

FLORIDA ACE BRADY SINGER IS OUR PLAYER OF THE YEAR

2018 COLLEGE AWARDS

ALL-AMERICA TEAMS BRIM WITH FIRST-ROUND TALENT

Baseball America

MAJORS ♦ MINORS ♦ DRAFT ♦ COLLEGE ♦ HIGH SCHOOL ♦ INTERNATIONAL

Head Coach
Kevin O'Sullivan

Jackson
Kowar, RHP

Michael
Byrne, RHP

COLLEGE PLAYER
OF THE YEAR

Brady
Singer, RHP

Gator Aid

HOW FLORIDA
BUILT A PITCHING
PIPELINE THAT
MAKES THEM
PERENNIAL CWS
CONTENDERS



TOP PROGRAMS CHOOSE EASTON

to guide their journey to greatness



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS



CAL STATE FULLERTON



COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
2016 CWS CHAMPION



UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
2017 CWS CHAMPION



UCLA
2013 CWS CHAMPION



UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI



TEXAS A&M

WWW.EASTON.COM

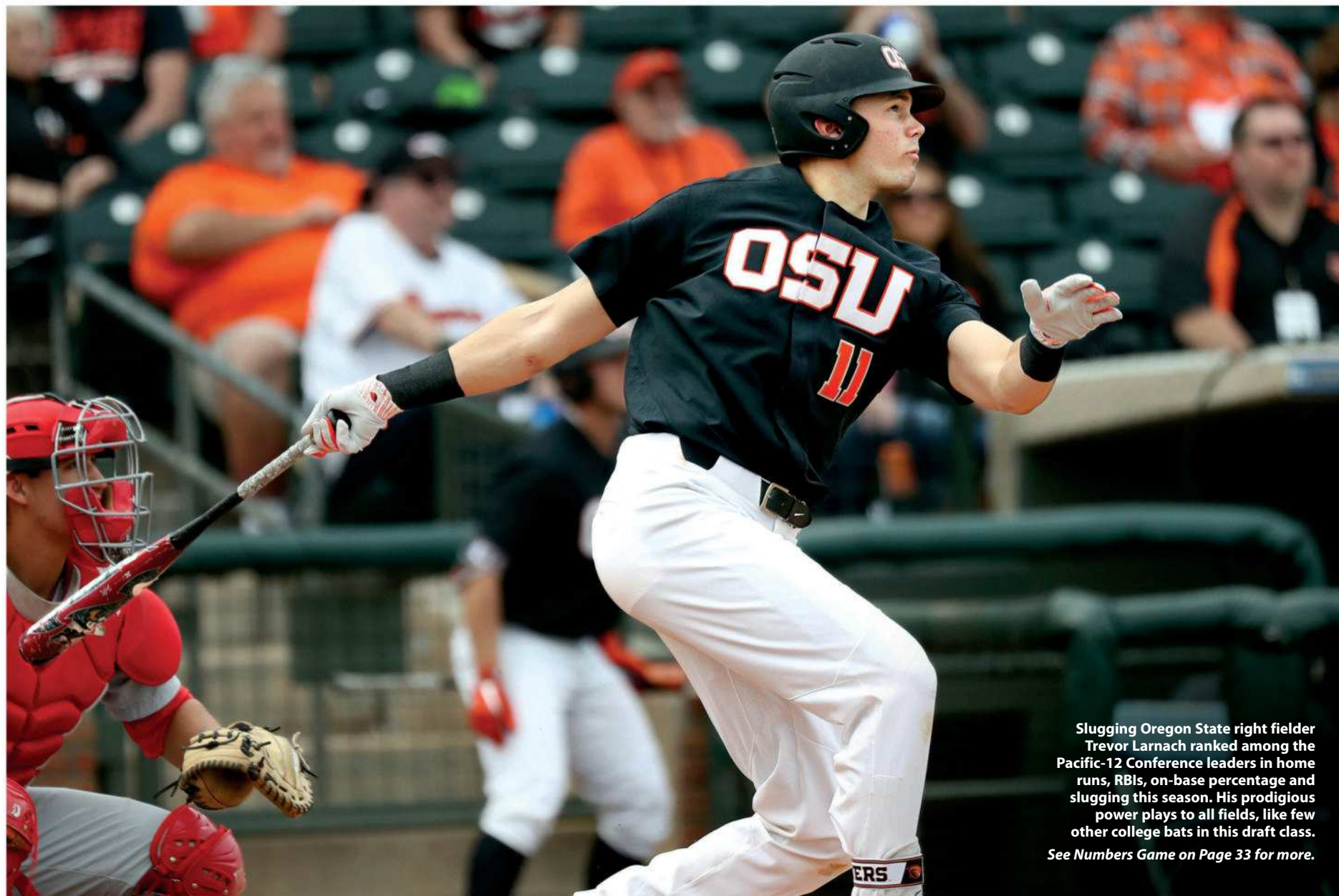


Leading Off

JUNE 15-29, 2018 VOLUME 38, ISSUE 14

“No one’s a finished product by the time your freshman year is over.”

FLORIDA HEAD COACH KEVIN O’SULLIVAN ON THE THREE-YEAR COMMITMENT HE ASKS PLAYERS TO MAKE, PAGE 8



BILL MITCHELL

Slugging Oregon State right fielder Trevor Larnach ranked among the Pacific-12 Conference leaders in home runs, RBIs, on-base percentage and slugging this season. His prodigious power plays to all fields, like few other college bats in this draft class. See Numbers Game on Page 33 for more.

COLLEGE AWARDS

COVER STORY

With roots in recruiting and a commitment to pitching, Kevin O’Sullivan has built a pitching factory at Florida **8**

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

Florida ace Brady Singer is the rare pitcher to win our College Player of the Year **14**

ALL-AMERICA TEAMS

Three Florida players and two from Stetson earn first-team All-America honors to provide Sunshine State flavor **16**

AL ORG REPORTS

The Blue Jays are buying Kevin Smith’s breakout in the Midwest League **20**

MINORS

While the full race has not yet been run, we review early hits and disappointments from the 2017 draft **26**

INTERNATIONAL

New international signing rules hamper the bonus Cuban Victor Mesa can demand **28**

COLUMNS

Jerry Crasnick **24**
 Tracy Ringolsby **25**
 Joe Sheehan **34**

EXTRAS

Where Are They Now? **4**
 Ask BA **6**
 Business Beat **30**
 Obituaries **32**
 Numbers Game **33**



Photo: Nik Layman
 Gear: Cleats: Nike Lunar Clipper '17 Turf (O’Sullivan) and Nike Air Clipper '17 (Kowar, Byrne and Singer)
 Gloves: Easton D45 Model 12” Split Solid
 Jerseys and Pants: Nike Vapor Elite

ON DECK: We recap the draft from the big-picture perspective, as only Baseball America can. **ALSO:** We name our High School Player of the Year and select three All-America Teams.

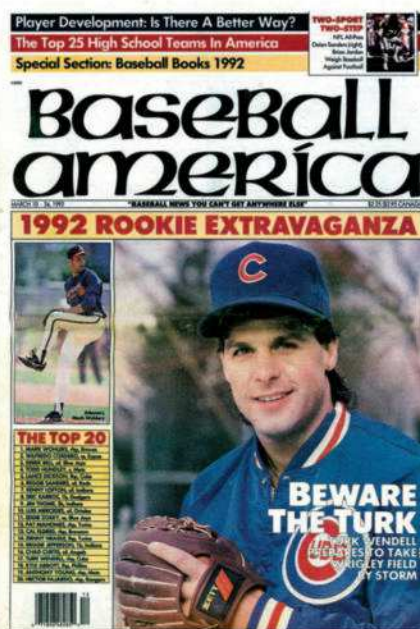
Leading Off

JUNE 15-29, 2018 VOLUME 38, ISSUE 14

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

LONG-TIME BIG LEAGUE RELIEVER TURK WENDELL BECAME KNOWN FOR MORE THAN JUST HIS ANTICS

BY RON MORRIS



MARCH 10, 1992

A 25-year-old Turk Wendell is touted as a top preseason rookie, but he wound up making just four Triple-A starts in 1992 because of an elbow injury.

Turk Wendell rose to prominence as a reliever for the Mets in the late 1990s, but he spent his first five big league seasons in the Cubs' bullpen. He is pictured here in 1997, about a month before his trade to New York. Wendell's talent combined with his eccentricities—which included brushing his teeth between innings—to make him a notable prospect in the Chicago system.



When Jim Riggleman arrived for spring training as the new manager of the Cubs in 1995, one of his first orders of business was a sit-down meeting with 27-year-old righthander Turk Wendell, a candidate for the bullpen.

Riggleman called for the end of Wendell's well-publicized antics, both on the mound and off. No more Wendell brushing his teeth between innings in the dugout. No more refusing to catch new balls put in play by the home-plate umpire. No more slamming the resin bag to the ground before an inning. No more exaggerated leap over the foul line when entering and exiting the field.

"It was the first time I had met this guy," Wendell said recently from his home in Larkspur, Colo. "I thought, 'Golly, he's kind of rained on my parade.'"

As it turned out, Wendell said Riggleman's guidance was instrumental in the pitcher's maturation process that resulted in a 1996 season for the Cubs that included 70 appearances, a 2.84 ERA and 18 saves.

Wendell turned pro in 1988 as a fifth-round pick of the Braves out of Quinpiac. Atlanta traded him to the Cubs after the 1991 season, and after an injury-plagued 1992, he made his big league debut in June 1993, recording a 4.37 ERA in 22.2 innings. Chicago traded him to the Mets in August 1997.

Wendell eventually pitched parts of 11 seasons in the major leagues with the Cubs, Mets, Phillies and Rockies, compiling a 36-33 record and 3.93 ERA in 552 games, including 70 or more appearances in 1999, 2000 and

2001. He pitched in two games for the Mets in the 2000 World Series.

The curbing of Wendell's high jinks did not curtail his speaking his mind. He chastised the Mets for trading him to the Phillies in 2001 and was a rare player to call out Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa for steroids use.

In Wendell's final season, 2004 with the Rockies, he offered to play for free because he was doing the only thing—other than hunt deer—that he wanted to do in life. The players' union forced Wendell to accept his \$700,000 salary.

"A lot of times people ask me what was the best part about (playing in the big leagues), and I say, 'I was living my dream every day,'" Wendell said.

In retirement, Wendell owned a 209-acre ranch south of Denver where he at times raised game birds, such as pheasants and chukars, as well as cattle, pigs and turkey for slaughter. He also trout fished on the ranch's six ponds and provided guiding for elk and deer hunters.

Wendell recently sold the ranch with an eye toward purchasing another in Iowa. His daughter, Dakota, plays soccer at Minnesota State and his son, Wyatt, plays baseball at Rock Canyon High in Lone Tree, Colo.

Like his father did in the big leagues, Wyatt wanted to wear jewelry on the baseball field. But high school association rules prohibited him from donning the necklace that included elk teeth and turkey spurs gathered from his father's ranch.

"The umpires are sticklers about it," Wendell said. "So one day, I said, 'Why don't you worry about calling balls and strikes and getting the call right. A kid wearing a necklace has no bearing on the game, whatsoever.'" Same old Turk Wendell. ■

Baseball America

ESTABLISHED 1981 • P.O. BOX 12877, DURHAM, NC 27709 • PHONE (919) 682-9635

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER B.J. Schechter @bjschechter

EXECUTIVE EDITORS J.J. Cooper @jcoop36

Matt Eddy @MattEddyBA

DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Ben Leigh

EDITORIAL

ASSOCIATE EDITORS Kegan Lowe @KeganLowe

Josh Norris @jnorris427

SENIOR WRITER Ben Badler @benbadler

NATIONAL WRITERS Teddy Cahill @tedcahill

Carlos Collazo @CarlosCollazo

Kyle Glaser @KyleGlaser

Michael Lananna @mlananna

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTOR Tim Newcomb @tdnewcomb

WEB EDITOR Mark Chiarelli @Mark_Chiarelli

PRODUCTION

DESIGN & PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Sara Hiatt McDaniel

MULTIMEDIA MANAGER Linwood Webb

DESIGN ASSISTANT James Alworth

BUSINESS

TECHNOLOGY MANAGER Brent Lewis

OFFICE MANAGER AND CUSTOMER SERVICE Angela Lewis

CUSTOMER SERVICE Jonathan Smith

COLUMNISTS

JERRY CRASNICK ESPN

RON MORRIS Columbia, S.C.

TRACY RINGOLSBY Cheyenne, Wyo.

STEVE RUSHIN Connecticut

JOE SHEEHAN New York

WHERE TO DIRECT QUESTIONS

BACK ISSUES To order back issues, visit <https://www.baseballamerica.com/back-issues/>

ADVERTISING ben.leigh@baseballamerica.com

COLLEGES ted.cahill@baseballamerica.com

DESIGN/PRODUCTION sara.mcdaniel@baseballamerica.com

DRAFT carlos.collazo@baseballamerica.com

HIGH SCHOOLS carlos.collazo@baseballamerica.com

INDEPENDENT LEAGUES jj.cooper@baseballamerica.com

INTERNATIONAL ben.badler@baseballamerica.com

MAJOR LEAGUES matt.eddy@baseballamerica.com

MINOR LEAGUES/BUSINESS josh.norris@baseballamerica.com

PROSPECTS kyle.glaser@baseballamerica.com

REPRINTS sara.mcdaniel@baseballamerica.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS/CUSTOMER SERVICE jonathan.smith@baseballamerica.com

WEBSITE tom.johnson@baseballamerica.com

CORRESPONDENTS

BILL BALLEW Asheville, N.C.; SHI DAVIDI Sportsnet Canada; MIKE DIGIOVANNA

Los Angeles Times; DUSTIN DOPIRAK Pittsburgh; BOB DUTTON Tacoma News Tribune;

ALAN ESKEW Topeka, Kan.; JACK ETKIN Denver; ANTHONY FENECH Detroit Free

Press; DERRICK GOULD St. Louis Post-Dispatch; SCOT GREGOR Daily Herald (Arlington

Heights, Ill.); TOM HAUDRICOURT Milwaukee Journal Sentinel; JIM INGRAHAM

Cleveland; GEORGE KING New York Post; STEVE KRONER San Francisco Chronicle;

ROCK KUBATKO MASN Sports.com (Baltimore); LACY LUSK Washington, D.C.; PHIL

MILLER Minneapolis Star-Tribune; BILL MITCHELL Tempe, Ariz.; PATRICK MOONEY

Chicago; NICK PICCORO Arizona Republic; BILL PLUNKETT Orange County (Calif.)

Register; MIKE PUMA New York Post; CHANDLER ROME Houston Chronicle; C. TRENT

ROSECRANS Cincinnati; HARVEY SAHNER Toronto; JEFF SANDERS San Diego Union-

Tribune; JIM SALISBURY Comcast SportsNet Philadelphia; ALEX SPEIER Boston Globe;

CASEY TEFERTILLER San Bruno, Calif.; MARC TOPKIN Tampa Bay Times; WALTER

VILLA Miami; JEFF WILSON Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

STATISTICAL SERVICE

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL ADVANCED MEDIA

BASEBALL AMERICA ENTERPRISES

Alliance
BASEBALL

CHAIRMAN & CEO Gary Green

PRESIDENT Larry Botel

GENERAL COUNSEL Matthew Pace

DIRECTOR OF MARKETING Amy Heart

INVESTOR RELATIONS Michele Balfour

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS Joan Disalvo

PARTNERS Jon Ashley

Stephen Alepa

Martie Cordaro

Brian Rothschild

Andrew Fox

Maurice Haroche

Dan Waldman

Sonny Kalsi

Glenn Isaacson

Robert Herreich

Craig Amazeen

Peter Rupprecht

Beryl Snyder

Tom Steiglehner

3 STEP

MANAGING PARTNER David Geaslen

CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER Jonathan Segal

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER Sue Murphy

DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL CONTENT Tom Johnson

BASEBALL AMERICA (ISSN 0745-5372/USPS 591-210) June 15, Vol. 38, No. 14 is

published bi-weekly with a double issue in August and December, 24 issues per year, by

Baseball America Enterprises, LLC, 4319 South Alston Ave., Suite 103, Durham, NC 27713.

Subscription rate is \$92.95 for one year; Canada \$118.95 (U.S. funds); all other foreign

\$144.95 per year (U.S. funds). Periodicals postage paid at Durham, NC, & additional mailing

offices. Occasionally our subscriber list is made available to reputable firms offering goods

and services we believe would be of interest to our readers. If you prefer to be excluded,

please send your current address label and a note requesting to be excluded from these

promotions to Baseball America Enterprises, LLC, 4319 South Alston Ave., Suite 103,

Durham, NC 27713, Attn: Privacy Coordinator.

POSTMASTER Send all UAA to CFS (See DMM 707.4.12.5); NON-POSTAL & MILITARY

FACILITIES send address corrections to Baseball America, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast,

FL 32142-0235. CANADA POST Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to IMEX Global

Solutions, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Please contact 1-800-381-1288 to start

carrying Baseball America in your store.

©2018 BY BASEBALL AMERICA ENTERPRISES, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE USA.

BASEBALL... IT'S IN OUR DNA

LIVE LOOK-INS AND ANALYSIS ON MLB TONIGHT™
PLUS 5 LIVE GAMES EACH WEEK



OUR NATIONAL PASTIME
ALL THE TIME®



GO TO FINDMLBNETWORK.COM FOR CHANNEL LINEUP.
© 2018 MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PROPERTIES, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

BA ONLINE WHAT'S NEW AT BASEBALLAMERICA.COM AND OUR SOCIAL ACCOUNTS

- @BaseballAmerica
- @BaseballAmerica
- BaseballAmericaMag
- ReadBA



A HALL OF FAME OFFER

Be a part of Hall of Fame history with a special collector's edition of the 2018 Induction Commemorative, brought to you by Baseball America. Buy one magazine for \$9.99 or get all five for \$39.99. Cover options for this historic HOF class are **Chipper Jones, Vladimir Guerrero, Jim Thome, Trevor Hoffman** or Tigers greats **Alan Trammell** and **Jack Morris**. BaseballAmerica.myshopify.com

ALMOST PERFECT

For the second consecutive year, Baseball America correctly predicted 63 of the 64 participants in the NCAA Division I Tournament. That's a credit to the season-long hard work of national writers Teddy Cahill and Michael Lananna, who cover the college beat for BA.

Our one miss was siding with Kentucky of the Southeastern Conference rather than Northeastern, the Colonial Athletic Association winners.

Even though BA correctly predicted 98 percent of the field this year, our goal is to make it 100 percent in 2019!

BaseballAmerica.com/college

Ask BA BY J.J. COOPER

HAVE A QUESTION?

@jjcoop36
askba@baseballamerica.com

Q How do you feel about trading draft picks? Do you think it would work?

—LONNIE HUDSON SMITH
 @MRLONNIESMITH

A In a small way, baseball has already dipped its toe into trading draft picks. Teams are allowed to trade competitive balance picks, which are the supplemental picks after the first and second rounds. The Padres recently acquired the Twins' supplemental second-round pick (No. 74 overall) in the trade that offloaded veteran Phil Hughes and some of his salary.

If baseball were to allow draft picks to be traded, it would have few advantages and significant disadvantages. An NBA or NFL system in which teams can trade picks at any time during the draft would not work.

An NBA draft has 60 players. An NFL draft has 253 players. The baseball draft has 40 rounds and more than 1,200 players selected. Because the baseball draft already takes two days to complete, in addition to the made-for-TV day one, the trading of picks would only serve to slow things down.

But the bigger problem is that any added excitement created by trading draft picks would be wiped away the first time a team sold a top-10 pick to a large revenue team for salary relief on a bad contract, which would happen. In other words, trading draft picks would only highlight the differences between high revenue teams and low revenue ones.

Not to mention: all 30 organizations have 200 or more players in their farm systems who can be traded at any time.

FOR MORE:
BASEBALLAMERICA.COM



FOLLOW BA ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Head college writer Teddy Cahill traveled to Hoover, Ala., for the Southeastern Conference tournament, where Mississippi prevailed in the finals against Louisiana State.

