bunt. Later, he became the first Cardinals rookie to hit a home run in the home opener in 47 years.

Entering the week, Pujols' stat line had more superlatives than a high school yearbook: most home runs ever by a rookie in April (tied with eight); most homers, RBIs (26), extra-base hits (16) and total bases (64) among major league rookies; most hits (33) in the National League.

**Pujols** is not just bashing balls all over the place, though. He has been fielding them all over the place, too. Although he had four errors last week, he has started at first, third, right and left. **Pujols** play is a big reason the Cards, expected to be a favorite in the N.L., were at least hovering around .500. Meanwhile, the other unexpected element in the team's season has displayed a mature demeanor and confidence and hasn't seemed the least bit surprised by his quick rise.

**Pujols**, 21, spent most of last season—his first in professional baseball—at Class A Peoria and was named the Cardinals' minor league player of the year. In spring training this year, he hit .349 with just eight strikeouts in 62 at-bats, winning a spot on the roster, but that doesn't explain why he hasn't been intimidated by big-league pitching.

"He stands there like a man," Expos manager Felipe Alou said after **Pujols** tore through Montreal pitching. "They didn't teach him fear at home, where he grew up. It's not part of his bag."

**Pujols** moved from the Dominican Republic to the Kansas City area when he was 16.

Hitting coach Mike Easler says **Pujols** is blessed with natural talent but that he also is learning how to adjust to pitchers. Solid mechanics enable **Pujols** to hit pitches of all speeds all over the plate.

"He stays quiet, the less movement the better," Easler says. "He's got a good solid base, knees flexed, slightly in. He's pre-loaded, meaning his hands are back. And he's got vision; the eyes are focused on the release point. He's almost a no-strider. That quiets his head down, so he sees the ball better. And once he sees it—ppssshewww!" —Matt Crossman

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