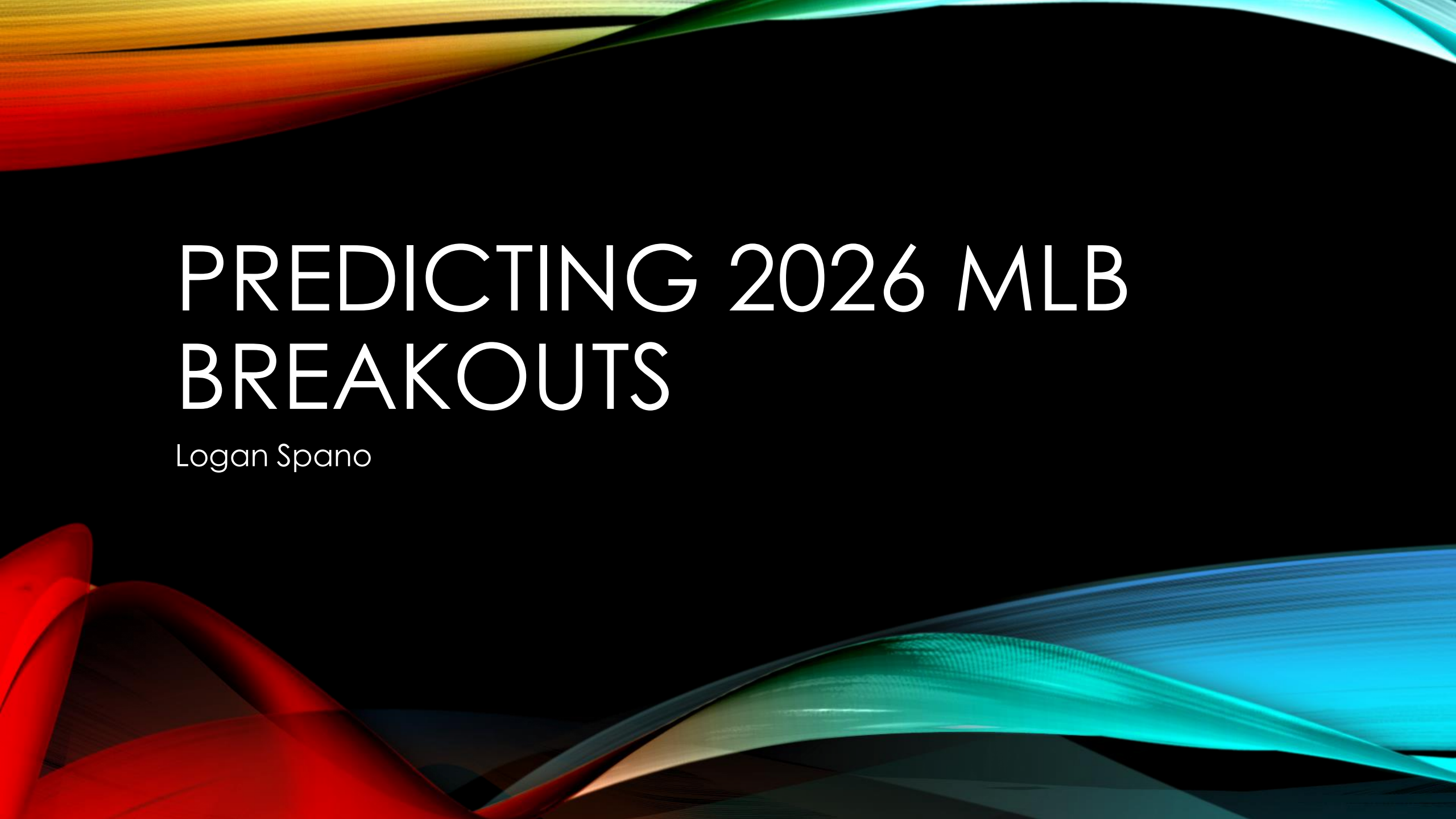




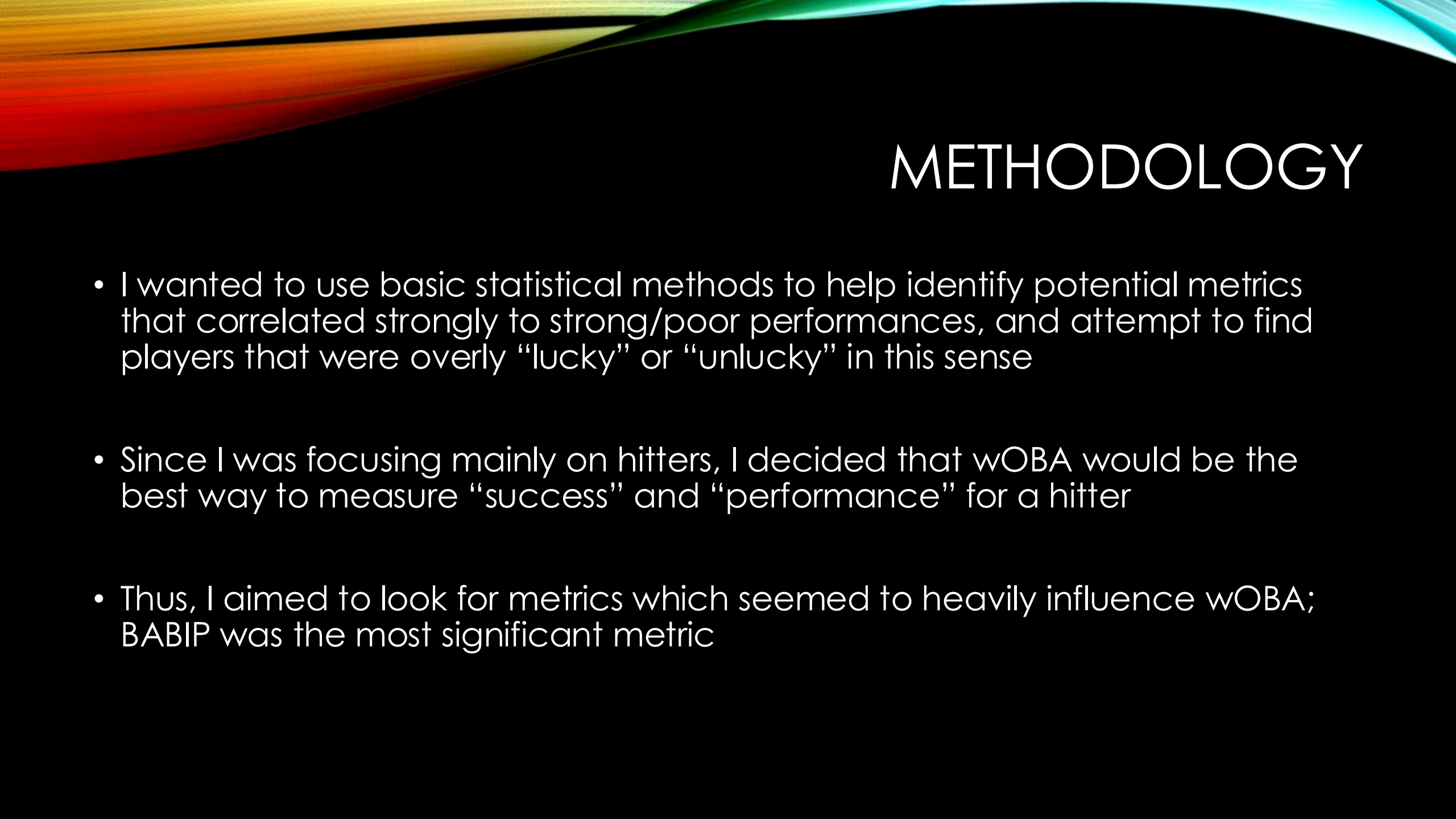
PREDICTING 2026 MLB BREAKOUTS

Logan Spano



OBJECTIVE

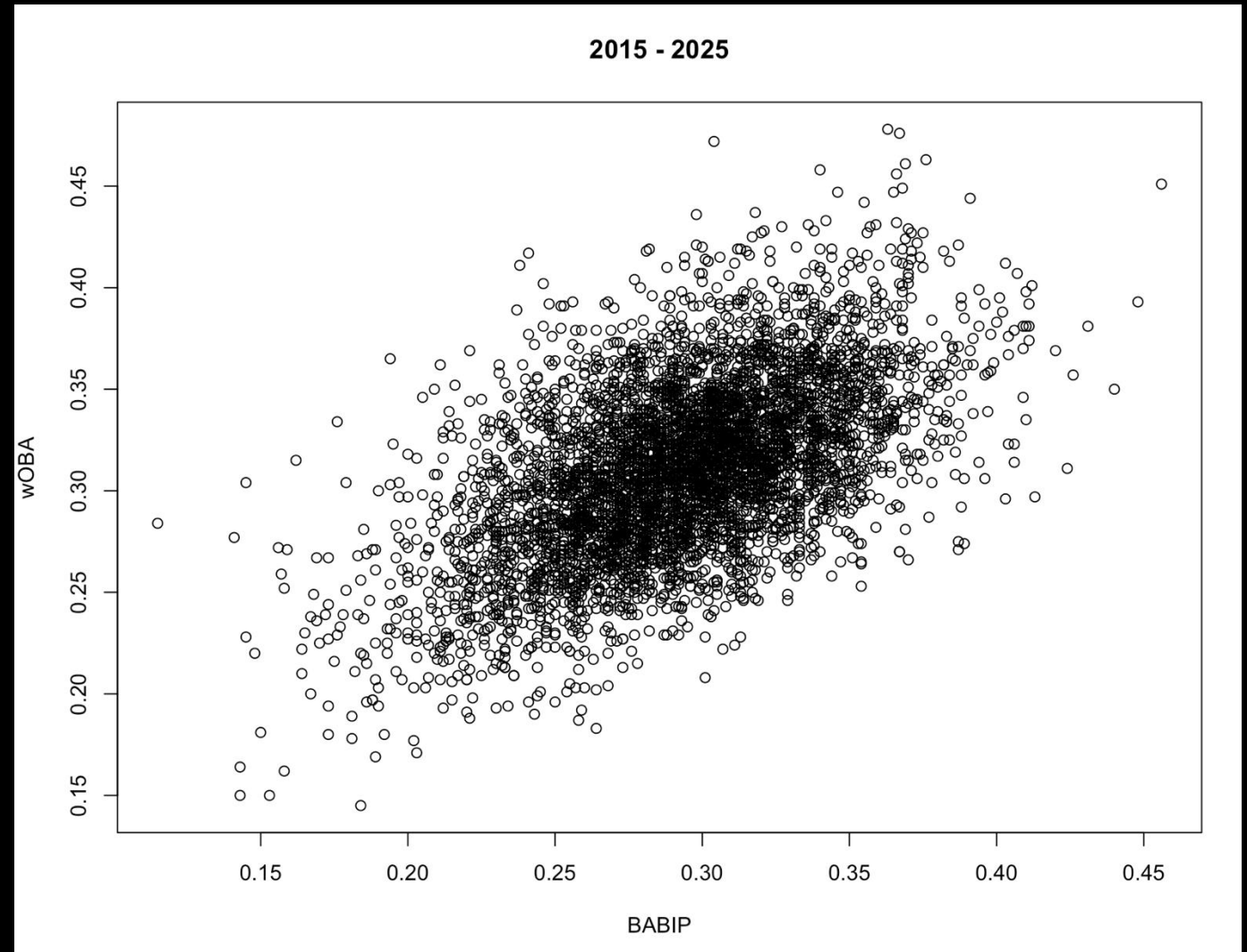
- My main objective was relatively simple: identify MLB players who based on past performance seem to be due for a significant breakout or regression in the 2026 MLB season
- I ended up limiting the selection to 3 hitters, using past data from Baseball Savant to do this
- I then wanted to track these players over the first few weeks of the season to judge their performances compared to last year



METHODOLOGY

- I wanted to use basic statistical methods to help identify potential metrics that correlated strongly to strong/poor performances, and attempt to find players that were overly “lucky” or “unlucky” in this sense
- Since I was focusing mainly on hitters, I decided that wOBA would be the best way to measure “success” and “performance” for a hitter
- Thus, I aimed to look for metrics which seemed to heavily influence wOBA; BABIP was the most significant metric

Right: wOBA vs BABIP from 2015 to 2025, showing the clear trend between BABIP and wOBA





TERMINOLOGY