Follow Teddy on Instagram:
@tedcahill.ba

Head draft writer Carlos Collazo appeared on MLB Network to preview the 2018 draft, including a discussion of No. 1 prospect Casey Mize of Auburn.

Follow Carlos on Twitter:
@CarlosACollazo

Trap Toon BY PAUL TRAP

paultrap@BaseballAmerica.com

News item: Supreme Court clears path for legalized sports gambling

P	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	R	H	E	RUN LINE	MONEY LINE	TOTAL RUNS
32 NY	0	3	0	1	0						4	4	0	-4 1/2 (+130)	-2000	07 1/2 (+115)
34 SOX	0	0	0	0	0						0	1	0	+4 1/2 (-170)	+850	U7 1/2 (-150)

TOTAL HITS IN 6 TH INNING?			MOST RUNS IN 6 TH INNING?			LIVE MARGIN OF VICTORY BY:		
UNDER 2	OVER 2	EXACTLY 2	NY	SOX	TIE	NY	SOX	
-115	+240	+280	+265	+280	-125	1 RUN	+800	+1300
						2 RUNS	+550	+5000
						3+ RUNS	-500	+5000
						TOTAL RUNS	EVEN #	ODD #
							-105	-125

I'M EXHAUSTED.

PAUL TRAP BASEBALL AMERICA '18

Data-Driven Development

FlightScope Strike is the first multi-frequency 3D tracking radar for baseball



“The **FlightScope Strike** has made gathering bat performance data much quicker and more precise. The setup and teardown takes only minutes and having the wireless capabilities using the Strike makes the testing sessions much more effective and efficient.”

Ryder Dupuis

Marucci Sports

Product Category Manager - Bats & Protective

R H E
2 7 0

Measures pitching and hitting data during practice, in the bullpen, and in-game



Portable for every setup, both indoors and outdoors



Accurately measures 20+ pitching and hitting parameters



PITCHER U.

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

Florida head coach Kevin O'Sullivan takes a unique developmental approach with his pitching pupils, including the program's two latest first-round talents Brady Singer and Jackson Kowar

BY TEDDY CAHILL

For righthander Brady Singer, the decision where to commit for college was simple. Florida coach Kevin O'Sullivan offered Singer a scholarship the summer before his junior year of high school. It was the third offer Singer had received but there was no need to wait for any more.

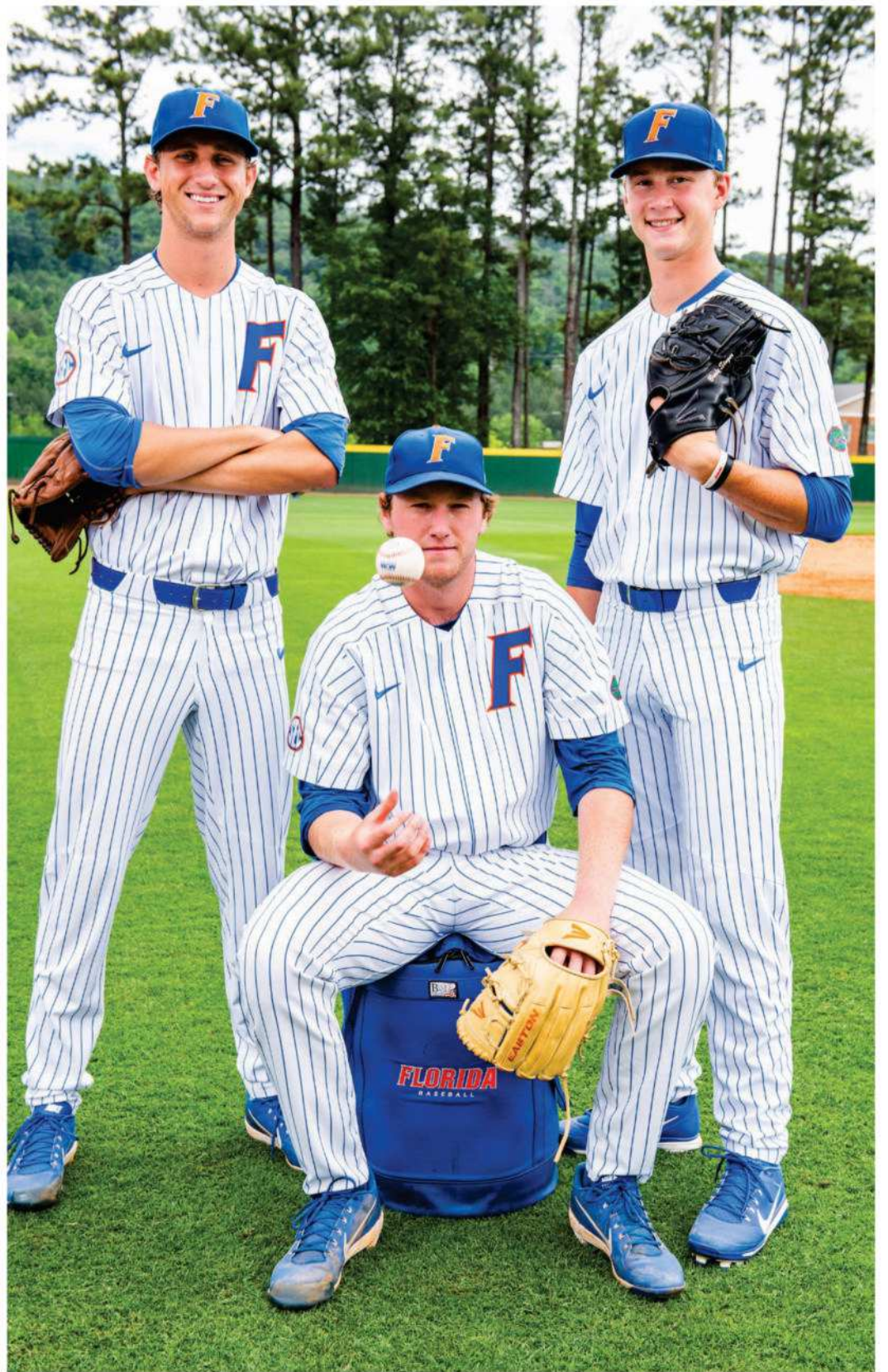
"I didn't think twice," Singer said. "Sully said, 'You're coming?'" and I said, 'Ok. I'm coming.'"

TOP: Florida head coach Kevin O'Sullivan refuses to cookie-cut his pitchers by making them throw the same.

RIGHT: Jackson Kowar, Michael Byrne and Brady Singer (left to right) arrived at Florida as part of the No. 2 recruiting class in the country. That didn't guarantee the trio prominent roles on a pitching staff that included future first-round picks A.J. Puk and Dane Dunning (2016) and Alex Faedo (2017).

The decision was so easy for Singer, who grew up about 90 minutes from Gainesville, Fla., because of the tradition O'Sullivan had built at Florida. During O'Sullivan's 11-year tenure, Florida has become one of the best programs for pitching development in the country. Elite pitchers have rolled out of McKethan Stadium like cars off an assembly line, a new model or two every year.

This year is no different. Singer came to Florida as an unsigned second-rounder and has lived up to his premium billing, developing into the Gators' ace and the College Player of the Year. Righthander Jackson Kowar follows Singer in the rotation and also projects as a first-round pick. Closer Michael Byrne doesn't match the premium stuff Singer and Kowar have, but he holds



PHOTOS BY NIK LAWMAN

the program's career and single-season saves records and has put together back-to-back All-America seasons.

Last year, Singer, Kowar and Byrne wrote themselves into Gators' history by helping the program to its first national championship. They are adding to that legacy and have already helped lead Florida to a Southeastern Conference championship and the No. 1 national seed in the NCAA Tournament. That trio also will add their names to the likes of Anthony DeSclafani, Brian Johnson, A.J. Puk, Logan Shore, Dane Dunning and Alex Faedo as some of the elite pitchers to come out of Florida during O'Sullivan's tenure.

The Gators are keenly aware of the legacy that has been developed before them and are

eager to keep it going.

"Just when I've been here, in that short time, we've had all kinds of really good arms, not to mention the teams he had before that," Kowar said. "Being a part of that, I think it's nice. I think it creates a competitive environment for everyone."

Florida's pitching tradition under O'Sullivan is no accident. It is the product of a strategic decision made by O'Sullivan and his longtime assistant coaches Craig Bell and Brad Weitzel when they took over the program 11 years ago to build the Gators around pitching and defense. It was a natural decision—O'Sullivan began his career as a pitching coach and leads Florida's efforts on

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



**PROVIDING PLAYER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES
FOR TODAY'S YOUTH**

JUN 10TH-12TH KANSAS CITY, MO - KC URBAN YOUTH ACADEMY

JUN 19TH-21ST COMPTON, CA - COMPTON MLB YOUTH ACADEMY

JUN 25TH-27TH BRADENTON, FL - PIRATE CITY





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

the mound—and it has guided the direction of the program for the last decade.

For O'Sullivan, it all starts with recruiting. As an assistant coach, he was known as an elite recruiter, and he hasn't slowed down as a head coach. And by tapping Bell and Weitzel, two former scouts, as his assistants, O'Sullivan has built a staff that is optimized for recruiting. Over the years that has paid off.

Florida has identified and developed a string of elite talents, both position players and pitchers. Third baseman Jonathan India this season joined Byrne and Singer as a first-team All-American and figures to be a first-round pick. Catcher Mike Zunino in 2012 was the College Player of the Year and the second overall pick. Harrison Bader and Preston Tucker are among the many hitters who have made their marks both at Florida and in pro ball during O'Sullivan's tenure.

But it is the pitching that stands out the most in Gainesville. The staff's early efforts on the recruiting trail paid off with the likes of DeSclafani, Nick Maronde and Alex Panteliodis. Their success, in turn, made it easier to land players such as Johnson, Austin Maddox and Hudson Randall and before long, Florida had a reputation for turning out high-end pitchers, which in turn attracted more high-end pitchers.

"You start to build some sort of a track record with the players and there's a level of trust that they believe you're going to help them get to where they want to get to," O'Sullivan said. "I think over time it takes care of itself."

Kowar had the most circuitous route to Gainesville but was ultimately drawn by the

Gators' reputation. The Charlotte native originally committed to Clemson, but when longtime coach Jack Leggett was fired after the 2015 season, Kowar got his release from his National Letter of Intent and reopened his recruitment. He gravitated to Florida and Vanderbilt because both Tim Corbin and O'Sullivan served as assistant coaches at Clemson under Leggett.

Kowar had never met O'Sullivan before he reopened his recruitment. But after one phone call and an official visit he knew Florida was the place for him.

"He's a pitching guy, and I just felt really comfortable with what he's been able to do with pitchers," Kowar said. "It wasn't the ideal route, but I think it was a really big blessing that I ended up here."

While Florida's reputation provides a powerful closing pitch on the recruiting trail, there's still the matter of identifying high school pitchers who will get to school and who will be able to keep the Gators in their lofty position in the college game. Some, like Singer, were considered among the best in their high school class. But Florida has also hit on some more under-the-radar talents. Byrne came to Florida as a preferred walk-on and has developed into the most productive reliever in program history.

Byrne has never had overwhelming velocity and mostly threw in the mid-80s in high school. But O'Sullivan noticed that Byrne always seemed to pitch against the best team in whatever tournament the Florida Burn, his travel ball team, played in.

"I know the radar gun is a big part of our game now, but you kind of watch who the coaches pitch against some of the better teams in their pool," O'Sullivan said. "When we followed Michael around, he always

pitched against the best teams and he never lost. Very similar to Hudson Randall.

"You just sit back and use common sense. Mark Guthrie knows what he's doing with the Burn. You go in and you watch Michael pitch against the best team in their pool every week for the whole summer and you go, 'Well, yeah, this is his guy.' And you just bear down, and you take the radar gun and punt it and say, 'You know what, this guy gets outs, and if his fastball takes a jump you've got something pretty special here,' and that's what's ended up happening."

Byrne, Kowar and Singer arrived on campus in 2015 as a part of the second-ranked recruiting class in the country. But Florida already had a wealth of talent on the mound, and fitting its new recruits into the staff wasn't going to be easy with a returning rotation of Shore, Puk and Faedo. Shaun Anderson, an eventual third-rounder, took over as closer and Florida had the luxury of slotting Dane Dunning, who would be drafted 29th overall that June, into a Swiss Army knife role.

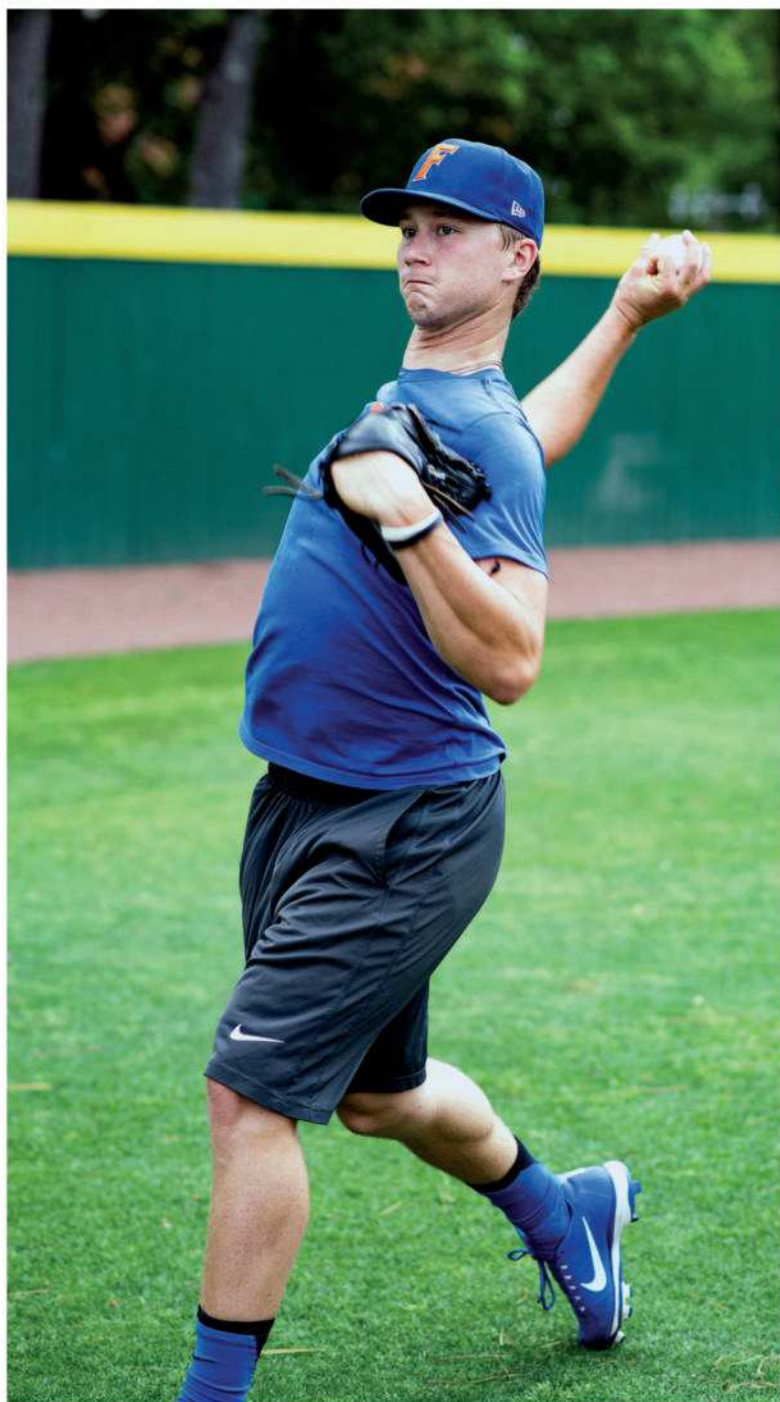
Joining that staff was an intimidating prospect, even to Singer, who just a few months before had been drafted 56th overall by the Blue Jays. But the Gators' established starters quickly put Kowar and Singer at ease, taking the pair out to dinner soon after their arrival in Gainesville and proving to be open and willing tutors.

Kowar and Singer were equally willing students, happy to be able to learn from players who had already experienced success on college baseball's biggest stage.

"They showed us how to work and what it meant to really get better every day," Kowar said. "They took a really professional approach to the game in their daily routine

LEFT: Lightly recruited out of high school because he threw in the mid-80s, Michael Byrne went from preferred walk-on to closer in three years in Gainesville. His velocity spiked at Florida, and this season he ranked among the SEC leaders in saves.

RIGHT: Scouts believe that 6-foot-6 Jackson Kowar, who sits in the mid-90s with an above-average changeup, has untapped potential he can realize once his body fully matures and he sharpens his breaking ball.



An unsigned second-round pick out of high school, Brady Singer's rise at Florida underscores both program's success at luring top recruits to campus and also the efficacy of coach Kevin O'Sullivan's pitcher development program.

and I think that's rubbed off on me Byrne, Brady and some of the other guys."

The arrival of Kowar and Singer in Gainesville was something of a surprise. Singer was expected to sign following the draft and Kowar wasn't even on the radar until mid-June. But their arrival took what was already going to be an elite pitching staff and made it the deepest Florida staff in O'Sullivan's tenure.

Fitting all those pieces together was a tricky puzzle for O'Sullivan. It required Anderson and Dunning, who would have been in the rotation for nearly every other team in the country—and who moved immediately to starting roles in pro ball—to accept spots in the bullpen. O'Sullivan said the pair was extremely unselfish in filling in where they were needed on staff.

Amid so much talent as freshmen, Kowar and Singer also had to take on smaller roles. Singer ended up in the bullpen as a setup man. Kowar mostly served as the midweek starter.

Florida went 14-0 in midweek games that year, a sign of just how deep the pitching staff truly was. But the piece de resistance of that 2016 Gators staff was the SEC Tournament. Kowar and Shore were out that week with injuries. That meant Puk started Florida's first game of the tournament, a sensational game against Louisiana State that stretched 14 innings and led to Dunning coming out of the bullpen for 4.1 innings.

O'Sullivan then tapped Singer, who hadn't started a game all year, and the freshman threw six innings to help the Gators win an elimination game. After Faedo threw a seven-inning complete game to send Florida to the semifinals, O'Sullivan turned to lefthander Scott Moss, who that spring recorded just two outs in SEC play as he worked his way back from Tommy John surgery. He threw six innings to send Florida to the championship game. Moss, due in large part to his start that day, was drafted in the fourth round.

"It was a dominant performance and now you're watching him pitch in minor league baseball, and he's continued that success. He's continued from that start," O'Sullivan said. "I think that start in itself was like, 'Wow, that's a lot of depth we have on that staff.'"

Florida's depth that season meant Florida's talented freshmen worked in supporting roles. But they didn't chafe at their assignments. They understood that not only were there better, more experienced pitchers ahead of them on the depth chart, but that this was just the first step in their development.

O'Sullivan explains to Florida's incoming players that what they saw when they watched the team play in high school was usually a finished product. What they didn't see was the hard work everyone put in over the course of their career to refine their craft.

"This is a three-year commitment and a process," O'Sullivan said. "No one's a finished product by the time your freshman year is over. It's really about getting better from your freshman year to your sophomore year and then to your junior year and, in some cases, senior year. They all have things to work on regardless of how talented they are."

Not only do all the pitchers have things to improve, those things are also different. Byrne and Singer have spent a lot of time at Florida working to improve their changeups to give them a third quality offering. Kowar, however, arrived with his changeup as his best secondary pitch and has needed to work to find a breaking ball that works for him.

Singer has grown into the Gators' ace with an electric fastball/slider combination and this season went 10-1, 2.25 with 92 strikeouts and 18 walks in 88 innings. His fastball sits in the low-to-mid-90s and he throws it from a three-quarters arm slot that generates plenty of run and sink. His slider is a sharp offering that can be an out pitch, and he has developed his changeup to round out his arsenal.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

STYLE YOUR SWING.

