Why Edwin Diaz should win the 2022 NL Cy Young

By Jackson Downs



In this article, I will create some tables and reference data from Excel. It can all be found at this link: Diaz Excel 1.xlsx. Note some of the conditional formatting is only available on Excel not Google Sheets.

Introduction:

Edwin Diaz has a stellar 2022 campaign. He was an all-star who appeared in 61 games, amassing a 1.31 ERA in 62 innings. This gave him the 4th best ERA+ (296) in the league among pitchers who threw at least 50 innings. He also had the best FIP (0.90), double the next closest of 1.83 (Spencer Strider). Additionally, he was top 6 in the NL[1] for SO/W, H/9, HR/9 and WHIP. All the basic statistics show Edwin Diaz has a phenomenal season. Today, I am here to educate you on why he should win the NL Cy Young award. The last relief pitcher to win the Cy Young was Eric Gagne in 2003[2] and that's the only time in the 21st century. Without waiting any longer, let's get into why Diaz is deserving of the prestigious award.

[1] NL = National League

[2] Cy Young Award Winners | History | MLB.com

Diaz vs other Relievers:

Before I can explain why Diaz is the best pitcher in the NL, I'll need to explain why he's the NL's best relief pitcher. From what I could find, the NL's top relievers along with Diaz are the Dodgers' Evan Phillips, Cardinals' Ryan Helsley, Rockies' Daniel Bard, Brewers' Devin Williams and Reds' Alexis Diaz (Yes, Edwin's own brother). Some may feel others like Josh Hader or AJ Minter should be here, but I couldn't compare Diaz to every reliever, and he handily beat them in most categories, so I omitted them.

Below, you can see a table comparing the NL's top relievers and a flurry of analytic statistics comparing them.

	xBA	xSLG	xWOBA	xOBP	xISO	Avg Exit Velocity	Whiff Percentage	ERA+	FIP	Most Common Inning to Enter
Edwin Diaz	0.149	0.205	0.202	0.223	0.056	85.5	49.9	296	0.9	9
Daniel Bard	0.178	0.264	0.247	0.272	0.087	87.7	27.5	261	2.86	9
Devin Williams	0.147	0.199	0.223	0.264	0.051	84.3	40.8	205	2.01	8
Evan Phillips	0.175	0.266	0.231	0.242	0.091	86.1	30.1	367	1.94	8
Alexis Diaz	0.159	0.279	0.26	0.286	0.12	86.7	36.5	243	3.31	7
Ryan Helsley	0.152	0.275	0.223	0.223	0.123	88.8	37.8	305	2.34	9

All this data was collected from Statcast. Then, I downloaded it into Excel and used a VLOOKUP formula to easily construct a table. A lot of these statistics are expected stats. For example, xBA is expected Batting Average. From this table, we can see that Devin Williams and Edwin Diaz are head and shoulders above the rest. There's no point in nitpicking Diaz being 0.4 better in xOBP to say he was better; this table shows that both were elite pitchers. So, why should Diaz win the Cy Young if Williams is just as good of a relief pitcher?

This is where we look at the last column: Most Common Inning to Enter. Devin Williams was the 8th and Edwin Diaz was the 9th. This isn't surprising to most baseball fans as Devin Williams was the setup man for Josh Hader for most of the season. That was one of the reasons I didn't include saves, as it would be unfair to Williams, who didn't ascend into the closer role until August 1 when Josh Hader was traded[3]. August 1st is also when playoff races tend to intensify for teams. So, I decided to look at both these players' statistics August 1st via their game logs on Baseball Reference.

	Innings Pitched	Saves	Holds	Blown Saves	SO	ERA	FIP	cWPA	RE24
Edwin Diaz	20.1	9	3	0	34	0.89	0.8	1.23%	8.52
Devin Williams	21	9	1	2	30	2.57	3.35	0.02%	4.09

Since August 1st, each has thrown about the same number of innings, and both had 9 saves. That is where the similarities end. Williams blew 2 saves to Diaz's 0 and Diaz was superior in every pitching category I could find. Diaz gave the Mets an additional 1.23% Championship Win Probability while Diaz added almost none. Additionally, Diaz's Base-Out Runs Saved (RE24) which shows how many runs a pitcher saves on a

[3] Josh Hader traded to Padres (mlb.com)

resulting player, was double Williams'. Williams wasn't bad by any stretch, but his inability to keep up his elite pitching when it mattered most is possibly why the Brewers missed the 2022 playoffs by 1 game[4].

While Diaz's "struggles" came at the start of the year, he played his best baseball when it mattered most. For me, this is why he was the best relief pitcher, not Devin Williams.

Edwin Diaz vs Starters

While it's one thing to show Edwin Diaz as the NL's best relief pitcher, I'll have a much more difficult task in proving Diaz is more deserving of the award than Sandy Alcantara, Zac Gallen, Max Fried and Julio Urias.

A few things to note. First, I won't use the previous statistics to compare Diaz to the NL starter's as it's a statistic most relievers are better in due to the lack of hitters they face. Additionally, I'll omit cumulative statistics as that gives a huge advantage for starters. In the case of WAR (a cumulative statistic), I'll divide it by innings pitched so we can gauge a fairer assessment between Diaz and the other starters.

