

It's no secret that the St. Louis Cardinals didn't have a stellar season in 2024. It was fine...but after the July 30th Tommy Pham pinch hit grand slam to take the lead against the reigning World Series Champion Texas Rangers, the season was a little lackluster. Busch Stadium in downtown St. Louis didn't rock as hard as it did at that moment any time in the season going forward. Luckily for Pham, he was gracefully given a release from the aforementioned lackluster St. Louis Cardinals and picked up by the Kansas City Royals who are currently as I write this on their way to an ALDS. I digress...back to the Cardinals!

The Tommy Pham pinch hit grand slam on July 30th may have been the top pinnacle of the season, but there were some moments other than that where St. Louis Cardinals fans got excited. In fact, I would personally say that I was pretty excited between mid May-late August when the Cardinals were in a Wild Card spot. Or at least close. Really though, after August 14th when the Cincinnati Reds completed the sweep and beat down of a zillion homers against the Birds, any realistic fan knew the playoff chances were slim.

This all being said, The Cardinals did have a handful of players who played especially big roles in making this 2024 playoff run even as close as it was. I'm sure that every single player on the roster had at least one moment. I'm looking at you, Nolan Arenado, who had a very exciting extra inning grand slam on August 21st that almost pulled the Cardinals back into playoff contention. But any Cardinals fan paying attention this year knows that Nolan Arenado and his \$35 million salary in 2024 was far from the team MVP. I'm here to tell you who I think were the top three MVPs for the St. Louis Cardinals in 2024. The first two are fairly obvious candidates. Neither particularly expected before the season, but dear after the final game, nonetheless. The third one is a bit more of a dark horse candidate. Okay, here it goes!

MVP #1: Ryan Helsley

I went to a game at Busch Stadium in early May 2023 when the Cardinals were already in a tailspin of a season. Ryan Helsley was brought into a non save situation relief role in the 7th inning against the Los Angeles Angels. Busch Stadium did the whole to-do with the flashing red lights and 'Hells Bells' playing on the loudspeaker. I'm not even sure that the Cardinals had the lead at the time, and the whole hoopla felt a tad unnecessary. Helsley ended up with an okay season in 2023. He had just 36.2 innings pitched compared to his 66.1 in 2024. This was largely due to his being injured June 10th- September 1st, aka roughly half of the season. It's legend that Helsley and Cardinals manager, Oliver Marmol, had a heart to heart in the off season leading up to 2024 about what his role should be going forward. They decided that he would

strictly come into 9th inning save situations. It was possibly to help keep at bay the uncertainty of how many times Helsley would have to warm up and sit back down in the bullpen during games, which in turn can help avoid injuries. It was also partially, according to Helsley in an article by Katie Woo of The Athletic, to take away the element of surprise of when he was going to be used. Knowing exactly what kind of situations, ninth inning tied or up by three or less, helped him be more prepared. It turns out; the plan worked amazingly. On September 27th in a 6-3 win against the San Francisco Giants, Helsley acquired The Cardinals single season saves record with his 49th save of the season. He had 49 saves in 53 save opportunities. One of his minuscule amounts of blown saves came on July 5th against the Washington Nationals in the 10th inning. The ghost runner (that starting in 2020 automatically starts the inning on 2nd base in extra innings) scored off Helsley to amount to that particular blown save. So, we can all basically agree that shouldn't even count, right?