THOUSANDS OF COLOR COMBINATIONS / PERSONALIZE YOUR GAME / PRIME PERFORMANCE

SLUGGERCUSTOMBATS.COM

Baseball America

RECORDS THROUGH MAY 27

COLLEGE TOP 25 RANKINGS

RK.	TEAM	2018 RECORD	LAST WEEK	PREV. RANK	RK.	TEAM	2018 RECORD	LAST WEEK	PREV. RANK
1	Florida	42-17	1-2	1	14	Texas	37-20	0-2	14
2	Oregon State	44-10-1	2-1	2	15	North Carolina State	40-16	0-2	10
3	Stanford	44-10	1-2	3	16	Duke	40-15	1-1	12
4	Mississippi	46-15	4-1	4	17	Southern Mississippi	43-16	4-1	17
5	Florida State	43-17	4-0	13	18	Stetson	45-11	4-0	20
6	North Carolina	38-18	1-1	5	19	Houston	36-23	3-2	18
7	Clemson	45-14	2-1	6	20	UCLA	36-19	1-2	16
8	Arkansas	39-18	2-1	9	21	Connecticut	35-20	3-2	NR
9	Minnesota	41-13	4-0	11	22	Auburn	39-21	2-2	22
10	Texas Tech	39-17	1-2	7	23	Missouri State	39-15	4-0	24
11	Georgia	37-19	0-2	8	24	Louisville	43-16	3-1	NR
12	East Carolina	43-16	4-1	19	25	Tennessee Tech	48-9	2-2	21
13	Coastal Carolina	42-17	4-0	15					

Dropped out: South Carolina (22), Mississippi State (25)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

Kowar, listed at 6-foot-6, 185 pounds, inspires the biggest dreams about his future, but that's not to say he hasn't performed in the present. This season he went 9-4, 3.21 with 91 strikeouts and 37 walks in 92.2 innings. His fastball sits in the mid-90s and his changeup is an above-average offering. He's found a breaking ball that works for him, and as he continues to mature, there is a belief among many that he'll improve even more.

Byrne has become an unlikely relief ace, piling up 32 saves in the last two years. He doesn't have the lights-out stuff typically associated with closers. Instead, he stands out for his pitchability and ability to create ground-ball outs. His three-pitch mix is good enough to give him a chance to start in pro ball, but he's shown the ability to thrive in the bullpen and that may be where he stays at the next level.

They all bring different skills to the table and, to a man, they praise O'Sullivan for taking a unique approach with all his pupils. There is no cookie-cutter approach in Gainesville, no stereotypical Florida pitcher every freshman is steadily turned into.

"He's not going to be a cookie-cutter guy and try to get everyone to throw the same," Kowar said. "He's kept my same motion and just added a couple little things here and there to clean me up and it's been tremendously helpful."

One of the few things O'Sullivan hammers into all his pitchers' heads is the importance of throwing strikes. Florida has ranked in the top 30 nationally in walks per nine innings in each of the last five years, a feat that is not by accident.

"If you walk guys, you know you're coming back to the dugout getting an earful, so you might as well not walk guys," Byrne said. "If you walk guys, it's probably not the place unless Sully can help you out with that."

Now that Byrne, Kowar and Singer are juniors, they have developed a professional rapport with O'Sullivan and he has given them more freedom in their own development. That more laissez-faire attitude is part of O'Sullivan's own development as a coach. Early in his career, he said, he might not have been as flexible in letting a player develop his own routine.

So, if, for instance Singer wants to throw every single day, whether it's flat-ground work or long-tossing, O'Sullivan makes sure he does it. But if another pitcher doesn't want to long toss the day after he starts, that's all right, too.

O'Sullivan has learned over the course of his career that it is important to make sure his players have ownership in their own development.

"I want them to have input on how they go about things because at the end of the day it's their career," he said. "You can't cookie-cut anybody. Everybody's different and everybody's arm responds differently after a start."

The pace at which players put everything



together is different for everyone. For Kowar and Singer, O'Sullivan saw their development reach another level throughout fall ball during their sophomore year. Other times, it comes together in just one game.

That has been the case for some of Florida's next wave of big-time arms. For righthander Tyler Dyson, who could be a first-rounder in 2019, it was an appearance last year out of the bullpen in super regionals against Wake Forest. For righthander Tommy Mace, who could be a first-rounder in 2020, it was a spot start at Mississippi State on the final weekend of the regular season.

"This is not an easy transition from high

school to this level," O'Sullivan said. "There's an adjustment period. You kind of see a maturation. Really sometimes it's one game. You go, 'There it is,' and you kind of run with it."

As Byrne, Kowar and Singer near the end of their storied Florida careers, players such as Dyson and Mace, as well as freshmen Jordan Butler and Jack Leftwich have emerged as the next wave. Next season, it will be their turn to carry Florida's legacy on the mound. And they will eventually beget the next group.

As long as O'Sullivan is scouring the recruiting trail for the next generation of Florida pitchers, there figure to be more kids like Singer, eagerly waiting for their offer to join the ever-growing legacy in Gainesville. ■

TOP: Jackson Kowar (No. 37) celebrates after recording the final out of the 2017 College World Series in which Florida defeated Louisiana State to win the program's first national championship.

BOTTOM: Brady Singer, Michael Byrne and Jackson Kowar (left to right) form the backbone of Florida's brilliant pitching staff.

JUSTIN TAFOVA/GETTY IMAGES; PORTRAITS BY NIK LAYMAN



NATIONAL TRYOUT TOUR

50 STATES. 150 CITIES.
GET DISCOVERED.

SEE HOW YOU STACK UP NATIONWIDE & IMPROVE AS A PLAYER.
FIND OUT WHEN THE UNDER ARMOUR BASEBALL FACTORY TOUR
FOR MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL PLAYERS IS COMING TO YOUR CITY!

RECEIVE 10% OFF REGISTRATION
WHEN YOU USE PROMO CODE **BA2018**

BASEBALLFACTORY.COM/TRYOUTS OR 800.641.4487

@BASEBALLFACTORY    

Florida righthander Brady Singer is the No. 1 starter for the No. 1 team in the country. He also entered the season as the top draft prospect for 2018, and though he ceded that title to others, Singer remains an attractive pro prospect because of his stuff and competitiveness.



TONY PARKER

PLAYER OF THE YEAR

LIVING UP TO THE HYPE

Brady Singer dominated rugged SEC competition even while contending with preseason expectations that focused scouts' attention squarely on him

BY TEDDY CAHILL

Looking back on his remarkable regular season, Florida righthander Brady Singer is drawn all the way back to facing Siena on Opening Day. The junior this season took over as the Gators' ace and came into the year regarded as the top prospect in this year's draft class. The Gators were the defending national champions and all eyes were on Singer delivered immediately, throwing 89 pitches in seven innings and striking out eight batters while holding Siena to one run (unearned) on two hits and a walk.

"Walking out there for the first time my junior year with all the pressure—you know, the draft stuff and people are watching with the No. 1 tag on me," Singer said. "To go into that start and get it started on the right

foot going into the next weekend with Miami, I think that was the toughest one."

Singer has carried that momentum through the rest of the season. As Florida's ace, he helped lead the Gators to the Southeastern Conference title and the top seed in the NCAA Tournament. He went 10-1, 2.25 with a 92-to-18 strikeout-to-walk ratio and held opposing hitters to a .186 average in 88 innings. He carried the mantle of being the early favorite to be the No. 1 draft pick well, and while he is no longer expected to be the top selection, he is still expected to be selected in the top six picks.

For his exemplary season and his premium talent, Singer is Baseball America's 2018 College Player of the Year.

Singer has long been regarded as a high-level prospect. He ranked No. 54 on the BA 500 draft rankings in 2015 when he was coming out of Eustis (Fla.) High and was drafted No. 56 overall by the Blue Jays that June. He was the top-ranked prospect in the Cape Cod League after his freshman season at Florida. Through it all, he has lived up to the high expectations and now joins Mike Zunino as the only Gators to be named College Player of the Year.

Singer has impressive physical tools and some of the best stuff in the country. He gets a lot of sinking action on his low-90s fastball and his sharp slider can be an out pitch.

Those tools are readily apparent when watching him pitch. What's more difficult to see is the hard work he puts in between starts to prepare. Coach Kevin O'Sullivan said Singer has completely changed his body over his three years at Florida, filling out his lanky frame and getting stronger.

Beyond those physical gains, Singer also spends a lot of time on the mental side of the game.

"He's a tremendously hard worker between starts," O'Sullivan said, citing Singer's dedication in the weight room as well as his "watching of video and preparation and understanding the

game."

Singer's competitiveness is also a part of what makes him an elite college pitcher. That competitive fire famously spilled over last year in super regionals when his appearance was interrupted by the umpteenth rain delay of the weekend in Gainesville.

Singer's mentality on the mound helps him excel on big stages. Last year he was at his best in the College World Series. This year he rose to the occasion time after time when facing the SEC's best pitchers. That included outdueling Auburn's Casey Mize in front of more than 60 scouts.

Singer said his competitive spirit comes from his parents, especially his mother.

"Even when we play board games, we can't lose," he said. "She's a huge competitor and I get it from her."

All those pieces have come together for Singer to make him a true college ace and the leader of the best pitching staff in the country. And they should enable him to sustain that success for years to come.

"This guy's going to pitch forever," O'Sullivan said. "It's not just ability. He's extremely talented, and he has a competitive spirit. He's just different. That's hard to come by." ■

Singer Joins Distinguished Company

A look at the past six pitchers who won College Player of the Year

BY MATT EDDY

Florida ace Brady Singer became the seventh pitcher to win BA's College Player of the Year award this century—and the 11th in 38 seasons—for his dominant season with the Gators, the No. 1 team in the nation heading into regionals play.

Singer led the Southeastern Conference in ERA (2.25) and opponent average (.186) and tied Arkansas' Blaine Knight for the lead with 10 wins, while striking out 92 and walking 18 through 88 innings.

To place Singer's performance in context, here we will take a closer look at the past six pitchers to win the BA College POY. All were first-round draft picks who went on to have distinguished big league careers, but keep in mind that Singer has not yet added to his totals via postseason play.

MARK PRIOR, 2001 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

15-1, 1.69 ERA in 20 G, 18 starts
202 SO, 18 BB, 100 H in 138.2 IP

Just four pitchers won POY honors in the first 20 years of its existence: Louisiana State's Ben McDonald (1989), Clemson's Kris Benson (1996), Stanford's Jeff Austin (1998) and Baylor's Jason Jennings (1999). Prior became the fifth for his outstanding 2001 campaign in which he led the nation in strikeouts and became the 14th pitcher in Division I history to top 200. His 1.69 ERA ranked fifth that season. As BA wrote at the time, long-time college baseball observers proclaimed Prior the greatest pitcher in college history.

JERED WEAVER, 2004 LONG BEACH STATE

15-1, 1.63 ERA in 19 starts
213 SO, 21 BB, 91 H in 144 IP

Weaver's bid to pitch the Dirtbags into the 2004 College World Series came up one win short, but that didn't stop people from comparing his season with Mark Prior's 2001 campaign as one of the best ever by a college pitcher. The scrappy, hard-working Weaver led the nation in wins and strikeouts and ranked third in ERA.

ANDREW MILLER, 2006 NORTH CAROLINA

13-2, 2.48 ERA in 20 G, 18 starts
133 SO, 40 BB, 100 H in 123 IP

The first lefthander ever to win POY honors, Miller didn't dominate

the leaderboards like the other winners, ranking 10th in strikeouts and 48th in ERA. Yet he did pitch UNC to the College World Series for the first time since 1989, helping dispel the "under-achievers" tag that saddled the Tar Heels. That along with a wicked mid-90s fastball pushed Miller to the forefront of a deep college pitching class.

DAVID PRICE, 2007 VANDERBILT

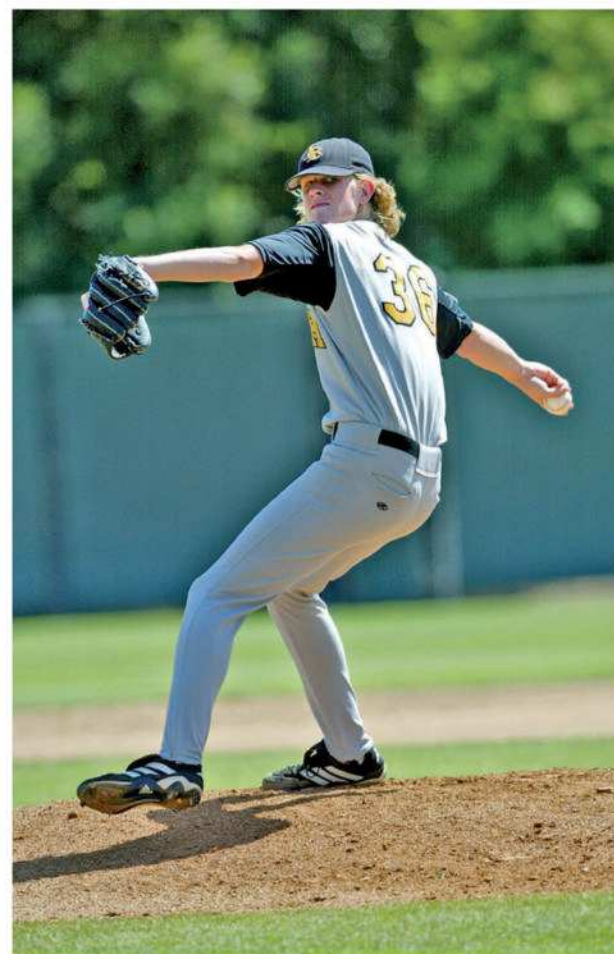
11-1, 2.63 ERA in 18 G, 17 starts
194 SO, 31 BB, 95 H in 133 IP

Price joined Ben McDonald and Kris Benson as the only POY pitchers to be drafted No. 1 overall—Stephen Strasburg would later join them—after he led the nation in strikeouts in 2007. College baseball observers knew they were watching a special talent in Price, whose competitiveness, work ethic and selflessness marked him as a future major league ace.

STEPHEN STRASBURG, 2009 SAN DIEGO STATE

13-1, 1.32 ERA in 15 starts
195 SO, 19 BB, 65 H in 109 IP

Strasburg led the nation in ERA and strikeouts in a 2009 campaign that put him on equal footing with Mark Prior and Jered Weaver for the title of best season ever by a college pitcher. While Strasburg faced weaker competition in the Mountain West Conference than either Prior or Weaver, his ridiculously good arsenal, shocking pitchability and spotless performance set him apart.



BILL NICHOLS

TREVOR BAUER, 2011 UCLA

13-2, 1.25 ERA in 16 starts
203 SO, 36 BB, 73 H in 136.2 IP

Bauer led the nation in strikeouts and ranked fourth in ERA, doing so with a combination of whiffs and a sub-2.00 ERA that put him in the company of Mark Prior, Jered Weaver and Stephen Strasburg in terms of accomplishment. What set Bauer apart was his durability. He held his mid-90s velocity while averaging 8.5 innings per start, and at one point he completed nine consecutive starts. ■

Jered Weaver won 150 big league games in 12 seasons and recorded three top-five finishes in AL Cy Young Award balloting. He first rose to prominence in 2004, when as a Long Beach State junior he turned in a season for the ages.

PRESENTS THE ALL-STAR CAPTAIN'S CATCHER'S AWARD

The Captain's Catcher's Award recognizes the defensive qualities of minor league catchers. Inspired by the catching skills and character of Jason Varitek, this award is only about catching and who plays the position to the fullest. The best catchers are detail oriented and driven to improve their performance behind the plate. Leadership, dedication, the ability to call a game, blocking, receiving, and making plays are the primary qualities sought after—with the ultimate goal of protecting home.

#MFRA

RODRIGO VIGIL
MARLINS

Vigil is playing his ninth season in the minors in 2018. In every year, at every stop, the 25-year-old Panamanian has been a defensive standout behind the plate. Playing for Double-A Jacksonville this season, Vigil leads Southern League catchers in caught stealing percentage and is third in fielding percentage. He's always controlled the run game with a 39 percent career caught stealing rate, and this year he is expertly guiding the Suns' young staff. With Vigil as the primary catcher, Jacksonville's staff is second in the league in ERA (3.51) and has issued the second-fewest walks (163).

2018 CAPTAIN'S CATCHER AWARD WATCH LIST

Player, Team	PCT	G	E	PB	SBA	CS	PCT
Edgar Cabral, Philadelphia	.995	21	1	3	26	7	.269
Eric Haase, Cleveland	.988	30	3	5	29	12	.413
Sean Murphy, Oakland	.991	39	3	3	30	7	.233
Dom Nunez, Colorado	1.000	26	0	2	17	7	.412
Michael Perez, Arizona	.993	29	2	2	17	7	.412
Jake Rogers, Detroit	1.000	37	0	5	34	17	.500
Will Smith, Los Angeles (NL)	.992	14	1	3	18	6	.333
Garrett Stubbs, Houston	.996	23	1	1	15	8	.533
Jose Trevino, Texas	.996	28	6	2	27	12	.308
Rodrigo Vigil, Miami	.993	31	2	3	39	19	.487

MOVE FORWARD RISE ABOVE™

COLLEGE ALL-AMERICA TEAMS



WADE RACKLEY/AUBURN ATHLETICS

Auburn righthander Casey Mize ran up a 6.75 ERA in his final three starts, costing him a shot at College Player of the Year, but his 14-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio bettered efforts from Mark Prior, Stephen Strasburg or Jered Weaver in their historic, "best college pitcher ever" seasons.

C **JOEY BART**

SCHOOL: Georgia Tech
THE SKINNY: After being slowed by injury last year, Bart bounced back in a big way in 2018. He led the Atlantic Coast Conference in hitting (.359) and ranked second in on-base percentage (.471) and slugging (.632), while also earning ACC defensive player of the year honors. Bart threw out 34 percent of basestealers during the regular season.

BRIAN WESTERHOLT/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

OF **SETH BEER**

SCHOOL: Clemson
THE SKINNY: Beer in 2016 exploded on the college baseball scene when he won Freshman of the Year honors. The lefthanded hitter continued slugging for all three years at Clemson. This season he led the Atlantic Coast Conference with 20 home runs, a career high, while also drawing more than 50 walks for the third consecutive year.

TONY FARLOW/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

BASEBALL AMERICA HAS SELECTED A COLLEGE ALL-AMERICA TEAM FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS. THIS YEAR'S SELECTIONS WERE MADE BY THE BA STAFF BEFORE REGIONALS, WEIGHING THE PERFORMANCE OF PLAYERS THROUGHOUT THE SPRING. WHILE OUR PRESEASON ALL-AMERICA TEAMS, WHICH ARE VOTED ON BY MAJOR LEAGUE SCOUTING DIRECTORS, LOOK FORWARD WITH AN EMPHASIS ON TALENT AND POTENTIAL, THESE TEAMS ARE MEANT TO LOOK AT THE RESULTS OF THE 2018 SEASON. WE TAKE INTO ACCOUNT EVALUATIONS FROM COUNTLESS COACHES AND SCOUTS, AS WELL AS STATISTICAL PERFORMANCE TO CREATE THE TEAMS.