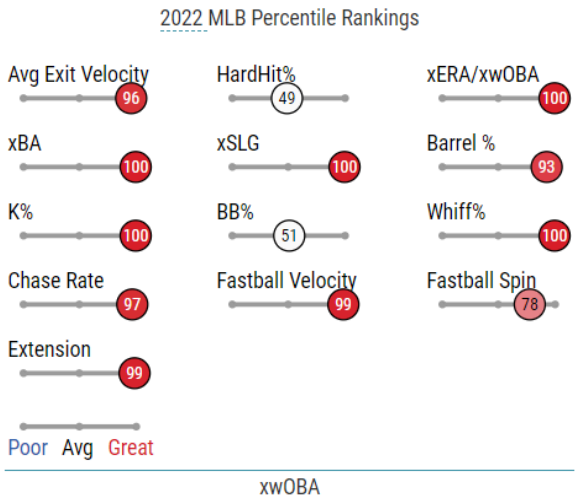
	WAR/IP	RAR/IP	Average Exit Velocity	WPA	cWPA	RE24/IP
Edwin Diaz	0.052	0.403	85	3.9	2.7%	0.38
Julio Urias	0.028	0.263	86.2	3.7	1.1%	0.20
Max Fried	0.032	0.297	85.6	4.3	2.8%	0.21
Zac Gallen	0.028	0.261	87.1	4	0.7%	0.20
Sandy Alcantara	0.035	0.320	87.3	5.5	1.6%	0.20

Before I begin, regardless of the statistics we use, it'll be incredibly difficult to compare Edwin Diaz to starting pitchers. I avoided per 9 statistics because Diaz looks much better due to only throwing 1 inning. But a lot of the time, that inning is significantly more important than most starters throw. Whether you think that is an advantage or disadvantage for Diaz is for you to decide, but it's a classic case of subjectivity and preferring the guy who gets you there or the one who closes the door.

While the statistics are close, Diaz is slightly better in WAR/IP and RAR/IP. RAR is the number of runs a pitcher saves above a replacement level. While these are not statistics, I calculated myself using Baseball Reference data, they make a more level playing field as it looks how effective a player is per inning. Diaz has been more effective than any of the starters in WAR and RAR per inning.

Additionally, Diaz has the lowest exit velocity against. This is particularly impressive with his 50.2% strikeout percentage. Strikeouts are usually correlated with pitchers who throw harder. Pitchers who throw harder usually have higher exit velocity then. However, look at Diaz's Statcast table below:

[4] 2022 Baseball Standings | MLB.com



Diaz's fastball velocity is in the 99th percentile but his average exit velocity is in the 96th percentile. Incredibly, he throws the ball hard, but players don't hit it hard too often (if they can even make contact due to his 100th percentile Whiff %).

Next, we move onto two stats that I valued highly. Win Probability Added (WPA) and Championship Win Probability Added (cWPA) which displays how many wins and what odds of a world series a player adds to a team. Despite it being a cumulative statistic, Diaz's numbers are close. Alcantara has the highest WPA added, but Diaz is only 1.6 WPA below despite Alcantara throwing a league high 228.2 innings. Diaz only threw 62 (over three times left). Baseball Reference also tells us that Gallen and Fried threw over 184 innings as well, showing Diaz has a compatible WPA despite throwing over 100 less innings than all of them.

Additionally, Diaz has a 2.7% cWPA second to only Max Fried by 0.01%. While it may be out of Alcantara and Gallen's control that their teams were bad so they couldn't add a higher chance at a championship, this is more of a good indicator that Diaz and Fried were integral to their teams winning 101 games.

Lastly, we have Base-Out Runs Saved (RE24) Per Inning. Diaz dominated this category despite the fact that like starting pitchers he enters most innings with no one on and no outs.

I know I'll get responses that I'm cherry-picking statistics to make Diaz look bad or omitting DeGrom because of his stellar season (however, he only threw 64.1 innings). However, most normal statistics don't accurately compare starters and relievers, so I've used the fairest statistics I could formulate.

Closing:

To be completely honest, I think Diaz's main Cy Young competitors are Sandy Alcantara and Devin Williams. However, Diaz has shown he is the best relief pitcher. Versus Sandy, Diaz has shown that on an inning-by-inning basis he has been better than Alcantara. Keep in mind, most of the time Diaz is facing a team in the highest leverage situation possible: their last chance to salvage something from a game. This takes nothing away from Sandy, but a majority of his innings came in low pressure situations with the Marlins far removed from the playoff race.

For these reasons, I would name Edwin Diaz my Cy Young winner.

Sources:

Any Statistics that I cited and did not give a specific source were found either on Baseball Reference and Statcast links below:

- 2022 Major League Baseball Standard Pitching | Baseball-Reference.com
- 2022 Major League Baseball Value | Baseball-Reference.com
- 2022 Major League Baseball Win Probability | Baseball-Reference.com
- 2022 Major League Baseball Pitching Ratios | Baseball-Reference.com
- 2022 Major League Baseball Relief Pitching | Baseball-Reference.com
- 2022 Major League Baseball Advanced Pitching | Baseball-Reference.com
- Edwin Díaz Statcast, Visuals & Advanced Metrics | MLB.com | baseballsavant.com
- Statcast Custom Leaderboards | baseballsavant.com (mlb.com)