- Key terminology used:
 - wOBA – a metric that measures the quality of a hitter's performance, as it relates to their contribution to helping the team score runs; similar to what OPS measures, but does so in a more accurate way
 - BABIP – batting average on balls in play; ignores strikeouts, and focuses solely on performance when contact is made, which can be useful in identifying a player's luck



SELECTIONS

- From the criteria stated, I determined that these players seemed most in-line for a breakout/regression in the 2026 MLB season:
 - Matt Wallner, RF, Minnesota Twins (breakout)
 - Nick Kurtz, 1B, Oakland Athletics (regression)
 - Luis Torrens, C, New York Mets (breakout)

MATT WALLNER

- **Reasons for Selection:**
 - Drastic gap between wOBA and BABIP
 - BABIP seemed unsustainably low -> should lead to a better 2026 performance
- **Reasons for Potential Error:**
 - Incredibly high K% could lead to more variance in BABIP, with a smaller sample size of batted balls
- **2026 (so far):**
 - As predicted, Wallner's BABIP has improved dramatically from 2025 (albeit not near his pre-2025 career average), however his wOBA has actually dropped significantly. As alluded to previously, BABIP luck only matters on "balls in play", and Wallner has somehow increased his already incredibly high K% to an unfathomable 37%



NICK KURTZ

- **Reasons for Selection:**
 - Drastic gap between wOBA and BABIP
 - BABIP seemed unsustainably high -> should lead to a worse 2026 performance
- **Reasons for Potential Error:**
 - Truly elite players (Judge, Ohtani) tend to overperform luck-driven stats; it is not infeasible that Kurtz may be part of this category
- **2026 (so far):**
 - Thus far, Kurtz has regressed from his 2025 performance. While his BABIP has only decreased slightly, his wOBA has dropped significantly, despite nearly doubling his walk rate



LUIS TORRENS

- **Reasons for Selection:**
 - Large gap between xwOBA and wOBA, with a sustainable BABIP unlike Kurtz and Wallner
- **Reasons for Potential Error:**
 - Despite receiving significant playing time last year, Torrens is slotted as the backup catcher, so he may not play enough for this to be meaningful
- **2026 (so far):**
 - As feared, Torrens has had next to no playing time this year. There is even less of a sample size to draw any conclusions from.