Florida, the top-ranked team going into the NCAA Tournament, also leads all schools with three first-team All-Americans. The Gators' trio includes righthander Brady Singer, the College Player of the Year. Oregon State leads all teams with four honorees across all three All-America teams. Florida and Clemson have three each, tied for the second most. Six schools—Arizona State, California, Southern Mississippi, Stetson, Tennessee Tech and Texas Tech—had two players honored. In all, 35 schools are represented on the All-America teams. Six players from the Preseason All-America first team also made the post-season first team: catcher Joey Bart, outfielder Seth Beer, starting pitchers Logan Gilbert, Casey Mize and Singer and reliever Michael Byrne. Third baseman Jonathan India was on the third team. In all, 15 Preseason All-Americans earned spots on the postseason teams. Mize, Byrne and Nick Madrigal all repeat as All-Americans. Madrigal was a first-team honoree last year, while Mize and Byrne were on the third team. ■

FIRST TEAM

Selected By Baseball America Staff; Statistics Through Conference Tournament Play

Pos.	Name, School	Year	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB
C	Joey Bart, Georgia Tech	Jr.	.359	.471	.632	220	55	79	16	38	41	56	3
1B	Bren Spillane, Illinois	Jr.	.389	.498	.903	175	57	68	23	60	36	57	16
2B	Kody Clemens, Texas	Jr.	.344	.437	.703	209	53	72	19	61	34	37	4
3B	Jonathan India, Florida	Jr.	.362	.502	.723	188	57	68	17	42	47	47	11
SS	Terrin Vavra, Minnesota	Jr.	.405	.477	.620	163	43	66	7	42	23	13	6
OF	Seth Beer, Clemson	Jr.	.316	.471	.656	209	60	66	20	52	52	31	1
OF	Trevor Larnach, Oregon State	Jr.	.324	.447	.637	204	52	66	17	64	40	50	3
OF	Bryant Packard, East Carolina	So.	.403	.460	.680	206	47	83	14	50	19	42	5
DH	Andrew Vaughn, California	So.	.402	.531	.819	199	59	80	23	63	44	18	4
UT	Brooks Wilson, Stetson	Sr.	.287	.399	.437	167	28	48	3	26	31	39	8
Pos.	Player, School	Year	W	L	ERA	G	CG	SV	IP	H	BB	SO	AVG
SP	Logan Gilbert, Stetson	Jr.	10	1	2.52	14	0	0	100	60	20	143	.171
SP	Casey Mize, Auburn	Jr.	9	5	3.07	15	0	0	103	73	10	140	.209
SP	Nick Sandlin, Southern Mississippi	Jr.	9	0	1.13	14	0	0	95	51	15	134	.166
SP	Brady Singer, Florida	Jr.	10	1	2.25	13	1	0	88	59	18	92	.186
RP	Michael Byrne, Florida	Jr.	2	1	1.99	29	0	13	45	33	4	46	.200
RP	Jack Little, Stanford	So.	3	0	0.66	23	0	15	41	24	7	54	.170
UT	Brooks Wilson	Sr.	6	0	2.13	31	0	20	55	40	19	68	.197

1B **BREN SPILLANE**



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

SCHOOL: Illinois
THE SKINNY: Spillane had a spectacular season for the Illini and finished the regular season leading the Big Ten Conference in all three triple crown categories. He slugged .903 and became the first player in the country to finish a season with a slugging percentage of more than .900 since 2009. His 23 home runs rank as the second most in program history.

2B **KODY CLEMENS**



JOHN RIVERA/GETTY IMAGES

SCHOOL: Texas
THE SKINNY: Clemens' standout season led Texas to its first Big 12 Conference title since 2011. Clemens, the youngest of Roger Clemens' four sons, hit some dramatic homers, including three on the final weekend of the regular season when the Longhorns clinched the championship. He led the league in home runs (19) and slugging (.687).

3B **JONATHAN INDIA**



MIKE JAMES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

SCHOOL: Florida
THE SKINNY: India was a highly regarded prospect coming out of high school and was a regular in the lineup his first two years at Florida. His breakout in 2018 made him one of the focal points of the Gators' offense. He led the Southeastern Conference in on-base percentage (.506) and slugging (.730) during the regular season.

SS **TERIN VAVRA**



SCHOOL: Minnesota
THE SKINNY: The Golden Gophers ran away with the Big Ten Conference title, and Vavra played a big role in their success. He ranked second in the Big Ten in batting (.385), led Minnesota with 10 home runs, had more walks than strikeouts and played solid defense up the middle, playing his way up draft boards—possibly to day two—along the way.

OF **TREVOR LARNACH**



BILL MITCHELL

SCHOOL: Oregon State
THE SKINNY: Larnach has long had big raw power but hadn't tapped into it early in his college career. That all changed this season, when the junior broke out for a team-high 17 home runs. Larnach's emergence as a middle-of-the-order power threat helped the Beavers earn a top-eight seed in the NCAA Tournament for the second year in a row.

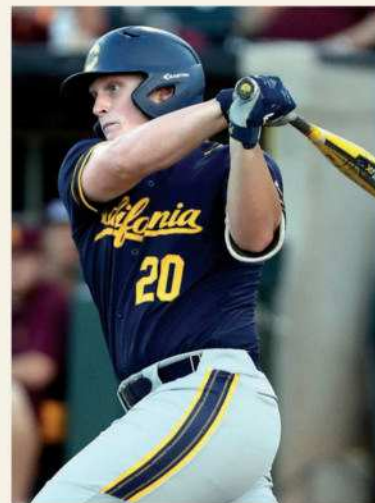
OF **BRYANT PACKARD**



BILL MITCHELL

SCHOOL: East Carolina
THE SKINNY: Packard led the American Athletic Conference in all three triple-slash statistics during the regular season, hitting .418/.475/.714. He helped lead the Pirates to the conference tournament title and a hosting bid in the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2009. Packard also set a program record with a 32-game hitting streak.

DH **ANDREW VAUGHN**



BILL MITCHELL

SCHOOL: California
THE SKINNY: Vaughn has done nothing but hit since arriving in Berkeley. The sophomore this season led the Pac-12 Conference in hitting (.402), on-base percentage (.531) and slugging percentage (.819) and finished the regular season second in home runs (23) and RBIs (63), leaving the first baseman just shy of winning the triple crown.

UT **BROOKS WILSON**



SCHOOL: Stetson
THE SKINNY: Wilson had primarily been a starting pitcher the first three years of his college career before taking over as closer this season and also moving into the lineup. The new role suited the senior well, and he went into the NCAA Tournament leading the country in saves (20), while also ranking second on the team in hitting (.287).

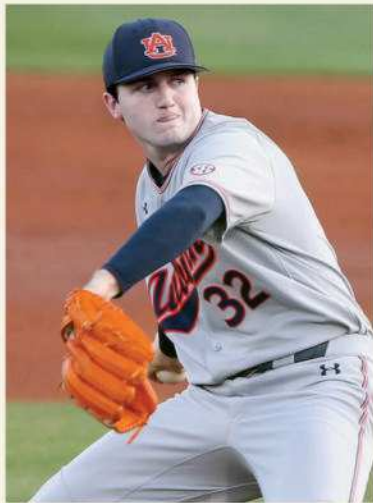
SP **LOGAN GILBERT**



MIKE JAMES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

SCHOOL: Stetson
THE SKINNY: Gilbert is the latest high-end pitcher to come through Stetson, joining the likes of all-stars Corey Kluber and Jacob deGrom. Gilbert this spring won Atlantic Sun Conference pitcher of the year honors for the second straight season and entered the NCAA Tournament with the second most strikeouts (143) in the country.

SP **CASEY MIZE**



CLIFF WELCH/GETTY IMAGES

SCHOOL: Auburn
THE SKINNY: Mize emerged as the top prospect in this year's draft class thanks to his devastating stuff and pinpoint control. He led the Southeastern Conference with 140 strikeouts in 102 innings during the regular season and posted a 14-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio. Mize threw a no-hitter against Northeastern, the first in program history since 2002.

SP **NICK SANDLIN**



BOBBY MCOUFFIE/GETTY IMAGES

SCHOOL: Southern Mississippi
THE SKINNY: After two years as Southern Miss' bullpen ace—a role in which he racked up 20 saves—Sandlin moved to the front of the rotation for the Golden Eagles. He excelled in his new role and went 9-0, 1.13 during the regular season. Sandlin threw three shutouts, and his season ranks as one of the best on the mound in program history.

SP **BRADY SINGER**



MIKE JAMES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

SCHOOL: Florida
THE SKINNY: Singer came to Florida as a Blue Jays unsigned second-round pick in the 2015 draft. He has lived up to those lofty expectations, this year earning College Player of the Year honors after helping to lead Florida to its second straight Southeastern Conference title. Singer led the SEC in wins (10), ERA (2.25) and opponent average (.186).



DIAMOND PRO
 PROFESSIONAL GROUNDSKEEPING PRODUCTS



RED INFIELD CONDITIONER
 BULK DELIVERY 10, 15 AND 24 TONS



HOME PLATE / MOUND CLAY
 50 LB. BAGS / 40 BAGS PER PALLET



DOUBLE PLAY INFIELD CONDITIONER

800.228.2987
 diamondpro.com



AVAILABLE IN BULK NATIONWIDE

RP

MICHAEL BYRNE



CLIFF WELCH

SCHOOL: Florida

THE SKINNY: Byrne surprisingly emerged as Florida's closer and went on to earn All-America honors in 2017. He repeated that feat this year when he became the Gators' all-time saves leader and anchored the bullpen. He isn't overpowering, but he pounds the strike zone and understands what he has to do to be successful in high-leverage moments.

RP

JACK LITTLE



BILL MITCHELL

SCHOOL: Stanford

THE SKINNY: Little was seldom used as a freshman, but this season he flourished as Stanford's closer in his sophomore year. The righthander anchored the Cardinal's bullpen and earned 15 saves. He allowed just five runs (three earned) in 41 innings in the regular season to help Stanford win its first Pac-12 Conference title since 2004.

SECOND TEAM

Pos.	Name, School	Year	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB
C	Adley Rutschman, Oregon State	So.	.391	.494	.594	197	44	77	6	63	44	30	1
1B	Spencer Torkelson, Arizona State	Fr.	.320	.440	.473	206	59	66	25	53	38	44	4
2B	Nick Dunn, Maryland	Jr.	.330	.419	.561	212	39	70	10	39	32	19	3
3B	Josh Jung, Texas Tech	So.	.381	.484	.650	226	63	86	11	73	33	29	4
SS	Cadyn Grenier, Oregon State	Jr.	.335	.420	.477	218	57	73	4	42	27	43	8
OF	Devlin Granberg, Dallas Baptist	Sr.	.426	.531	.651	235	65	100	11	65	50	41	23
OF	Grant Little, Texas Tech	So.	.378	.477	.675	209	58	79	12	67	37	30	9
OF	Steele Walker, Oklahoma	Jr.	.326	.441	.606	216	48	76	13	53	31	48	7
DH	Alec Bohm, Wichita State	Jr.	.339	.436	.625	224	57	76	16	55	39	28	9
UT	Tanner Dodson, California	Jr.	.328	.389	.407	189	35	62	1	23	15	30	12

Pos.	Player, School	Year	W	L	ERA	G	CG	SV	IP	H	BB	SO	AVG
SP	Kyle Brnovich, Elon	So.	8	2	1.71	15	1	0	105	57	36	147	.159
SP	Colton Eastman, Cal State Fullerton	Jr.	9	3	2.26	15	1	0	104	73	26	108	.208
SP	Blaine Knight, Arkansas	Jr.	10	0	2.78	15	0	0	87	76	21	86	.234
SP	John Rooney, Hofstra	Jr.	8	2	1.23	13	3	0	95	51	27	108	.166
RP	Parker Caracci, Mississippi	R-So.	4	2	1.86	25	0	10	44	38	10	68	.246
RP	Ryley Gilliam, Clemson	Jr.	2	3	0.99	24	0	11	36	19	22	53	.153
UT	Tanner Dodson, California	Jr.	2	1	2.48	19	0	11	40	36	7	35	.235

THIRD TEAM

Pos	Name, School	Year	AVG	OBP	SLG	AB	R	H	HR	RBI	BB	SO	SB
C	Cal Raleigh, Florida State	Jr.	.330	.455	.593	221	44	73	13	54	51	40	2
1B	Chase Chambers, Tennessee Tech	Sr.	.400	.498	.652	230	71	92	15	76	41	24	0
2B	Nick Madrigal, Oregon State	Jr.	.395	.459	.563	119	29	47	2	27	12	5	9
3B	Luke Reynolds, Southern Miss.	R-Jr.	.400	.562	.727	205	69	82	15	60	63	52	8
SS	Logan Davidson, Clemson	So.	.298	.411	.562	235	57	70	15	45	39	62	10
OF	Gage Canning, Arizona State	Jr.	.369	.426	.648	236	47	87	9	45	24	54	8
OF	Keegan McGovern, Georgia	Sr.	.325	.440	.630	200	63	65	15	44	36	42	7
OF	Andrew Moritz, UNC Greensboro	Jr.	.428	.492	.637	215	57	92	6	61	28	27	12
DH	Kevin Strohschein, Tennessee Tech	Jr.	.406	.463	.713	251	65	102	18	65	27	33	1
UT	Jack Labosky, Duke	Sr.	.238	.391	.405	138	31	44	7	38	32	62	10

Pos.	Player, School	Year	W	L	ERA	G	CG	SV	IP	H	BB	SO	AVG
SP	Mason Feole, Connecticut	So.	9	1	2.50	15	0	0	94	75	47	114	.230
SP	Joey Murray, Kent State	Jr.	9	1	1.71	15	1	0	95	47	38	139	.146
SP	Andre Pallante, UC Irvine	So.	10	1	1.60	15	0	0	101	77	30	115	.220
SP	Adam Wolf, Louisville	Jr.	7	2	2.26	15	0	0	96	73	26	105	.209
RP	Robert Broom, Mercer	Jr.	10	4	1.70	31	0	2	74	57	24	111	.209
RP	Durbin Feltman, Texas Christian	Jr.	0	1	0.74	19	0	6	24	12	6	43	.156
UT	Jack Labosky, Duke	Sr.	2	0	0.84	21	0	9	32	23	4	24	.211

HIGH FIVE



ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE

ACCEPT THE HIGH FIVE CHALLENGE TODAY BY:

1. Donating \$5
2. Post on social media and challenge 5 friends
3. Show us your high five video or via #high5miracles



LEARN HOW YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT BASEBALLMIRACLES.ORG

THE WOOD CORNER

"Spring is right around the corner, I can't wait to hear the ping of an aluminum bat" - Said no one ever

Bring the crack back. Use a wood bat.



607.436.9082 | www.leatherstockinghandsplits.com



Kevin Smith owes his Midwest League success to a revamped swing and new approach.

AMERICAN LEAGUE ORGANIZATION REPORTS

LIFT-OFF AT LANSING

Kevin Smith spent all offseason working to close a hole in his swing—and it shows

TORONTO BLUE JAYS

Shortstop **Kevin Smith** is always thinking about his game, looking for ways to improve.

"I self-evaluate a lot," the 21-year-old righthanded hitter said. "Probably more than I should."

Over the winter, Smith's point of emphasis was obvious. A skilled defender at shortstop and third base, he wanted to cut down the length of his swing as a way to increase both the quantity and quality of contact. The 2017 fourth-round out of Maryland also wanted to improve his approach with two strikes.

"I had a loop in my swing, and I'm not really sure how it got there," Smith said. "Looking at swings, I can tell when something's off. I was getting way under the ball, coming way up through it, and I really wasn't on plane with it for a while."

"The whole offseason was just trying to work on that ball up, and that was what was giving me trouble. On fastballs up, I'd try to cheat to it and then get exposed with breaking balls away."

The payoff was substantial for Smith, who through his first 40 games at low Class A Lansing hit .367/.421/.652 with seven home runs, 20 doubles and 10 stolen bases. More importantly, he slashed his strikeout rate from 24.7 percent last year at Rookie-level Bluefield to 14 percent in the Midwest League.

At the same time, Smith's power production spiked, which is why the Blue Jays believe his improvements are no fluke, but rather the sustainable product of measured adjustments.

"Really, it was working on (getting to fastballs up), saying, 'If I can drive this pitch through the middle or into the gaps, then I know I'm on time. I know I can hit anything else,'" Smith said.

"Along with that came some swing adjustments that I wasn't really forcing on myself, but they just kind of came to fruition because I was trying to shorten up and get to (the high fastball). Now my swing can handle that pitch and I'm a little more confident the plate."

» Righthander **Nate Pearson** suffered a fractured ulna after being struck on the forearm by a line drive during his season debut at high Class A Dunedin, his first start after recovering from a spring oblique injury.

—SHI DAVIDI

BALTIMORE ORIOLES

With his health no longer an issue, lefthander **Keegan Akin** can go back to getting out hitters and allowing the Orioles to envision him in their rotation somewhere down the road.

Akin put together a streak at Double-A Bowie of five straight starts without surrendering more than two earned runs until hitting a small bump on May 16. Through nine starts he went 4-4, 3.38 with an Eastern League-leading 53 strikeouts and 20 walks in 50.2 innings. Opponents hit just .225.

A 2016 second-round pick out of Western Michigan, Akin made 21 starts at high Class A Frederick in 2017. He didn't pitch after Aug. 4 because of a pulled oblique muscle and was slow-played in the spring.

The 23-year-old Akin's impressive five-game streak this spring included just five earned runs allowed in 30.1 innings.

"You look at those staffs (in the minors), I don't think anybody's pitched better than Keegan Akin right now," Orioles manager **Buck Showalter** said. "He's been impressive. I always challenge fans to get out to Bowie and watch him pitch."

Akin tossed 6.2 scoreless innings on May 11 against Hartford, allowing four hits, walking one batter and striking out six to lower his ERA to 2.75.

"Keep your eye on Keegan Akin," executive vice president **Dan Duquette** said. "(Special assistant) **Lee Thomas** was there to see his last outing and he sent me a text that said, 'He could have pitched for any club in the big leagues tonight.' And Lee doesn't do that very often, but he likes this kid."

Taking care of his body is keeping Akin on the mound and the Orioles' radar as they possibly move toward a rebuild that could present an opportunity for him later in the summer or in spring training next year.

"I think he worked hard in the offseason on his conditioning," Duquette said. "He's got a better understanding of the stresses of the major league starting pitcher job."

—ROCH KUBATKO

BOSTON RED SOX

The news that top prospect **Jay Groome** would require Tommy John surgery represented an anvil dropped atop a Red Sox organization that was already in an early-season free fall.

After years of feeding quality prospects to both the big league team and to other teams as parts of trades, the Red Sox already appeared thin on impact arms entering the season.

The loss of Groome would have rep-

resented a tough loss in its own right, but the fact that it came in mid-May, at a time when so many of the team's other top pitching prospects were struggling, left the organization in a particularly depleted state.

The team's top pitching prospects behind Groome all had suffered from major early season control difficulties at high Class A Salem. Righthander **Bryan Mata** had the highest walk rate in the Carolina League (19.5 percent) by a pitcher with at least 25 innings. Lefthander **Darwinzon Hernandez** had the second-highest walk rate (18.8 percent) and 2017 first-rounder **Tanner Houck** (15.1 percent) ranked eighth.

The organization can cite reasons for each of those pitchers' difficulties. Houck is altering his arsenal in pro ball, figuring out the right balance between a four-seam fastball (a new pitch for him) and the two-seamer that carried him at Missouri. He also switched from a college slider to a curveball in pro ball.

"He's taking steps forward," farm director **Ben Crockett** said. "I think we're seeing a lot of positives there. The stuff has been very good."

At 19, Mata is the youngest pitcher in the Carolina League. Thrown into the deep end, he had been trying to re-establish himself with the same aggressive strike-throwing that characterized his first two pro seasons.

"I think it's a combination of repeating his delivery and also staying consistent and aggressive with his plan," Crockett said. "... I think, ultimately, we'll get him in the right place."

The ability of the Salem rotation members to attack the strike zone will play a huge role in determining the state of the system going forward—at least until Groome returns to the mound some time in 2019. In the meantime, the Red Sox face a host of challenges to place several of their top pitching prospects on more stable developmental footing.

—ALEX SPEIER

CHICAGO WHITE SOX

The White Sox are keeping a close eye on a catching prospect playing for Double-A Birmingham.

Actually, they're tracking two catchers with major league potential.

Zack Collins, the 10th overall pick in 2016 following a standout career at Miami, is ostensibly the main attraction behind the plate for the Barons. But Chicago isn't sleeping on **Seby Zavala**.

A 12th-round pick out of San Diego State in 2015, Zavala missed his freshman season with the Aztecs after having Tommy John surgery.

The injury was a setback for the 5-foot-11, 210-pound catcher, but

MIKE JAMES/FOUR SEAM; ED ZURGA/GETTY IMAGES

Zavala never lost sight of his goals.

"It's just really rewarding knowing that all of the work I've put in is finally starting to show a little bit," Zavala said.