This next statement should take absolutely nothing away from Helsley's remarkable 49 save season. In fact, it's even more of a reason why I call him the #1 2024 Cardinals MVP. The Cardinals had .540 winning percentage in one run games in 2024 which is #10 in MLB. Their overall winning percentage was .512. The Cardinals total number of wins was certainly not #10 in MLB. They were a bit farther down at #14 (or 15 if you want to look at it that way, since they were tied at 83 wins with the Chicago Cubs...so, yeah, 14th.) Helsley had a lot of chances to save games. The fact that he was available and successful in all but four is what kept the Cardinals from plummeting out of the playoff race much sooner than they did. The below average offense of the 2024 Cards and the mediocre starting pitching didn't propel the team to a ton of wins. The fact that Helsley was able to be such a lock down weapon to unload against the opposition and keeping the Cards from losing those 49 games, is why he's my #1 2024 Cardinals MVP. And that's why when I attended a game at Busch stadium on August 17th of 2024 against the Los Angeles Dodgers, they did up the flashing red lights and the 'Hells Bells' again when Helsley entered the game. This time it was in the 9th inning coming in for a save situation. Helsey quickly one, two, three shut the door on the now NL West winning Dodgers, and the hoopla was much appreciated and deserved.

MVP #2: Masyn Winn

Masyn Winn has been a Cardinals top prospect since he was drafted in the second round of the 2020 draft, and made his major league debut late in 2023 when the team was stumbling around far below .500. He was a defensive spark as advertised. He made his name known in the baseball nerd world when he rocketed a 100+ miles per hour throw



ALMOND HUMMUS

It's not actually hummus.
Just an almond dip resembling hummus

INGREDIENTS

1.5 cups slithered almonds with no skin
(NOT SLICED!)

One big TBSP tahini

1/2 cup or more lemon juice
(it's really hard to over do the lemon juice)