The 24-year-old showed a lot last season, batting a combined .282/.353/.499 at low Class A Kannapolis and high Class A Winston-Salem. Zavala also led all White Sox minor leaguers with 21 home runs.

Picking up where he left off last year, Zavala was leading the Southern League with 10 homers through 38 games this season.

"The home run part, it just comes," Zavala said. "I don't really look for home runs or anything. I just try to find a way to help the team every day."

His bat looks like it's going to be an asset for Chicago in the near future, but Zavala understands the importance of playing strong defense behind the plate.

"I've always thought I was a catcher who was able to hit," he said. "I really take a lot of pride in my catching and handling the pitching staff."

Through the first quarter of the season, Zavala and Collins have shared near equal time at catcher with the Barons. When one is catching, the other is usually the DH.

"I think it's going really well," Zavala said. "I think overall we're a good combo and we have a good situation going on here."

—SCOT GREGOR

C CLEVELAND INDIANS

It was a good problem to have, but Indians officials wished they didn't have it.

Cleveland entered spring training with two major league-quality utility infielders. Both were 26 years old. Both were originally signed by the Indians in 2008 as international free agents. Both were out of minor league options—but only one major league roster spot was available.

The contestants were shortstop **Erik Gonzalez** and third baseman **Gio Urshela**. The winner was Gonzalez.

"I said all along: We don't want to lose either one of them," Indians manager **Terry Francona** said. "They're our guys, and we value them, and they're good kids."

It came down to versatility. Urshela can play other infield positions, but he is best suited for third base, where he made some spectacular defensive plays last year in the 67 games he played with the Indians.

Gonzalez, on the other hand, has appeared at all four infield positions this season and has played every field position but catcher in the minors.

A strained hamstring in spring train-



Jason Adam took nine seasons to make his big league debut with his hometown Royals.

ing forced Urshela to start the season on the disabled list, and Gonzalez made the most of his opportunity.

In sporadic play this season, Gonzalez hit .361/.395/.583 in 22 games. As for Urshela, when he returned from the DL he was traded to the Blue Jays.

Francona said that he and his coaching staff and the Indians front office had a number of long and difficult discussions trying to decide which player to keep. They were aware that they were probably going to lose the one they didn't keep, since that player would almost certainly be claimed on waivers.

"We came to the conclusion that, one, Gonzalez is really helping us," Francona said. "But I don't doubt Gio would have, too. I think we were pretty much realizing we were probably going to lose one of them."

—JIM INGRAHAM

D DETROIT TIGERS

Lefthander **Josh Turley's** time with the Tigers was coming to an end.

It was last summer, in the midst of a 6.27 ERA campaign at Triple-A Toledo, when the organization came to him with a final opportunity to stay in the system: Start throwing a knuckleball.

Turley's coaches had noticed him throwing a knuckleball and said it looked pretty good. Now 27, Turley figured it would be his best chance to reach the big leagues.

After working with Hall of Fame knuckleballer **Phil Niekro** in the off-season, Turley was putting up solid numbers at Triple-A Toledo. Through eight appearances, including six starts, he logged a 3.86 ERA with 41 strikeouts, 27 walks and 34 hits in 42 innings.

"He's kind of a trickster," vice president of player development **Dave Littlefield** said. "Those aren't easy types to evaluate as to where the end game is, but the obvious part, that's pretty simple.

If you're performing well, it's a pretty good sign."

Turley now throws a knuckleball nearly 90 percent of the time. The pitch impressed former Tigers manager **Jim Leyland**—now a special assistant to general manager **Al Avila**—who relayed to Littlefield that Turley gets very uncomfortable swings because of the movement on his ball. And the fact he's the rare lefthanded knuckleballer.

Against Triple-A Gwinnett on May 20, Turley allowed two hits over five innings, recording 10 strikeouts.

The biggest reason why the Tigers came to Turley, a 16th-round pick in 2012 out of Baylor, about making the switch was because of his pedestrian, mid-80s fastball. But his knuckleball—which is rare in affiliated baseball—makes Turley one of the more interesting pitchers to watch going forward.

If he continues at his current rate, it would not be a surprise to see Turley join the Tigers as a September callup.

—ANTHONY FENECH

H HOUSTON ASTROS

Last year at this time, scouts wondered if Texas A&M righthander **Corbin Martin** could survive as a starter in pro ball.

Not only has the 22-year-old survived—he also has thrived.

When Martin joined Corpus Christi in early May, he became the second 2017 draft pick to reach Double-A, joining Angels righthander **Griffin Canning**.

Though a rough first outing in the Texas League could have harmed Martin's psyche, the second-rounder got back on track quickly. His progress has been remarkable in light of the fact he worked primarily as a reliever in college until his draft year.

Assigned to high Class A Buies Creek on Opening Day, Martin required only one month in the Carolina League. He

punched out 26 in 19 innings before his promotion, showcasing two plus off-speed pitches—a slider and curveball—that made him a desirable draftee.

Martin made his Double-A debut in Corpus Christi, three hours from his hometown of Hempstead, Texas, but the homecoming vibe wore off quickly. He recorded one out, allowing five hits and six earned runs in one-third of an inning before he was lifted.

In the 13.1 innings since, Martin permitted three runs and 10 hits while striking out 11.

"Corbin just continues to improve," farm director **Pete Putila** said. "He came to us with a couple plus offspeed offerings. His command was maybe a little shaky in college, but he's doing a lot of work. He really just continues to improve."

Part of Martin's work entails harnessing his fastball, which hovers around 92 mph, so that it complements the two breaking pitches he's able to mix.

"I think he'll continue to learn and grow," Putila said. "He knows what he needs to work on, but I look forward to see what he can do (at Double-A)."

—CHANDLER ROME

K KANSAS CITY ROYALS

Righthander **Jason Adam's** path from a suburban Kansas City high school to pitching for his hometown team was anything but linear.

The Royals drafted Adam in the fifth round in 2010 out of Blue Valley Northwest High and signed him for \$800,000. By 2013 he had advanced to Double-A Northwest Arkansas, pitched in the Arizona Fall League and was a non-roster invitee to big league camp.

"When the Royals drafted me, it was unbelievable," said Adam, 26.

That feeling lasted until 2014, when the Royals traded Adam to the Twins for **Josh Willingham** as they (successfully) chased their first postseason appearance since 1985.

"I was bummed," Adam said, "especially seeing that team I knew about to make a playoff run."

He took solace when Willingham delivered a big hit in the wild card game for a Royals team taking its first step to the 2014 World Series.

Adam had never missed a start in the Royals' system, but he developed issues almost immediately after the trade. He had four elbow surgeries and missed the entire 2015 and 2016 seasons.

Adam signed a minor league deal with the Padres in 2017 but was released in August after one appearance at Double-A San Antonio.

The Royals promptly signed Adam. At

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

the end of spring training this year, general manager **Dayton Moore** told manager **Ned Yost** to keep an eye on Adam, and that he was throwing the ball well.

"I didn't know what he had really gone through with the other organizations," Yost said. "I was just glad to have him back. I remembered I liked him back then, but (after the trade) he was off the radar for me."

Adam recorded a 1.00 ERA in 10 relief appearances at Triple-A Omaha and Northwest Arkansas and was called up to the Royals on May 4.

Adam's fastball velocity had returned. He was throwing 95 mph became a valuable addition to Yost's bullpen, striking out 11 and walking one through eight innings.

"You have to get your health back, No. 1, but your stuff has got to come back with it," Yost said. "A lot of times, the stuff packs up and leaves when that happens. He was lucky when he came back. His stuff was every bit as good or maybe even better."

—ALAN ESKEW

LOS ANGELES ANGELS

The first thing one notices about **Jared Walsh's** season at high Class A Inland Empire is his power. The first baseman hit 11 home runs in his first 37 games, including six during a seven-game stretch from May 8-14.

"When he gets hot," said minor league field coordinator **Chad Tracy**, who managed Walsh at Inland Empire last season, "he can carry a club for a while."

The next thing you notice is the two pitching appearances by the 24-year-old Walsh. The lefthander allowed three hits, struck out four and walked none in two relief innings.

The 6-foot, 210-pound Walsh was a 39th-round pick out of Georgia in 2015. He served as a standout pitcher in high school and college, with a low-90s fastball that drew plenty of interest from teams looking to draft him as a pitcher.

With **Shohei Ohtani** dominating on the mound and providing middle-of-the-order power in Anaheim, could the Angels be grooming another two-way player in Walsh?

"Honestly, to this point, the outings are more happenstance," Tracy said. "In the minor leagues, you have to do a lot of things to take care of the young arms you have, and every once in a while you run into a shortage in the bullpen."

"Jared has pitched before, and he throws with some velocity, so if they need a pitcher for extra innings, they have one. But it's not anything that's planned or in the works."



Alex Kirilloff showed no rust at the plate in the Midwest League after missing all of 2017.

Tracy wouldn't rule out the possibility of Walsh exploring a two-way role or moving to the mound, "but he's got 11 homers on May 18," he said. "Right now, Jared is a first baseman."

Walsh hit seven homers in 109 games at low Class A Burlington in 2016 and then 11 in 90 games in 2017, but the Angels believe this year's power is more the norm, not an exception.

Walsh homered in each of his first two games last season before suffering a lower-back injury in the fourth game that sidelined him for six weeks. He returned in late May, was promoted to Double-A Mobile on June 12 but sent back to Inland Empire after batting .232 with three homers in 20 Southern League games.

"There were flashes that would suggest he could hit some homers if he was healthy and playing every day," Tracy said, "and I'm sure he's starting to master the level a bit."

"He's also drawing walks, getting on base—and he can drive the ball out the other way. When you start seeing guys leave the park in the opposite direction, that's a unique characteristic."

—MIKE DIGIOVANNA

MINNESOTA TWINS

Missing an entire year of development is a setback that takes time to overcome, especially for a teenager. So the Twins understood that 2016 first-round outfielder **Alex Kirilloff** would be rusty upon his return from Tommy John surgery, that he would need time to get his timing and batting eye back.

That took him a whole weekend.

"It was pretty impressive how quick it was," vice president for player personnel **Mike Radcliff** said. "You always worry when a really young guy has a major injury, because it takes away your playing time, your learning time, when you need it the most. Some guys never recover."

That wasn't the case for the 20-year-old Kirilloff, a product of Pittsburgh's Plum High.

He missed the entire 2017 season, and then went 1-for-15 to open this season at low Class A Cedar Rapids. Then Kirilloff suddenly regained the form that made him the 15th overall pick in his draft class.

He ended his slow start by reeling off a double, single and two home runs in his next four at-bats, all driving in runs. After a slow start, the right fielder batted .345/.395/.633 with seven home runs in his next 35 games, displaying a smooth lefthanded swing.

"He's just got a great swing. It really sets him apart at that level," Radcliff said. "It's a fluid, adjustable, terrific swing. His dad (**Dave**) is a hitting guy, so he's always been advanced in his skills."

Kirilloff used the recovery time to work on more than his elbow. He reported to spring training visibly bigger, having added muscle to his frame. It had paid off with 23 extra-base hits that ranked him second in the Midwest League.

"We threw him right in the middle of the lineup," Radcliff said. "We put some pressure on him and he responded."

—PHIL MILLER

NEW YORK YANKEES

Righthander **Trevor Stephan** advanced quickly to Double-A Trenton in May, less than a year after being drafted as a third-round pick out of Arkansas in 2017. The 22-year-old could be closer than expected to the Bronx.

The 6-foot-4, 230-pound Stephan breezed through an assignment to short-season Staten Island last year, recording a 1.39 ERA and 43 strikeouts against six walks in 32.1 innings.

His second pro season was even more impressive. In seven starts at high Class A Tampa, Stephan went 3-1, 1.98 with 49 strikeouts and nine walks in 41 innings. He allowed just 23 hits before moving up to the Eastern League.

"His fastball is between 92-96 (mph) with a lot of deception," minor league pitching coordinator **Danny Borrell** said. "He has a good breaking ball he throws to righthanders and lefthanders. He is a quality pitcher and pretty impressive. He has a chance to go pretty quickly."

The upper levels of the Yankees' system are light on major league-ready starters, outside of perhaps lefthander **Justus Sheffield**, who landed on the Triple-A disabled list in May with a shoulder problem. That will provide Stephan with a chance to move swiftly.

"He has a very heavy fastball that is hard to hit," a talent evaluator said. "And he has mental toughness."

—GEORGE KING

OAKLAND ATHLETICS

The first time **Neil Avent** watched outfielder **Tyler Ramirez**, he saw something special.

"I really thought he could swing the bat," said Avent, the Athletics' area scout for the Carolinas. "He always had very good at-bats. I think all the (scouts) wanted him. I was fortunate enough to be the one who got him."

The A's drafted Ramirez out of North Carolina in the seventh round in 2016, and the lefthanded hitter has spent three years proving Avent right.

All Ramirez has done is hit. The 23-year-old had risen to Double-A Midland, where he tortured Texas League pitchers. Through 44 games, he hit .304/.400/.478 with four home runs, 12 doubles and two triples.

"I definitely think that his hit tool is the one that carries him, no question about that," Avent said. "You're splitting hairs if you say it is a 60 or a 70 (on the 20-80 scouting scale). It's definitely above-average."

The 5-foot-9 Ramirez is a line-to-line, line-drive hitter, which could make him difficult to defend—or at least difficult to shift. Plus, he hangs

in against lefthanders about as well as righthanders.

Ramirez plays all three outfield positions, but his best spot is left field, where last season he did not make an error in 168 outfield chances. He played 100 of his 128 games in left as he spent most of the season at high Class A Stockton.

Farm director **Keith Lieppman** said Ramirez has enough arm and a very quick release to make him playable in right field, plus he has good enough outfield instincts to survive in center. His speed is average to slightly above, but he lacks the burner speed teams desire for a center fielder.

The big question will be power, especially if Ramirez is limited to a corner.

"He's starting to flash occasional power," Lieppman said of Ramirez, who hit 11 home runs in 2017.

—CASEY TEFERTILLER

SEATTLE MARINERS

Any map shows **Daniel Vogelbach** was no closer now to the big leagues than he was a year ago. Triple-A Tacoma, where he again found himself, is still 30 miles from Safeco Field.

Don't be fooled by the linear distance.

The 25-year-old Vogelbach resurrected his prospect status this spring and broke camp with the big club. He caught a break when an injury sidelined first baseman **Ryon Healy**—a player the Mariners acquired last winter in part because they harbored doubts about Vogelbach.

Those doubts mushroomed a year ago when Vogelbach pouted after being sent to the minors. This year, though, he returned to Tacoma in late April with a rejuvenated mindset and a belief that steady duty in the majors is close.

"Obviously, last year, getting sent down," he said, "that's not the feeling you want to feel. This year was a totally different feel."

Coming to the Mariners in a July 2016 trade that sent lefthander **Mike Montgomery** to the Cubs initially seemed a ideal fit for Vogelbach, whose path to the majors had been blocked by **Anthony Rizzo**.

The Mariners, at that point, had no long-term answer at first base and also saw Vogelbach as a potential down-the-road replacement for DH **Nelson Cruz**.

It didn't work out.

Vogelbach showed little in a series of brief big league tours and, even in the Mariners' talent-thin system, he failed to crack the organization's Top 10 Prospects for 2018.

Perception changed this spring when Vogelbach, a 2011 second-rounder out of high school in Florida, hit camp with a new, power-enhancing swing that

underscored his acknowledgment that he needed to change.

"It was time," he admitted. "I definitely made some adjustments in the offseason that I really hadn't been willing to make."

Vogelbach raked at Tacoma with eight home runs in 20 games. Now he just waits for another chance.

"Everybody loves Vogey's personality," Mariners manager **Scott Servais** said. "He's funny, he brings a lot of energy and keeps the dugout light and loose. But ultimately, what teammates (want) is, 'Can this guy help us win?'"

"I think they saw signs of Vogey really being able to help us going forward."

—BOB DUTTON

TAMPA BAY RAYS

At some time after mid-June, shortstop **Willy Adames** will join the Rays for good.

As the top prospect and the head of a class of talented young players they expect to be the core of future success, Adames is targeted for stardom.

Which made the sneak peek the Rays got during an unexpected May cameo callup all the more exciting.

With starting shortstop **Adeiny Hechavarria** on the disabled list, and with second baseman **Joey Wendle** taking a three-day paternity leave, the Rays summoned Adames, who seemed destined to remain at Triple-A Durham until after the unofficial Super Two arbitration cutoff in June.

That made it a bit of a surprising move, made more unusual by the Rays basically announcing ahead of time he was only there for the three days. Still, there was some risk at either extreme—that he did so well that it looked really bad to send him back down, or that he got hurt and then accrued the service time they so carefully wanted to avoid.

"It's very exciting," Rays manager **Kevin Cash** said. "Willy has done nothing but make just positive impressions every time you see him, every time you talk to him . . . He's just got that knack where he can come in and light up a room, light up a clubhouse. And we anticipate he's going to do some special things and light up the field for us."

Adames showed that in his debut, hitting a home run in his second at-bat against Red Sox ace **Chris Sale**. But he also experienced the down side in his second start—a throwing error from shortstop on a somewhat routine grounder in the ninth inning of a tie game and an eventual 4-1 loss.

Adames was thrilled to get the opportunity. He flew his parents and sister in from the Dominican Republic to see his second game, even under the circumstances of the business side of



Willy Adames circles the bases after homering during a three-game callup to the Rays.

the game.

"I've got to be okay with it, and when I come back—hopefully soon—do my best," said Adames, who signed with the Tigers in 2012 and was traded to the Rays in July 2014 as part of the return for **David Price**. "I just want to be here and play in the big leagues."

Whether that's in mid-June, in July after a trade of Hechavarria or later in the season, the Rays figure Adames will benefit from the experience.

"You'd like to think that any opportunity you get at this level, the reps, the pace of the game—I think every level you go up starting from A ball, Double-A, Triple-A, the pace of the game changes," Cash said. "Everybody talks about how much faster it is up here. He's going to see that firsthand so he'll be better equipped when he comes back."

—MARC TOPKIN

TEXAS RANGERS

The offseason signing of lefthander **Brandon Mann** barely received a blip on a Rangers press release. He wasn't even invited to big league camp.

Instead, the 34-year-old journeyman headed to minor league camp and went about his work knowing that he was ticketed to open another pro season, his 15th, in the minors.

Mann couldn't give up on his dream of reaching the major leagues, which he chased in Japan and the independent leagues.

The dream was finally realized.

Mann made his major league debut on May 13 and even got to pitch two days later in his hometown of Seattle. The Rangers took note of his stellar start at Triple-A Round Rock and added him

to help fill in while righthander **Chris Martin** was on the disabled list.

"It means everything," Mann said of his callup. "Pretty amazing. It has been a long journey. I'm pretty excited . . . I always told myself I was a big leaguer. To keep grinding it out to get the opportunity, you have to believe that you are."

Mann turned pro as a 27th-round pick by the Rays in 2002 out of high school in Washington.

Mann recorded a 1.04 ERA and 0.75 WHIP over the first month of the Triple-A season to earn his debut. With the Rangers' bullpen struggling for a second consecutive season, Mann might be called upon throughout the year.

The Rangers signed Mann in January after assistant general manager **Josh Boyd** watched him throw at Driveline Baseball, the Seattle-area facility also used by righthander **Tim Lincecum**, whom the Rangers also signed.

Mann said that his phone wasn't ringing off the hook after a mediocre 2017 at Double-A Midland in the Athletics organization. He contemplated life without baseball, but couldn't give it up just yet.

It seems unlikely that Mann is a long-term fit based on his age, but with fellow lefty **Jake Diekman** headed for free agency, Mann could become an affordable option to consider.

He doesn't want to let go of the majors now that he has reached the summit.

"I was at a point where I didn't want to go back to (independent) ball," Mann said. "I had done it multiple times already, and I believe in my heart that I was definitely capable of pitching in the big leagues. It's crazy how it happens."