1/2 cup olive oil

1/2 cup water

tsp black pepper

tsp salt

1/2 tsp cayenne pepper

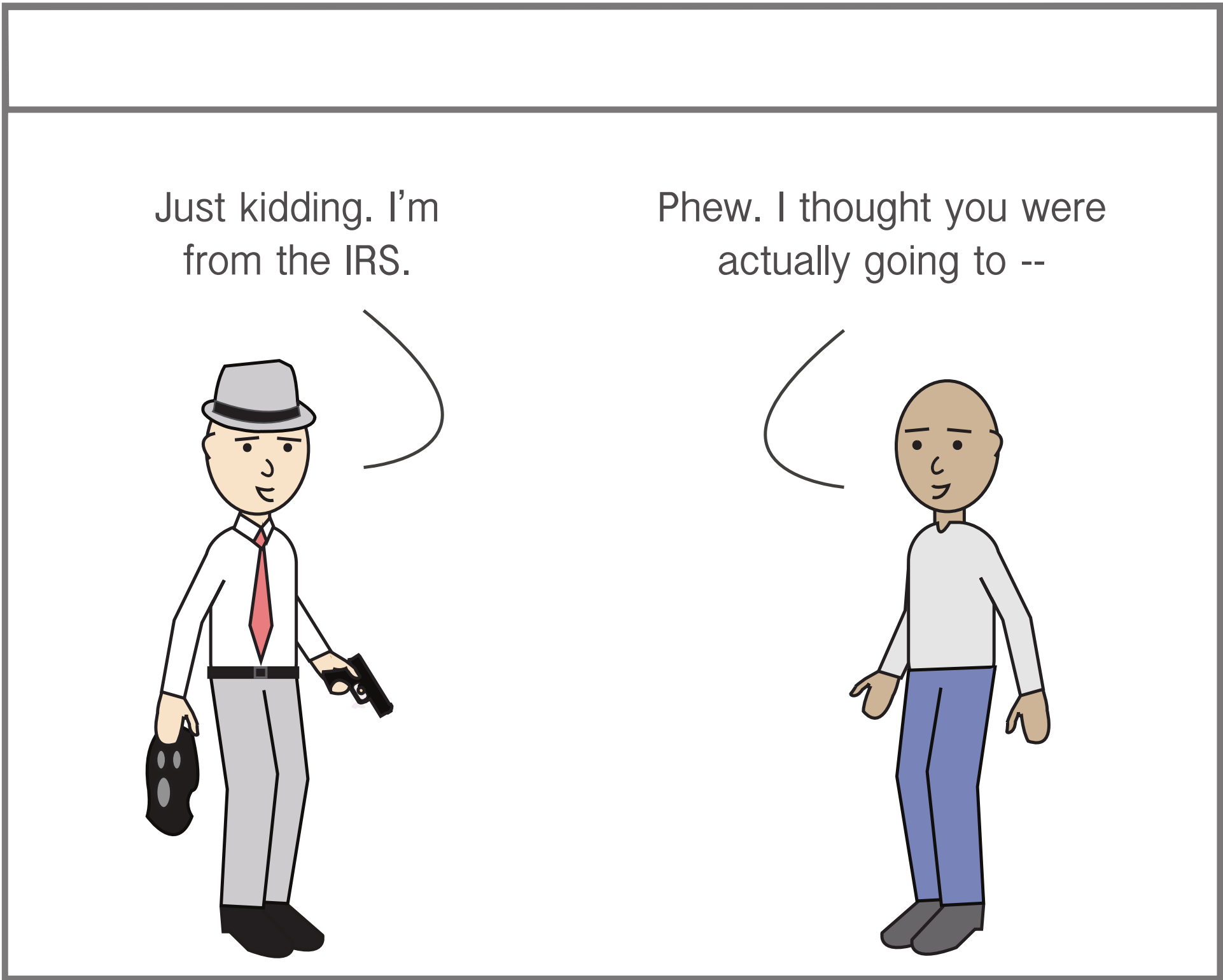
DIRECTIONS

Soak the almonds in water for a few hours.

Combine everything in a food processor and blend it up!

If you want to be fancy, drizzle the olive oil in as you're blending.

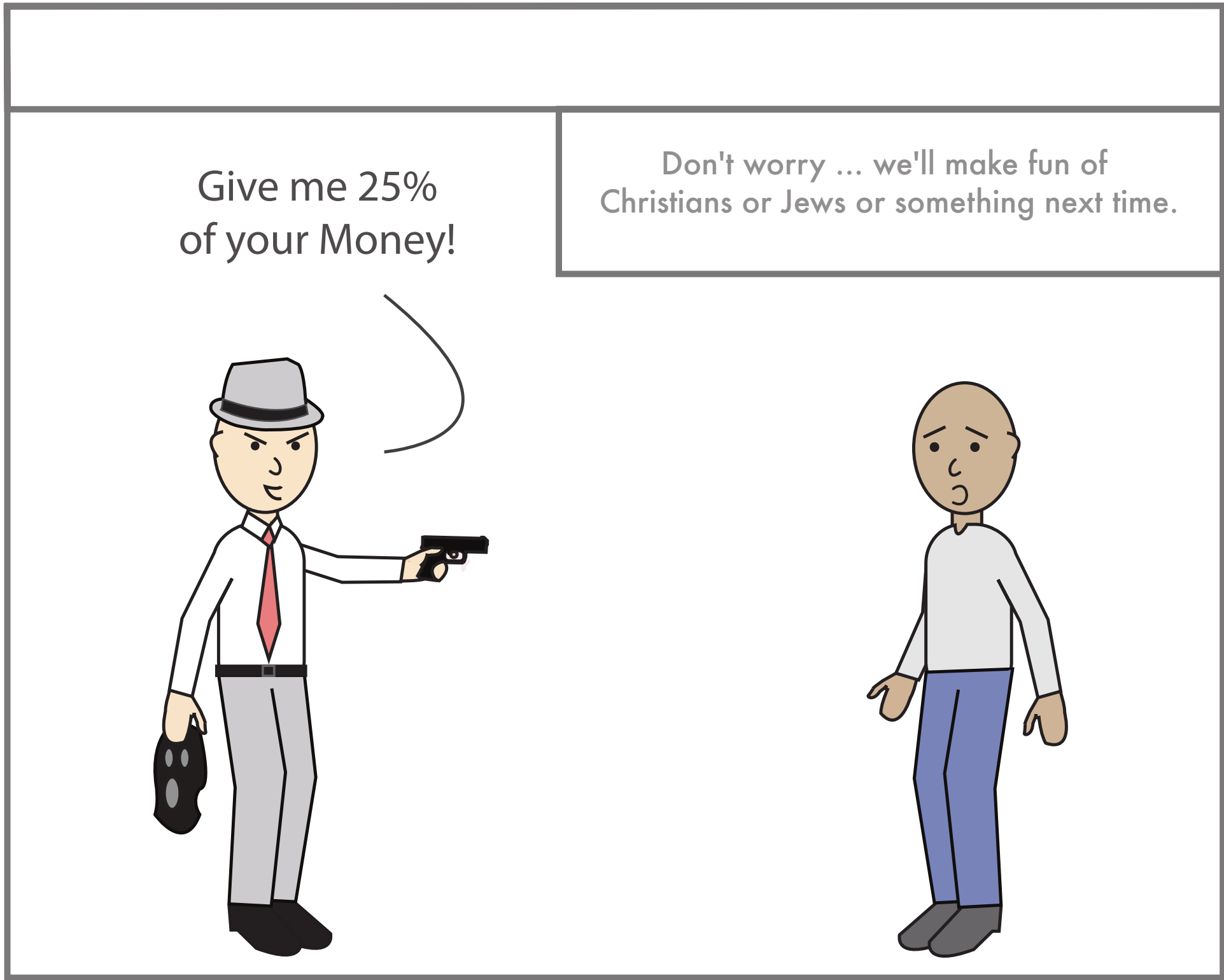
Serve with raw veggies, chips, crackers or whatever you want!



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across the infield in the 2022 futures game. That's fast. 86.9 was the MLB average in 2024 according to Statcast. He also had incredible range getting to balls hit through the infield. But he didn't hit much. And honestly, much like the once light hitting now Hall of Fame shortstop Ozzie Smith who was traded to the Cardinals in the off-season of 1981 because of his eye popping defensive play, no one really was too worried about Winn not hitting. His defense was good enough to make him valuable on the major league club, and any hitting would be a bonus. I should mention that Ozzie eventually ended his career with 2,460 hits making him 112th all time. But back to Winn.

Cardinals manager, Oli Marmol, started the season with Winn batting 9th in the lineup. If he wasn't going to get on base a ton, at least he'd have less chances to bat if he was at the bottom of the order. It soon became evident, however, that he indeed could hit. And well! On May 14th, Winn was moved up to the lead off spot, and stayed there through the end of the season. He ended up with 157 hits, which was second on the team behind Brendan Donovan. One of my favorite things about Winn is how many hits he had with two strikes. As of mid September, Winn ranked number two in all of baseball with two strike hits just behind perennial all-star Jose Ramirez. Hitting with two strikes is an art that shows maturity in the 22 year old Winn. The skill of being able to make solid contact with the ball when the pitcher thinks that he's in the driver's seat being ahead in the count is one that may go unnoticed in the face value stats. But as a fan throughout the season feeling more confident that Winn is going to get a hit when he's behind in the count is a great feeling! One that Cardinal's fans haven't been able to experience much of since the hey days o Matt Carpenter's career.



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The final thing that I'll say about Winn is coming full circle with what got him to this position as super stud Cardinals rookie in the first place. His defense at a premium defensive position; shortstop. I can give you some of the nerdy numbers such as he was fifth in all of baseball in defensive WAR (wins above replacement.) WAR measures a players value to the team citing how many more wins the team has with that particular player than with the average player at any given position. Winn's defensive WAR being 2.4 means that his defensive play at shortstop resulted in the Cardinals winning 2.4 more games than putting an average Joe shortstop at that position. 2.4 may not seem like a lot, but if every defensive player on the field was as good as Winn, that would be 2.4x9 more wins (that's 21.6.) For context, ten time gold glove winner, Nolan Arenado, had a 1.0 defensive WAR this season. And he looked to the naked eye like he made some great plays!