—JEFF WILSON

Majors

► The Nationals called up 19-year-old **Juan Soto** from Double-A Harrisburg in between games of a double-header. He became the youngest player in the majors. Search **Soto** at BaseballAmerica.com

A LEGACY TARNISHED

Robinson Cano put his Hall of Fame chances in serious jeopardy with his 80-game suspension

JERRY CRASNICK

@JCRASNICK



By most objective measures, Robinson Cano has a résumé with enough illustrious comparisons and gaudy numbers to cruise into the Hall of Fame as a first-ballot invitee one day.

Only one piece of news could kill his chances, and Major League Baseball delivered it by email in a press release at 2:15 p.m. on May 15.

Two days after suffering a broken hand on an errant fastball from Tigers lefthander Blaine Hardy, Cano received an 80-game suspension for the use of Furosemide, a diuretic that can be used as a masking agent to conceal the use of performance-enhancing drugs. Cano's time on the disabled list will count toward his suspension, but he will lose about half his \$24 million annual salary and be ineligible for the All-Star Game and the postseason, should the Mariners make the playoffs for the first time since 2001.

Cano was contrite in his apology and claimed he received the diuretic from a licensed doctor in the Dominican Republic to treat an undisclosed medical ailment, and he now wishes that he had been "more careful." An independent program administrator and MLB had both determined that he used the substance to hide use of a PED.

"I would never do anything to cheat the rules of the game that I love," Cano said in a statement, "and after undergoing dozens of drug tests over more than a decade, I have never tested positive for a performance-enhancing substance for the simple reason that I have never taken one."

Maybe Cano is sincere and was simply guilty of an oversight. But there's too much at stake—and we've heard too many of these apologies—to react with anything more than cynicism and an eye roll. That's been truer than ever since Ryan Braun stood before a microphone in spring training in 2012 and impugned the integrity of a test collector while calling himself "a victim of a process that completely broke down."

Baseball writers continue to grapple with the issue of PED use, and they're all over the map with their decision-making. Ivan Rodriguez, Mike Piazza and Jeff Bagwell crossed the 75 percent threshold to Cooperstown amid a heavy cloud of suspicion. Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens have the suspicion without the contrition, and they've stalled in the mid-to-upper 50s.

For sake of comparison, a positive test or admission of guilt is a death knell. Manny Ramirez failed two drug tests and has yet to appear on more than 23.8 percent of the ballots in two years of eligibility. Mark McGwire confessed to Bob Costas in a TV interview in 2010 and topped out at 23.7 percent in 10 attempts. And Rafael Palmeiro, who dropped off the ballot with 4.4 percent of the vote in 2014, is now scratching his itch to play in the independent American Association.



In a more innocent time, Cano might have qualified as a player whose production was so steady and predictable, he never would have appeared on a list of potential steroid suspects. He's the quintessential .300, 30-homer, 100-RBI, .900 OPS guy who posts the same numbers year after year over 155-160 games. There were no annoying outliers or inexplicable one-year blips amid that sea of gray type on his Baseball-Reference.com profile.

But warning signs abounded. Cano's close friends, Nelson Cruz and Melky Cabrera, both received PED suspensions along the way. And Palmeiro's 2005 steroid bust showed that even metronomically consistent performers shouldn't be above suspicion.

Barring the mother of all goodwill tours or a radical shift toward forgiveness on the part of the electorate, Cano now resides in an ignominious netherworld with Manny, Big Mac, Palmeiro and Alex Rodriguez. His Cooperstown chances are remote even though he's an eight-time all-star and the second most prolific home run-hitting second baseman in history behind Jeff Kent. He's on the outs even though he's part of a group with Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Hank Aaron, Willie Mays and Stan Musial as one of just 16 players with a career .300 average, 1,000 runs, 300 home runs, 2,000 hits, 500 doubles and 1,000 RBIs.

In his 2018 Handbook, Bill James gave every indication that Cano was Cooperstown-bound. James has devised a system based on selected milestones and statistical achievements and

determined that Cano entered this season with 130 points, and counting. For sake of comparison, Craig Biggio finished his career with 114. Of all the second basemen who have played big league ball since 1961, only Rod Carew, Roberto Alomar, Ryne Sandberg and Joe Morgan have placed higher on the James scale.

All that changed when Cano exited their company amid a hail of self-inflicted wounds. At best he's a cheater, and at worst he was so recklessly oblivious to the consequences that he single-handedly torched his legacy. It makes for a sad story either way.

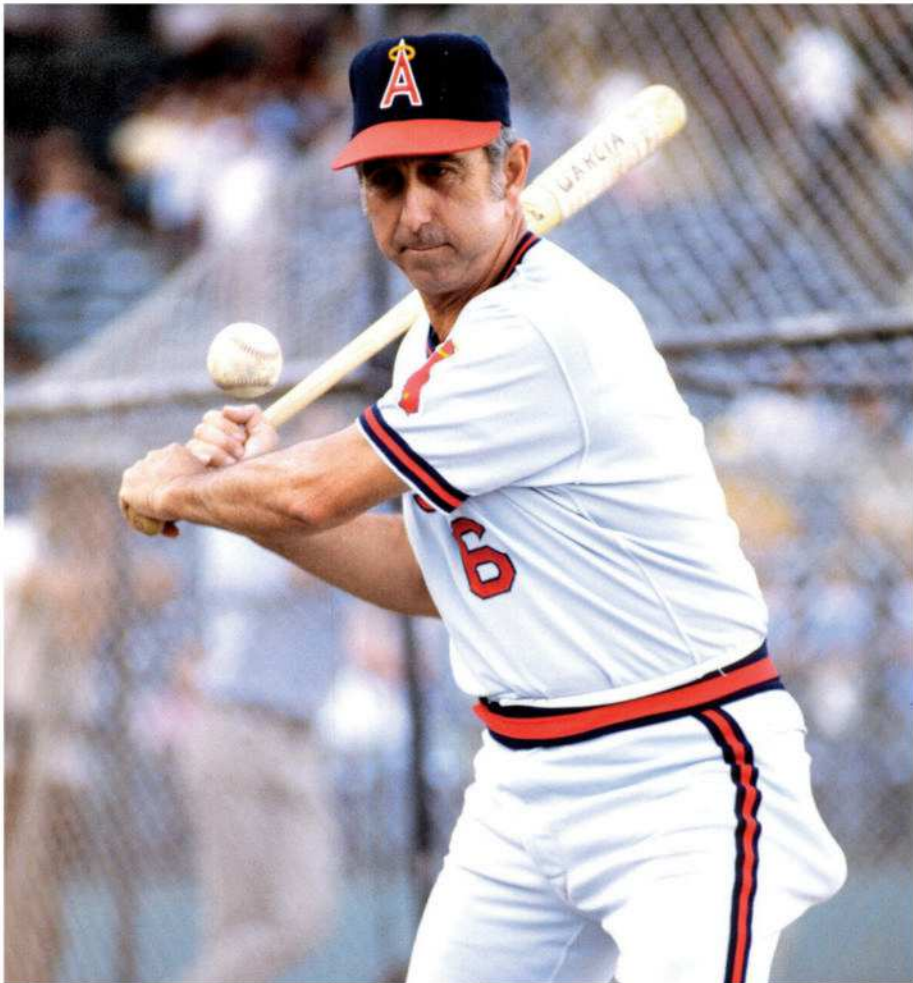
Can Cano publicly rehabilitate himself? To an extent. "It will be a long road back, a tough road back, but I'm confident that Robinson Cano is going to come back and continue his spectacular career and I hope at the same time he can learn a great lesson and make his life even better," said A-Rod, who has done an impressive job of escaping life as a pariah through appearances on everything from "Shark Tank" to ESPN's "Sunday Night Baseball."

There was a time when Cano's biggest sin was being overpaid, at \$240 million over 10 years, and his second biggest was a failure to run out routine ground balls a handful of times each season. Now he's just collateral damage from a drug-testing program that MLB considers the most stringent in all of professional sports.

Would Cano have joined former Yankees double-play partner Derek Jeter in Cooperstown?

The point is now moot. ■

Major League Baseball suspended the Mariners' Robinson Cano for 80 games after he tested positive for a diuretic that is commonly used as a masking agent for performance-enhancing drugs. He is chasing Jeff Kent for most home runs ever by a second baseman, but his Hall of Fame chances are dim following his suspension.



Dave Garcia, pictured here in 1977 as Angels manager, spent parts of eight decades in baseball as a player, manager, coach and scout. His legacy lives on. Grandson Greg Garcia is a Cardinals utility infielder.

A GREAT EIGHT

Dave Garcia spent parts of eight decades in baseball and remained sharp until his death at age 97

TRACY RINGOLSBY

@TRACYRINGOLSBY



Dave Garcia knew pretty much everybody in baseball. Giants broadcaster Duane Kuiper can prove it. “I remember one day—when he was managing the Indians and I was playing for him—I knew I had him,” Kuiper said. “I told him there was somebody in the ballpark who he wouldn’t know.” Garcia smiled.

As Garcia and Kuiper walked out of the Cleveland dugout onto the field, Garcia did a double take, shouted out to Pat Daugherty—who at the time was working for the Expos—and asked Kuiper, “Do you know Pat? He’s a good kid.”

Know Pat? Sure Kuiper did. Daugherty had been his head coach at Indian Hills JC, a small Iowa school removed from the American mainstream. He was that “somebody” he figured Garcia wouldn’t know.

“I gave up after that,” Kuiper said.

That was Garcia, one of baseball’s greatest ambassadors of goodwill.

He died on May 22 at the age of 97 following a lengthy illness. He lost his vision several years ago, but his mind was always sharp, and he never lost his love for the game that he was a part of for 70 years. He shared the distinction with Vin Scully, Tommy Lasorda and Don Zimmer in the four-man fraternity of men who spent parts of eight decades in pro ball as a player, coach or broadcaster.

“Mr. Garcia was a special person,” Dusty Baker said. “When I was a young player in the minor leagues, dealing with the challenges (of integration in the South), Dave was managing in the Giants’ system and he would always reach out. He was always there to provide counsel.”

Garcia’s heritage lives on with his son David Jr., the Yankees’ first-round pick in the secondary phase of the January draft in 1978; and grandsons Drew, a White Sox 21st-round pick in 2008; and Greg, a Cardinals 2010 seventh-rounder who on April 28, 2014, became the first member of the family to play in the major leagues.

The elder Garcia would sit behind home plate at Petco Park in his later years during batting practice, his vision having betrayed him, and would occasionally offer an opinion.

“That kid can hit,” he would say. “Nice swing.”

The listener would laugh and remind Garcia he said he couldn’t really see home plate.

“But I can hear,” he would explain. “Did you hear the sound of the contact he made? That’s a hitter’s contact.”

Growing up in East St. Louis, Garcia would proudly talk about his days in the knothole gang, and praise Cardinals shortstop Marty Marion,

who he felt was the best defensive shortstop he ever saw play the game.

His playing career started in 1939 in the Class D Evangeline League and ended in 1957 in the Class B Carolina League. He spent the final 10 seasons as a player/manager. In all, Garcia spent 30 years in the minor leagues as a player, manager, coach and scout.

“When Bucky Harris was hired to manage the Senators in 1950 he offered me a coaching job,” Garcia said, “but (Giants farm director) Jack Schwartz told me I’d have my job (as a player/manager) longer than Bucky would have his.”

“Bucky was fired at the end of the 1954 season, and I was with the Giants until 1969.”

Once Garcia got to the big leagues, he stuck. His first job was third-base coach for the Padres in 1970. He later coached for the Indians and Angels, receiving managing stints with both. He served as manager of the Angels from 1977-78 and then, after initially returning to the Indians as a coach, he took over as manager when Frank Robinson was fired in July 1979.

“I wasn’t going to take (the job),” Garcia said. “Frank brought me there. I wasn’t going to take his job, but Frank said, ‘David, someone is going to be hired. I’d rather you had the job than anybody else.’”

Garcia would manage the Indians through the 1982 season. He then coached the Brewers in 1983-84 before becoming a special assistant with the Brewers, Royals, Rockies and Mariners.

He became a fixture at Petco Field in his later years, hired as a special assistant to Seattle general manager Billy Bavasi. Bavasi’s father, Buzzie, was the GM of the Padres who hired Garcia for his first big league job in 1970, and he was the GM of the Angels who promoted Garcia to manager in 1977.

“I have been blessed,” Garcia said in a recent conversation. “I never had to work. I spent my whole life in baseball. I was fortunate.”

Not as fortunate as baseball was to have had Garcia a part of its fraternity for more than seven decades. ■

THE BEST PLAYERS SWING THE BEST BATS



(866) PRO BATS • OLDHICKORYBATS.COM

Minors

► Rangers righthander **Jonathan Hernandez** focused on improving his mechanics last offseason, and he was seeing the fruits of his labor at high Class A Down East. Search **Jonathan Hernandez** at **BaseballAmerica.com**

EARLY REVIEWS

HITS AND MISSES FROM THE 2017 DRAFT

For better or worse, these players have stood out

BY KYLE GLASER AND JOSH NORRIS

With the 2018 draft in the books, it's an excellent time to take a look in the rear-view mirror at the early results from the 2017 draft. It's obviously still early, but there's been enough of a sample in many cases to point out some successes and disappointments. Three top college arms have already reached Double-A, while three of the top 10 selections have scuffled in their full-season debuts. Player development is a marathon, so here's how the race has been run over the first few miles.

The Hits

GRIFFIN CANNING RHP, Angels

Canning ranked 26th on the 2017 BA500 draft rankings but he fell to the second round after some teams had concerns with his medical report. If the draft were re-done today, Canning would be picked in the first round as was expected. His fastball has ticked up from 90-94 mph to 93-97, his slider and curveball are both flashing plus, and he was the second pitcher from the draft to reach Double-A. He recorded a 1.72 ERA through his first seven starts at Mobile, and he had been the starter in two combined no-hitters.

KEVIN SMITH SS/3B, Blue Jays

Smith hit .301 in the Cape Cod League in 2016 (against a league average of .249) while leading the league with 12 doubles, but he turned in an underwhelming junior season at Maryland and fell to the fourth round. After watching video, Smith found a flaw in his swing against high fastballs that he worked to correct. The early results were outstanding. Through 46 games at low Class A Lansing, Smith hit .355/.407/.639 with seven home runs—while reducing his strikeout rate. That earned him a bump to high Class A Dunedin.

TREVOR STEPHAN RHP, Yankees

Canning was the second pitcher from the 2017 draft class to make it Double-A, and Stephan, a third-rounder out of Arkansas, wasn't far behind. The righthander skipped over low Class A Charleston and dominated in his full-season debut at high Class A Tampa. With the Tarpons, Stephan struck out 49 in 41 innings while allowing just 23 hits. Stephan was a junior college reliever for two years before transferring to Arkansas, where he made 16 starts. He gets his outs primarily with a lively low-90s fastball and a swing-and-miss slider.

CALVIN MITCHELL OF, Pirates

Mitchell was another consensus first-rounder who dropped to the second round. In his case, a poor first two months of his high school senior year sank him. Even though Mitchell rallied to finish strong, by that time evaluators had already moved on to scouting others for their first-round pick. Drafted 50th overall, Mitchell was outperforming many of the prep hitters taken in front of him, batting .324/.387/.535 through 45 games at low Class A West Virginia. With a beautiful, textbook swing from the left side and more power to come, Mitchell is in prime position to sustain his hot start and make teams regret skipping over him.



The Angels' second-round pick out of UCLA last year, **Griffin Canning** cruised through high Class A Inland Empire this spring in his pro debut, allowing zero runs in two starts. He continued to show bat-missing stuff at Double-A.

DAULTON VARSHO C, D-backs

On one hand, Varsho had bloodlines as the son of big league outfielder Gary Varsho, uncanny athleticism for a catcher and a potent lefthanded bat. On the other, he played against suspect competition at Wisconsin-Milwaukee and had a below-average arm. The knocks on Varsho dropped him outside of the top 60 picks, but he was showing that was a mistake. Varsho jumped straight to high Class A Visalia for his first full season and has flirted with a .900 OPS while stealing 12 bases in 14 attempts. Perhaps most importantly, he's posting pop times of sub-1.9 seconds on throws to second base—a plus arm—and had thrown out 40 percent of basestealers, eliminating concerns about his arm and showing he can stay behind the plate.

CORBIN MARTIN RHP, Astros

After being used primarily as a reliever at Texas A&M in his first two seasons, Martin saw ample rotation time in his draft year—and that's the role the Astros are developing him in after taking him in the second round. He blitzed the competition at high Class A Buies Creek, where he allowed a stunning four hits in 19 innings before becoming the third pitcher from his draft to reach Double-A. Armed with a mid-90s fastball and a pair of quality breaking pitches, Martin adjusted to the Texas League after a rough opening outing.

ZAC LOWTHER LHP, Orioles

Lowther doesn't have premium velocity, which is why he slipped to the supplemental second round, but the Orioles liked his deception which allowed him to miss bats with an 88-92 mph fastball. He bullied hitters this year at low Class A Delmarva, racking up 51 strikeouts against nine walks through 31 innings as he went 3-1, 1.16 through late May.

Disappointments

HUNTER GREENE RHP, Reds (No. 2 overall)

Greene's 101 mph fastball earned plus-plus grades in high school, but scouts also had concerns that his delivery lacked deception. The fears that professional hitters would have no trouble picking up Greene's relatively straight fastball, even with its outstanding velocity, have borne out. The No. 2 overall pick last year went 0-4, 7.92 through his first 12 career starts, with 45 hits allowed in 30.2 innings. Greene had also walked nearly five batters per nine innings. The sign of encouragement for Greene was his strikeout rate of 12.3 per nine innings, but he's giving up too much hard contact.

PAVIN SMITH 1B, D-backs (No. 7 overall)

The No. 7 overall pick last year, Smith has maintained his keen batting eye with more walks (22) than strikeouts (21) through 40 games at high Class A Visalia, but he has struggled to impact the ball when he does get a pitch to hit. Smith hit just .203/.318/.311 with three home runs and 10 extra-base hits in his first 148 at-bats despite playing in a hitter-friendly home park in the hitter-friendly California League, and he hit the ball on the ground half the time. When he does hit the ball in the air, it's largely been shallow popups to left field. Without the ability to drive the ball, opponents are showing no fear of pitching Smith in the zone, so he's going to have to show he can make some significant adjustments.



ADAM HASELEY OF, Phillies (No. 8 overall)

Haseley was a two-way player at Virginia, but the Phillies liked him more for his work with the bat than on the mound. They selected him eighth overall, one spot after teammate Pavin Smith was taken by the D-backs.

After quick stops in the New York-Penn and South Atlantic leagues in 2017, Haseley jumped to high Class A Clearwater to begin this season. He had shown flashes of the offensive promise the Phillies projected, but he had hit for little power and had struck out five times as often as he walked.

Reds righthander Hunter Greene has delivered premium velocity and has made progress with his slider, yet hitters in the Midwest League had tuned him up for a .327 average through 26.1 innings.

J.B. BUKAUSKAS RHP, Astros (No. 15 overall)

After three stellar years at North Carolina, where his slider was regarded as one of the best breaking pitches in the country, Bukauskas fell to the Astros with the 15th overall pick. He pitched just 10 innings in 2017 after a long college season and was assigned this year to low Class A Quad Cities. He got hit hard in his first two Midwest League outings before going on the disabled list with an oblique strain. Scouts who have seen Bukauskas pitch said his stuff itself looks fine, though the results clearly had not matched the stuff.

TANNER HOUCK RHP, Red Sox (No. 24 overall)

The Red Sox selected Houck with the 24th pick last year after three stellar seasons at Missouri. They eased him into pro ball in the short-season New York-Penn League. Houck skipped over low Class A Greenville and headed to high Class A Salem this spring, but he dug himself an early hole in the Carolina League. He has raised his arm slot from his college days, but he's still dealing with command and control issues, as evidenced by his 31 walks compared with 30 strikeouts through 41 innings. His slider, which was a weapon in college, has been inconsistent in pro ball and hasn't yet shown the same effectiveness against more advanced hitters. ■

RECORDS THROUGH MAY 27

Baseball America HIGH SCHOOL TOP 25 RANKINGS

NO.	HIGH SCHOOL	2018 RECORD	PREV. RANK	NO.	HIGH SCHOOL	2018 RECORD	PREV. RANK
1	Parkview HS, Lilburn, GA**	34-6	11	14	Huntington Beach HS, CA^	28-5	8
2	Orange Lutheran HS, CA	24-7	17	15	Reagan HS, San Antonio, TX	34-10	23
3	Har-Ber HS, Springdale, AR**	31-4	20	16	Aquinas HS, Ft. Lauderdale, FL	25-3	NR
4	Riverdale Baptist HS, Marlboro, MD^	32-1	4	17	Union HS, Tulsa, OK**	24-13	NR
5	Mountain Vista, Highlands Ranch, CO**	23-1	16	18	Mill Creek HS, Hoschton, GA*	34-8	22
6	Valley Christian HS, San Jose, CA**	28-3	24	19	Beckman HS, Irvine, CA	25-3	NR
7	George Jenkins HS, Lakeland, FL	25-3	25	20	Central HS, Baton Rouge, LA**	26-12	NR
8	St. Vianney HS, Kirkwood, MO	31-2	13	21	De La Salle HS, Concord, CA	24-4	NR
9	La Cueva HS, Albuquerque, NM**	27-3	10	22	Nogales HS, AZ**	30-5	NR
10	DeSoto Central HS, Southaven, MS**	27-8	NR	23	Calvary Christian HS, Clearwater, FL*	30-1	2
11	Harvard-Westlake HS, Studio City, CA	26-4	3	24	Cypress Ranch HS, Houston, TX	30-7	NR
12	St. Xavier HS, Louisville, KY	30-2	14	25	Mira Costa HS, Manhattan Beach, CA^	28-4	12
13	Pope HS, Marietta, GA**	34-8	NR				

Key: **state champion, *state runner up, ^season completed

International

► Senior writer Ben Badler delves into the international signing classes for all 30 clubs with his subscriber-only series of **International Reviews**.

Visit BaseballAmerica.com/international



CUBAN CONUNDRUM

INEFFICIENT MARKET

Cuban prospect Victor Mesa has talent comparable with Yoan Moncada, but he will command a much smaller bonus because of international signing restrictions

BY BEN BADLER

Outfelder Victor Mesa is officially out of Cuba and looking to sign with a major league club.

That is a big development. The 21-year-old Mesa, known as “Victor Victor” (the name on the back of his uniform in Cuba), has star potential and is the best young Cuban prospect to become available since Yoan Moncada signed with the Red Sox for \$31.5 million in 2015.

Mesa is a comparable player to Nationals prospect Victor Robles, the center fielder who ranks No. 5 on the Top 100 Prospects list.

Mesa a premium defender in center field who at his best has shown 70 speed and at least a 70 arm on the 20-80 scouting scale. He gets quick reads off the bat and takes sharp routes to cover plenty of ground and make highlight-reel catches. He even won a Gold Glove award in Cuba when he was 17.

Mesa is a righthanded batter who starred in the Cuban major league. In 2016-17 he hit .354/.399/.539 in 70 games for Matanzas of Serie Nacional. He compiled more extra-base hits (27) than strikeouts (19) and stole 40 bases in 50 attempts. Injuries have affected Mesa in

Cuba, making the Robles comparison even more apt.

That doesn't mean Mesa will immediately be a top 10 overall prospect upon signing—there's value and more certainty in players like Robles who have performed up through Double-A—but that is the type of upside Mesa possesses. As another point of comparison, if Mesa were available in the 2018 draft, his talent is on par with a top-10 overall pick.

In fact, given the structure of the draft and the international bonus pools, Mesa would arguably end up with a bigger signing bonus if he were in the draft instead of international free agency. With international bonus pools hard capped, Mesa can no longer sign for a pool-busting bonus like Moncada, outfielder Luis Robert (\$26 million with the White

Victor Mesa, also known as Victor Victor, is a 21-year-old Cuban outfielder with skills comparable to Nationals prospect Victor Robles. Once he signs, Mesa could be ready for Double-A, yet he won't receive a bonus commensurate with his ability. That's because teams already have committed large portions of their international pool money to 16-year-olds who become eligible to sign on July 2.

Sox), righthander Yadier Alvarez (\$16 million with the Dodgers) or even lesser prospects like shortstop Roberto Baldoquin (\$8 million with the Angels) were able to command.

And while every team on paper essentially has an international bonus pool of \$5 million to \$6 million for the 2018-19 signing period that opens on July 2, many teams have already unofficially committed the majority of their international bonus pools to 16-year-old players from the Dominican Republic and Venezuela.

The timing was different for Cuban center fielder Julio Pablo Martinez, but the problems Mesa will face as an international free agent are similar. The 22-year-old Martinez dealt with a constrained market and signed with the Rangers for \$2.8 million in April. He already ranks as the No. 57 prospect on the Top 100 Prospects list.

The top bonus in the 2017-18 signing period went to Dominican shortstop Wander Franco, who signed for \$3.825 million with the Rays at age 16. The top bonus in this year's international class is expected to go to 16-year-old Dominican shortstop Orelvis Martinez, likely for a tick north of \$3 million. So unless you're counting on the Orioles to make a big offer, it's hard for a Cuban player to maximize his value when he's being thrust into the system this late in the game.

On talent, Mesa has the ability to play right now in high Class A or Double-A, with the combination of impact potential and proximity to the big leagues comparable to the top college players in the draft who will sign for bonuses in the \$5 million to \$7 million range. Yet due to the rules of international free agency and the practicality of how teams operate, he might end up getting paid more along the lines of the top 16-year-old players in Latin America.

Mesa would be the No. 1 international prospect available for 2018, though unlike 16-year-olds who sign on July 2, he could play right away once he signs. However, the timetable for Major League Baseball to clear Cuban players to sign varies, and it's unlikely that Mesa would be eligible to sign immediately once the international signing period opens on July 2. It's not even clear that he would sign in time to be able to make his official debut in 2018.

Whenever Mesa does become available, teams will have the opportunity to add one of the top prospects in the game to their farm system. ■



Righthander Osiel Rodriguez headlines the class of Cuban pitching prospects who will be eligible to sign this year. At age 16, he already has touched 96 mph while flashing a sharp breaking ball and advanced feel for pitching.

TOP CUBAN PROSPECTS FOR JULY 2

While Victor Mesa will become the top international prospect for 2018 when Major League Baseball clears him to sign, he is not the only Cuban prospect of note this year. These five Cuban prospects also will be sought after when they become eligible to sign later this year.

VICTOR MESA JR., OF

Victor Mesa didn't leave Cuba alone. His younger brother, 16-year-old outfielder Victor Mesa Jr., also left with him in pursuit of a contract with a major league team. Mesa Jr. played in Cuba's 15U national league in 2016, when he hit **.365/.471/.522** with 19 walks and just five strikeouts in 148 plate appearances. He played in the 15U World Cup in Japan later that year, but scouts will need updated firsthand looks, since Mesa Jr. was just 14 at the time.

In the World Cup tournament, Mesa Jr. showed an unconventional swing but an accurate barrel, using his hands well to consistently put the bat to the ball with little swing-and-miss. At the time, he didn't have the standout speed and arm strength of his older brother, though scouts will need fresh looks to better gauge his present tools.

OSIEL RODRIGUEZ, RHP

While Victor Victor will be the prize of the 2018 international class, there is a group of promising teenage Cuban prospects who will be eligible to sign on July 2. The best of that group is Rodriguez, a 16-year-old righthander

with a fastball that sits in the low 90s and has reached **96 mph**.

Rodriguez throws a sharp breaking ball that flashes plus and has shown feel for pitching advanced beyond his years. The Yankees are the favorites to sign Rodriguez, with a bonus likely coming in just north of \$1 million.

SANDY GASTON, RHP

Gaston and Dominican righthander Starlyn Castillo (linked to the Phillies) are the two hardest-throwing 16-year-old pitchers in the 2018 class. At the MLB international showcase in the Dominican Republic in February, Gaston reached **97 mph** with his fastball, though he's more thrower than pitcher with bouts of wildness and secondary stuff that will need work. The Marlins are linked to Gaston.

JAIRO POMARES, OF

Pomares played in Cuba's 15U national league in 2015, when he ranked sixth in the league in batting average by hitting **.383/.447/.533** with 16 walks and just six strikeouts in 141 plate appearances. He's a lefthanded outfielder who has drawn praise for his bat and is linked to the Giants, with a bonus expected to be around \$1 million.

MALCOM NUNEZ, 3B

At 17, Nunez looks like a man among boys. He's a strong, physical third baseman with big bat speed and power. His swing can get big, but he drives the ball with impact when he connects, batting **.412/.592/.578** with 46 walks and nine strikeouts in 152 plate appearances when he played in Cuba's 15U national league in 2016. He led the league in walks while ranking third in on-base percentage and sixth in slugging.

Nunez will have to improve his footwork and agility at third base, but he has an excellent arm. ■

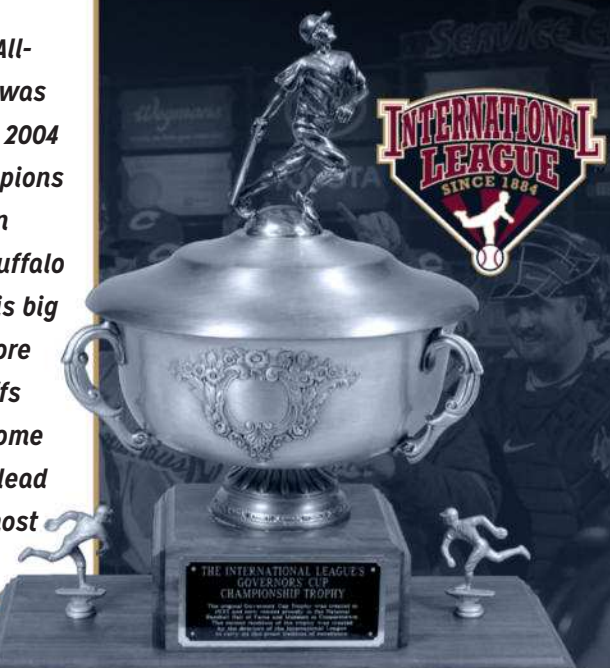
MOMENTS IN GOVERNORS' CUP PLAYOFF HISTORY

2004 GOVERNORS' CUP CHAMPION
GRADY SIZEMORE
BUFFALO BISONS



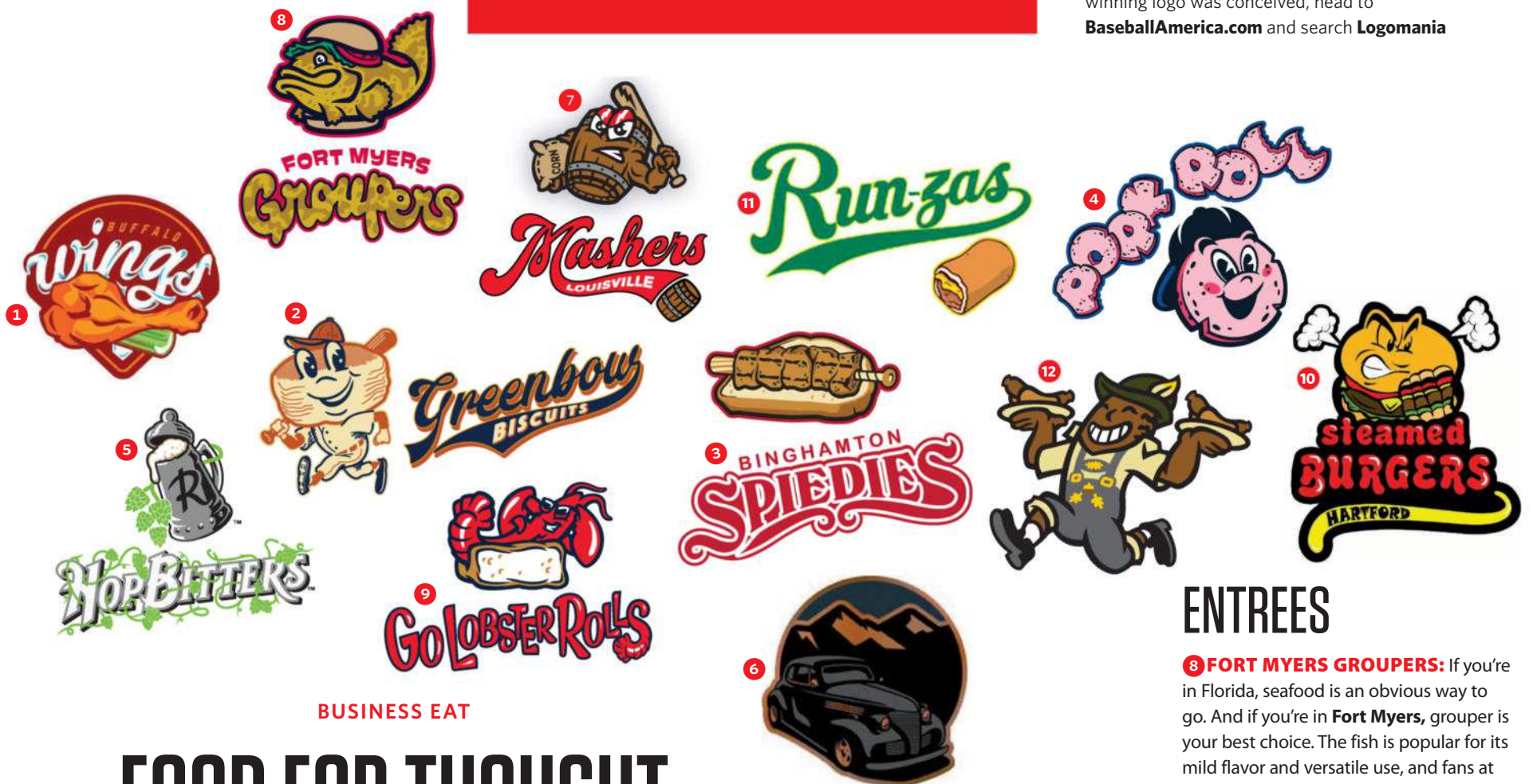
THE TITLE RUN...

Future 3-time MLB All-Star Grady Sizemore was a key member of the 2004 Governors' Cup Champions squad, seeing time in over 100 games for Buffalo while also making his big league debut. Sizemore hit **.333** in the playoffs including a pair of home runs in the finals to lead the Bisons to their most recent IL title.



Industry

► For a story about the winner of the 2018 Logomania contest, including a behind-the-scenes look at how the winning logo was conceived, head to BaseballAmerica.com and search **Logomania**



BUSINESS EAT

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Minor league menu is more than peanuts and Cracker Jack

BY JOSH NORRIS

For a few years now, Minor League Baseball has been the place to expose regional delicacies to the mainstream. Last season brought us the Reading Whoopies, the Lakewood Pork Roll, the Aberdeen Steamed Crabs, the Albuquerque Green Chile Peppers and the Syracuse Salt Potatoes, among many other food-themed one-offs. This year, scads more teams are introducing the world to their city's culinary creations. From appetizers to main dishes to adult beverages, the minor leagues once again have enough food-themed alter-egos to create a menu. In fact, that's exactly what we've done. Take a look, but don't let your mouth water too much.

APPETIZERS

1 BUFFALO WINGS: The **Buffalo Bisons** will become the Wings for three nights this year in the most obvious and perfect of all the food mashups. Naturally, they will be donning the jerseys and caps against Rochester, which is normally known as the Wings but will be wearing its **Plates** jerseys, in a mid-June series.

2 GREENBOW BISCUITS: Montgomery always plays as the Biscuits, but the team has added a twist this time around. In honor of Forrest Gump, Montgomery will become **Greenbow**, the fictional Alabama town in which the movie took place. The team will also wear special 1950s-themed jerseys and caps for the occasion.

3 BINGHAMTON SPIEDIES: As a part of its partnership with local eatery Lupo's, **Binghamton** will play a game as one of central New York's favorite dishes. Combining a soft roll and marinated, spit-grilled meat, the **spiedie** is sure to be as big a hit on the field as it is on a plate.

4 TRENTON PORK ROLL: Lakewood played as the Pork Roll last year, and now another team in New Jersey is getting in on the fun, too. **Trenton** will play as the Garden State's most divisive meat for several dates this year. No word on whether any team will be brave enough to play as the **Taylor Ham**.

DRINKS

5 ROCHESTER HOP BITTERS: The Northwest League already has the Hillsboro Hops, but now the East Coast is getting in on the act. This logo tips its glass to **Rochester's brewing** tradition while also turning the clock back to the short-lived National Association team of the same name, which played in the late 1800s.

6 WEST VIRGINIA MOONSHINERS: Don't be too loud when you order this drink, which calls attention to the area's tradition of making and transporting illegal moonshine during Prohibition. The copper-and-black color scheme is a nod to the colors of the stills used during the brewing process and the cars that transported the spirits.

7 LOUISVILLE MASHERS: If you're looking for something a little stronger, perhaps **Louisville** bourbon will do the trick. These hats and jerseys allude to the brewing process, which involves the mashing of potatoes, rather than the final product itself. Even without the food-and-drink tie-in, "Mashers" is not a bad name for a baseball team.

ENTREES

8 FORT MYERS GROUPERS: If you're in Florida, seafood is an obvious way to go. And if you're in **Fort Myers**, grouper is your best choice. The fish is popular for its mild flavor and versatile use, and fans at Hammond Stadium will be able to chow down on grouper sandwiches during that night's game.

9 NEW ENGLAND LOBSTER ROLLS: And if you're in **New England**, lobster is an obvious way to go. The Connecticut Tigers will honor the regional sandwich, which features lobster meat stuffed into the top of a grilled hot dog-style bun, by changing their name (and location) for a day on July 14.

10 HARTFORD STEAMED BURGERS: If you're of a certain age, steamed burgers are synonymous with a certain episode of *The Simpsons*. With this promotion, the **Yard Goats** are aiming to change that perception and instead draw attention back to the dish's Connecticut origins.

11 OMAHA RUNZAS: Baseball players want to score runs. Baseball fans, at least in **Nebraska**, want to eat Runzas. The Storm Chasers will play as the meat, cabbage and seasoning-filled bread pockets on June 9 against Albuquerque (which will play as the Green Chile Cheeseburgers) in another version of the minor leagues' ongoing food fight.

12 WISCONSIN BRATS: Hot dogs have long been a ballpark staple, so **Wisconsin** decided to beef things up a bit and play their game on June 9 as the Brats. Beyond the special hats and logos, the team will also wear jerseys designed to look like German lederhosen as part of the local Bratoberfest.



GEAR

SSK ADDS SYNDERGAARD TO ITS BATTING ORDER

The Mets star is the first pitcher to ink a bat deal

BY TIM NEWCOMB

Noah Syndergaard doesn't have the nickname Thor without reason. He's earned it for his pitching, but he's also hit four home runs in his career, including a two-home run game while visiting Dodger Stadium in 2016. So SSK decided to put some marketing power behind the power of the Mets' star and make Syndergaard the first pitcher in the majors with a bat deal.

SSK signed the all-star as its chief creative officer and bat designer, giving him his own line of Thor's Hammer bats, available in youth and full-size models. The SSK Thor's Hammer NS34 gives SSK a little logo time for when fans continue to search #pitcherswhorake and come up with the home run-belted Syndergaard.

"We are very excited about SSK's new partnership with Noah Syndergaard and Noah's vision in helping us launch this innovative and out-of-the-box idea," said Nell Kucich, vice president of marketing for SSK Baseball USA. "He's an elite player who fits in very well with our 2018 roster, as well as our company's premium

products."