Winn's incredible season will be overlooked in the grand scheme of things, because, quite frankly, 2024 was a really good year for rookies. But as far as great Cardinals performances go, he's my pick for the #2 team MVP of 2024.

MVP #3: Michael Siani

I know what you're thinking...why Michael Siani? He ended 2024 with a .228 batting average and a .570 OPS. Both of those stats are a healthy amount below the league average. But his offensive stats aren't the reason why I found Siani to be such a valuable member of the 2024 St. Louis Cardinals. It was way more for his defense. In his defense (no pun intended), Siani was batting .256 when he got injured missing nearly a month of play due to an oblique strain on August 4th. He batted .293

the brock street burner

(not your grandpa's RFT)

TOP 4 SHOWS IN ST. LOUIS IN NOVEMBER

Ultimate Fakebook
November 2nd at Off Broadway
25th Anniversary of 'This Will Be Laughing Week'
with Jon Snodgrass and His Buddies + Schatzi

Extra Life
November 14th at The Sinkhole
with The Conformists + 18andcounting

Saves the Day
November 27th at The Pageant
Performing 'Through Being Cool' in full
with Senses Fail & Narrow Head

Bagheera
November 30th at The Duck Room
with Secret Cajun Band & Something to Do

SONGS TO LISTEN ON REPEAT THIS WINTER

Good Feeling by Violent Femmes
Crucify Your Mind by Sixto Rodriquez

in June and July and in the three weeks before he got hurt, he was batting .320. When he came back to the team in early September, he got a little bit less playing time and wasn't quite able to get his offensive mojo going again as the team skidded down the finish line towards the end of the season. Even missing that month with the injury and the fact that his playing time was sparse the first three weeks of the season due to Victor Scott II getting the bulk of the starts in center field, Siani still ended the 2024 season leading the team in steals with 20. On top of that...lets talk about his super star MVP #3 earning defensive play!

As I stated above, Michael Siani only played in 124 out of the 162 game season. Even while missing roughly 40 games, he still ended the 2024 season #5 in outs above average in all of the MLB. At every position; not just center field. Outs above average is a stat that measures how many outs a fielder makes that have a slimmer chance to be made by the average fielder. For example, Siani made four outs that according to Statcast had a 0-25% chance of being caught by the average MLB fielder. He had eight outs that Statcast rated as a 26-50% catch probability. And so on. The cumulative number of outs above average he had ended up being best for 5th in the MLB. He single-handedly saved 15 runs for the Cardinals this year. That's more than MVP candidates Bobby Witt Jr. and Francisco Lindor as well as The Cincinnati Reds shortstop, Elly De La Cruz, who despite leading the MLB with 29 errors 218 strikeouts some baseball analysts think is God's gift to the sport...but I digress again. This isn't a paragraph talking about how overrated De La Cruz is; it's about how underrated your St. Louis Cardinals center fielder, Michael Siani is. On that note, one final deep dive stat for you. Michael Siani was #1 (#1!) in MLB this past year in the success rate added stat among all fielders. Success rate added is the difference between the success rate of plays that a player makes and the estimated success rate of those particular plays. Siani led the MLB with 7%.

All of the above are the mathematical stats as to why Michael Siani is my #3 2024 Cardinals MVP. But really, the eye test could tell you that he did something elite almost every game. Whether it was a diving catch, a stolen base, or a bunt to move a runner over; a lost art in today's game that Siani excelled at this past season. This was all done while going into the season Siani was probably the 5th or 6th choice for starting center fielder behind Tommy Edman, Victor Scott II and maybe even Lars Nootbar.

I hope that you enjoyed my top three 2024 Cardinals MVP picks. Here's to hoping that next year I'm able to write an article about the 2025 Cardinals play-off MVPs.