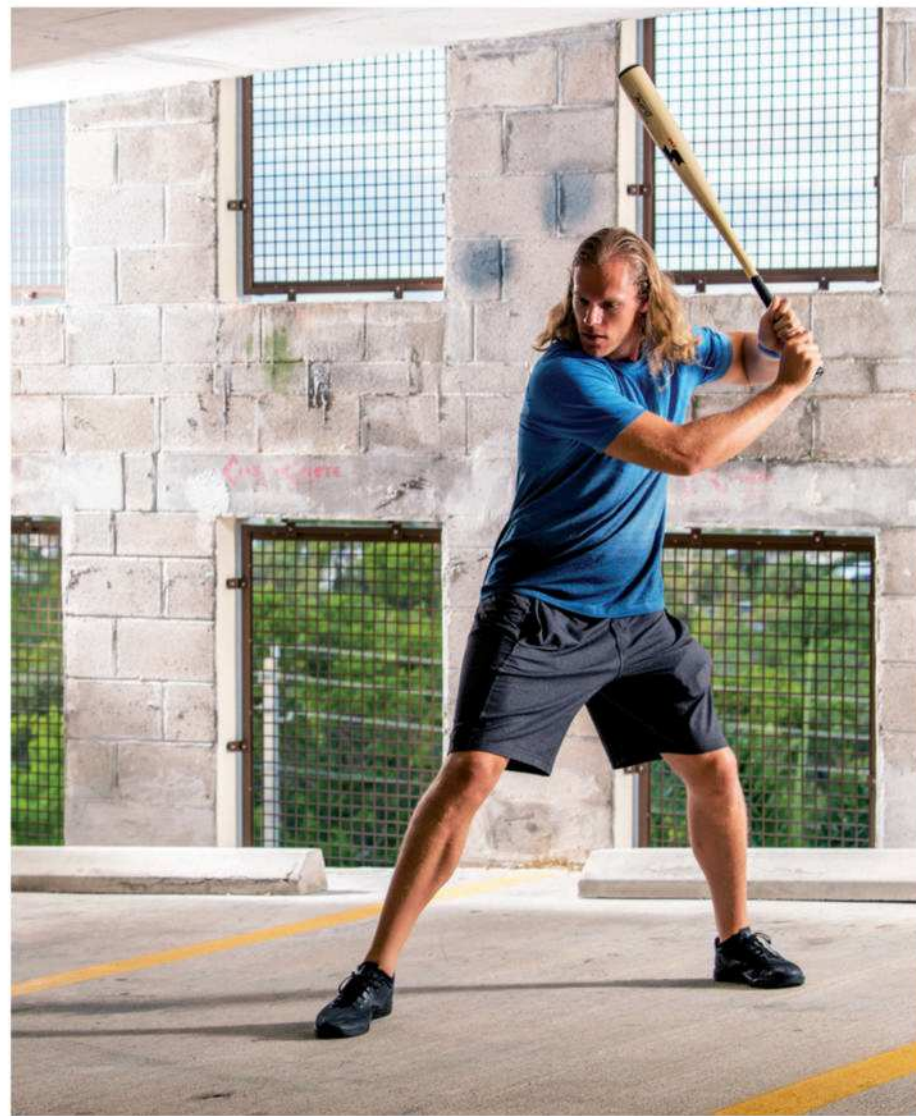
Kucich explained that even though most youth players who pitch also hit through the majority of their baseball careers, there was no product featuring a star pitcher to cater to these two-way players.

"Our partnership with Noah was a no-brainer because he's one of the most marketable players in baseball and will sell bats to youth pitchers that hit and every other fan of Syndergaard," Kucich said.

With the partnership, expect to see a new matte paint design—new for SSK—on the adult Thor's Hammer NS34, based on Syndergaard's creative direction. The wood-bat model is new for SSK, using the same wood as other bats in the line but built from Syndergaard's preferred specifications.

Moving forward, SSK wants to see pitchers participate in the home run derby and get a chance to rake alongside their peers.

"I think it would be great for baseball to highlight the hidden talents of these pitchers," Kucich said, "and SSK would have a great design for Noah to showcase if it ever happened." ■



FOR THE RECORD

OBITUARIES

ANTHONY ARNERICH, a minor league outfielder and second baseman who played for the Tigers and White Sox organizations from 1948-51, died March 9 in Alameda, Calif. He was 89.

FRANK BINSACK, a first baseman who played in the Florida State and Western Carolinas leagues for the Kansas City Athletics organization in 1962 and '63, died March 17 in Greece, N.Y. He was 73.

REMBERTO CONCEPCION, a minor league pitcher who played in the Florida State League in 1958, died Feb. 10. He was 82.

GLORIDA ELLIOTT, who played five seasons in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League from 1950-54, died March 13 in Staten Island, N.Y. She was 86.

ROBERT ALLEN "BOB" ENGEL, a National League umpire who worked three World Series and four All-Star Games, died March 5 in Fallon, Nev.

He was 84.

TOM FLETCHER, a lefthander who pitched for the Tigers in 1962, died May 9 in Oakwood, Ill. He was 75.

Fletcher made his one and only major league appearance on Sept. 12, 1962, when he pitched two scoreless innings against the Red Sox. He allowed two hits and two walks and struck out one batter.

NORMAN HARDING, a shortstop who played in the Carolina and Western Carolinas leagues for the Yankees organization in 1962 and '63, died in Spokane Valley, Wash. He was 79.

WAYNE HEIM, a minor leaguer who played for the New York Giants organization from 1951-52 and from 1955-56, died March 9 in West Chester, Pa. He was 85.

GERALD "GERRY" KAMMEL, a catcher who played in the Pioneer League in 1969, died March 8 in Bakersfield, Calif. He was 70.

DAVID MANN, a minor league outfielder who played in 1,524 games for the St. Louis Browns, Orioles, Brooklyn Dodgers, Phillies, Indians, Red Sox, Cardinals and Angels organizations from 1952-63, died May 14 in Seattle. He was 85.

JAMES "JIM" NAPIER, a minor league catcher and outfielder who played in 1,174 games for the White Sox and Cardinals organizations from 1958-65 and from 1967-72, died Feb. 11 in Tucson. He was 79.

Napier also served as a minor league manager for 11 seasons, managing in the White Sox organization from 1973-77, in the Cubs organization from 1979-80 and 1982-84, and in the Indians organization in 1986. Napier's career minor league managerial record was 744-772.

MAXWELL "MAX" NEWCOM, a minor league righthander who pitched in the Big State, Longhorn and West Texas-New Mexico leagues in 1953 and '54, died March 19 in Fort Worth. He was 88.

ROBERT PALANTINO, a righthander who pitched in the Georgia-Florida and Border leagues for the Phillies organization in 1946 and '47, died March 5 in Rome, N.Y. He was 95.

FRANK QUILICI, who played second base and third base for the Twins in 1965 and from 1967-70, died May 14 in Burnsville, Minn. He was 79.

Quilici played in 405 games during his five seasons in the majors, hitting .214/.281/.287 with five home runs and three stolen bases.

LOYD "WAYNE" SIMPSON, a minor leaguer who played in the Kansas-Oklahoma-Missouri League in 1951, died March 10 in Godfrey, Ill. He was 87.

ELIO "LEO" SCARPA, a minor league righthander who pitched in the Cardinals organization from 1953-56 and in '58, died March 10 in Toms River, N.J. He was 84.

AL STANEK, a lefthander who pitched for the Giants in 1963, died May 8 in Holyoke, Mass. He was 74.

Stanek made 11 relief appearances during his major league career, recording a 4.73 ERA in 13.1 innings with five strikeouts and 12 walks.

ROBERT "BOB" TROYER, a minor leaguer who played in the Evangeline League in 1952, died March 16 in Walnut Creek, Ohio. He was 85.

THOMAS "TOM" VANGELAS, a minor league first baseman from 1948-50 and 1953-54, died March 12 in Monroe Township, N.J. He was 90.

ROY WRIGHT, a righthander who pitched for the New York Giants in 1956, died May 5 in Chickamauga, Ga. He was 84.

Wright made his only major league appearance on Sept. 30, 1956, when he allowed five runs in 2.2 innings against the Phillies.

RICHARD "DICK" ZERATSKY, a minor leaguer who played in the Northern League in 1957, died March 18 in Green Bay, Wis. He was 85. ■

**Videos from the
ABCA Convention**

Access 35 new baseball coaching videos from the 2018 ABCA Convention at www.ABCAvideos.org!

**AMERICAN BASEBALL
ABCA
COACHES ASSOCIATION
Since 1945**

NUMBERS GAME

POWER PLAYERS

Tracking home run locations for top college hitters to determine which of them truly have all-fields power

BY CHRIS HILBURN-TRENKLE

A home run is perhaps the most valuable—and exciting—play in baseball. Thus home run hitters are among the most valuable—and exciting—commodities in baseball.

Even more valuable is a slugger with true all-fields power. Such hitters tend to be less prone to slumps and also are more likely to go deep even when hitting to the middle of the field or taking a pitch the other way.

The Cubs, to cite one example, have found success by drafting college hitters with all-fields power, such as **Kris Bryant** in 2013 and **Kyle Schwarber** in 2014. The draft class of

2016 featured all-fields power hitters **Nick Senzel** (Reds) and **Kyle Lewis** (Mariners), who came off the board early and are currently Top 100 Prospects.

With this year's draft class skewing heavy on quality college bats, we examined home run spray charts to identify which hitters are pull-oriented and which use all fields. The sample includes the top 20 college hitters, according to the BA 500 pre-draft ranking (displayed as **No.** below), who had hit at least seven home runs prior to regionals. In other words, these are the top draft-eligible, college position prospects who had hit at least seven homers.

HOME RUN LOCATION TRACKER FOR TOP COLLEGE HITTERS FOR THE 2018 DRAFT

No.	Name	Pos	School	Bats	HR	LF	LCF	CF	RCF	RF	Pull%	Mid%	Opp%
5	Jonathan India	3B	Florida	R	17	8	2	2	2	3	47.1	35.3	17.6
6	Alec Bohm	3B	Wichita State	R	16	3	6	3	3	1	18.8	75.0	6.3
8	Joey Bart	C	Georgia Tech	R	16	3	3	3	4	3	18.8	62.5	18.8
9	Travis Swaggerty	OF	South Alabama	L	13	1	1	2	3	6	46.2	46.2	7.7
26	Jeremy Eierman	SS	Missouri State	R	10	5	2	2	1	0	50.0	50.0	0.0
27	Trevor Larnach	OF	Oregon State	L	17	6	1	6	3	1	5.9	58.8	35.3
29	Greyson Jenista	OF	Wichita State	L	9	2	1	1	3	2	22.2	55.6	22.2
32	Steele Walker	OF	Oklahoma	L	13	2	0	3	3	5	38.5	46.2	15.4
49	Griffin Conine	OF	Duke	L	15	1	0	3	2	9	60.0	33.3	6.7
50	Tristan Pompey	OF	Kentucky	B	7	1	0	2	0	4	71.4	28.6	0.0
57	Seth Beer	1B	Clemson	L	20	2	0	4	5	9	45.0	45.0	10.0
68	Tyler Frank	2B	Florida Atlantic	R	12	8	3	0	0	1	66.7	25.0	8.3
69	Luken Baker	1B	Texas Christian	R	9	6	2	1	0	0	66.7	33.3	0.0
76	Kyler Murray	OF	Oklahoma	R	10	6	3	0	0	1	60.0	30.0	10.0
89	Gage Canning	OF	Arizona State	L	9	0	0	1	5	3	33.3	66.7	0.0
92	Kyle Isbel	OF	Nevada-Las Vegas	L	14	0	0	0	5	9	64.3	35.7	0.0
96	Cal Raleigh	C	Florida State	B	13	4	0	0	2	7	53.8	15.4	30.8
142	Richie Palacios	SS	Towson	L	8	2	0	0	4	2	25.0	50.0	25.0
154	Nick Dunn	2B	Maryland	L	10	0	0	0	0	10	100.0	0.0	0.0
175	Bren Spillane	1B	Illinois	R	23	4	3	0	7	9	17.4	43.5	39.1

Note that Florida Atlantic second baseman **Tyler Frank** hit a home run that was not tracked and, therefore, does not display in his total.

To summarize the results, we broke each hitter's home run output into three categories: pull side (Pull%), middle of the field (Mid%) and opposite field (Opp%). All home runs hit to left-center, center and right-center field are classified as middle of the field.

ALL-FIELDS HITTERS

Illinois first baseman **Bren Spillane** led all hitters in the sample with nine opposite-field homers. He hit nine, which was three more than the next closest player. Spillane also showed an ability to hit for power to all fields, with at least three homers hit to each field except center, where he came up empty. He also led the field by hitting 39 percent of his homers to the opposite field.

Wichita State third baseman **Alec Bohm** showed a remarkable ability to hit to all fields. While he hit only one home run to the opposite field, he hit at least three to each of the other fields. In fact, he led the sample by hitting 75 percent of his homers to the middle of the field.

Florida third baseman **Jonathan India** also demonstrated the ability to hit to all fields. He hit multiple homers to each field and hit 53 percent of his homers either to the middle of the field or the opposite field.

Oregon State outfielder **Trevor Larnach** hit 16 of his 17 home runs—that's 94 percent—to the middle of the field or the opposite field. He hit six home runs to straightaway center, which was easily the highest number in the sample. Larnach should have no trouble translating his power to pro ball.

Georgia Tech catcher **Joey Bart** smashed 13 of his 16 home runs (81 percent) to center or the opposite field. Only Larnach and Spillane had a higher percentage of homers that weren't pulled.



Alec Bohm

PULL-ORIENTED HITTERS

Maryland second baseman **Nick Dunn** was by far the most pull-oriented power hitter in our sample. He pulled all 10 of his home runs to right field.

The next most pull-heavy power hitters were Kentucky outfielder **Tristan Pompey** (71 percent), Texas Christian first baseman **Luken Baker** (67 percent) and **Tyler Frank** (67 percent).

Nevada-Las Vegas outfielder **Kyle Isbel**, Duke outfielder **Griffin Conine** and Clemson first baseman **Seth Beer**—a trio of lefthanded sluggers—all hit nine home runs to their pull side, even though their overall home run distribution didn't skew dramatically to the pull side.

In baseball's age of analytics, home run location information can give fans an idea of what to expect from top college hitters when they enter pro ball. ■

Join the Team! #TeamDinger
 WWW.DINGERBATS.COM
 Dinger
 WORLD CLASS WOOD made in the USA

YOUNG MAN'S GAME

An emphasis on raw skill over nuance means that the youngest big league players are often the best

JOE SHEEHAN

@JOE_SHEEHAN



I'd like to raise a toast to some of the best stories of 2018, but it would have to be with sparkling cider, because many are too young to drink.

Ronald Acuna Jr. has helped push the Braves into first place as a 20-year-old rookie. Teammate Mike Soroka, also 20, took a shutout into the sixth inning in his big league debut. Juan Soto, who moved from low Class A to the majors in seven weeks, homered in his first start for the Nationals. At 19, Soto was the youngest player to hit a major league homer since Bryce Harper in 2012. Vladimir Guerrero Jr., also 19, is hitting approximately .975 in Double-A, making his callup to the Blue Jays an inevitability.

Just a tick older is the Yankees' Gleyber Torres, who is making a run at the AL Rookie of the Year award so many have already given to Shohei Ohtani. Torres, 21, hit .323 with eight homers in his first month in the majors. Ozzie Albies, 21, leads the NL in runs and total bases, and had blasted 14 homers while standing a gentleman's 5-foot-8. Righthander Jordan Hicks, 21, forced his way into the Cardinals' bullpen this spring and led it with a 1.96 ERA. You may know him better as the guy who touched 105 mph in a May game against the Phillies, tying Aroldis Chapman for the fastest pitch in recorded history.

This is baseball now. Young players arrive on the scene fully formed and ready to contribute. Cody Bellinger hit 39 homers and won the NL Rookie of the Year last year at 21. Corey Seager won it at 22 the year before, and Carlos Correa was AL Rookie of the Year in 2015 at age 20. Bryce Harper was 19 and Mike Trout 20 when they nabbed the honors in 2012.

A decade ago, the Rookie of the Year award would often land at the feet of a Geovany Soto or an Angel Berroa or a Chris Coghlan, middling mid-20s players having career years amid weak rookie crops. Now, the award goes to young superstars at the start of big careers who chase MVP awards even as they're taking down rookie hardware.

In the 2010s, there have already been 35 occasions when a position player 21 or younger contributed at least one win above replacement to his team—including Torres and Albies so far this year. There were just 20 of those in the 1980s, 19 in the 1990s and 19 more in the 2000s. There were eight such 21-and-under contributors in 2011, the most in any year in baseball history. More than ever before, teams are asking their youngest players to help them win, and being rewarded for doing so.

The "what" is easy. The "why" is harder.



Some of it is business. Young players are where all the value lies. They make a minimum salary out of the gate, and not much more for a few seasons thereafter. Front offices are less inclined than ever to value service time or experience, especially when they have to pay market prices for it. The flip side of this is the way older players are being pushed out of the game. Just 2.8 percent of plate appearances this year had been taken by players 36 and older; over a full season, that would be the lowest figure since 1977.

Studies have shown that the arc of players' careers has changed as well. The idea of the age-27 peak, which stemmed from Bill James' research in the 1980s, no longer holds. What we've learned is that players, collectively, are about as good as they'll ever be when they reach the majors. One reason for that is the increased efficiency of the amateur and minor league pipeline. Players arrive in pro ball with more game experience than in previous generations. Travel ball has its issues, but the average American pro prospect has played a lot more organized baseball against good competition than did his counterpart a generation ago.

The way the game is played makes the transition easier as well. More than ever

before, baseball is about the big skills: velocity for pitchers, strength for hitters. There's less nuance in the game. With the rise in strikeout and home run rates, with singles rarer than ever before, with one-run strategies rarely used, being a good player is almost entirely about your physical ability. Defense is as much about positioning—data-driven in this era—as range or route-running or arm strength. Pitchers don't have to have deep repertoires because they're rarely asked to get hitters out a third time in a game, much less a fourth. Batters, similarly, don't have to make in-game adjustments for the same reason. More than ever before, raw athleticism can make you a baseball player.

This trend shows no sign of abating. Behind Soto and Acuna and Guerrero are Luis Urias (21) and Fernando Tatis Jr. (19) of the Padres. Kyle Tucker (21) could make his debut for the Astros later this year, and the Braves still have Austin Riley (21) at Triple-A. The success of young players is producing a feedback loop; every time a team wins with one, it makes it that much easier to look at the next one and see a Correa or a Bellinger or a Torres. This is modern baseball: Youth will be served . . .

Sparkling cider, I promise. ■

The Yankees' Gleyber Torres recorded a .998 OPS through his first month in the big leagues, and the 21-year-old wasn't the only rookie who hit the ground running. Players today peak younger than they did in the past, which means that teams expect those as young and talented as Torres to contribute right away.

SHOW SOME SKIN



Custom 11.5" Nokona SKN™
Lightweight Performance Calfskin (SKN)

The classic American-made glove, personalized to your specifications.
SIZE • LEATHERS • WEB • LACES • EMBROIDERY

DESIGN YOURS AT NOKONA.COM



NOKONA®
AMERICAN BALLGLOVES

NOKONA.COM / 800-433-0957



NOKONABALLGLOVES



NOKONABALLGLOVES

UNRIVALED



THE OFFICIAL BASEBALL GLOVE
OF MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL

What are your baseball dreams? To be the best player in the world? To extinguish a drought and lead a franchise to a long sought-after world title? What if it all came together? A once-in-a-lifetime talent, with a revolutionary glove. What would you do then? You'd go back to work. Because that's what MVPs do.

Achieve your dreams with the 2019 A2000 JA27 GM, dropping in August at Wilson.com.

JOSÉ ALTUVE
Houston Astros™ 2B



Get the new
2019 A2000 JA27 GM
this August.



W
YOUR GLOVE IS HERE

W, WILSON AND A2000 ARE REGISTERED TRADEMARKS OF WILSON SPORTING GOODS CO. MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TRADEMARKS AND COPYRIGHTS ARE USED WITH PERMISSION OF MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL PROPERTIES, INC. VISIT MLB.COM *PROS OFTEN CUSTOMIZE THEIR EQUIPMENT. THIS CONSUMER PRODUCT MAY VARY FROM THE MODEL CUSTOMIZED BY A PRO FOR GAME PLAY.