

The TBL Baseball Annual

A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

The Rebuild



2019 Edition

Walter H. Hunt

Robert Jordan

Mark H. Bloom

All 24 Teams Analyzed
Using the T.Q. System

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A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

by

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and extra help from:

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the TBL baseball annual

Welcome to the 2019 *TBL Baseball Annual*. This is the twenty-fifth year of the *Annual* in the book format. This year we're looking at the rebuild – certainly one of the most discussed topics in every TBL offseason. We've assembled a collection of insightful articles, including our lead from Robert, Joe Auletta's deconstruction of the concept of rebuild, a Rich Meyer discussion of unbuilding, and a scholarly discussion of bullpens from Paul Montague.

The staff would also like to thank Craig Musselman and Joe Auletta for help with Year in Review articles.

Our usual collection of team and division articles, and most of our usual features are here. Once again, we're glad to present the best of TBL, our great APBA league, now old enough to run for President.

Enjoy the *Annual* and enjoy the season.

Walter, Robert, Mark
May, 2019

The T.Q. System

Shamelessly stolen from the Mazerowski annual, the T.Q. System assigns points to each area of the team's expected performance and totals the result. The maximum score under the T.Q. System is **50**, divided as follows:

Pitching:	20 points
Offense:	17 points
Defense:	8 points
Bench:	5 points




The T.Q. System does not take age or prospect value into account, only present capability. It does, however, consider usage (available games, at bats and innings).

table of contents




FRONT MATTER

Future Drafts				6
TQ Summary				7
Manager Roll Call				8
2019 Computer Pre-Play		<i>Clay Beard</i>		9
Hall of Fame				10
Work, Clairvoyance and a Bolt of Lightning		<i>Robert Jordan</i>		12
Rebuilding – What does it mean?		<i>Joe Auletta</i>		16
SNTs				19
Spontaneous Unbuilding		<i>Rich Meyer</i>		20
Commissioner’s Report		<i>Ray Murphy</i>		23
Bullpen Manifesto		<i>Paul Montague</i>		24

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

	Clemente Division	<i>Back to Normal</i>			28
	Whitman	30	Blue Hill	34	
	Strong City	38	Riverwoolf	42	
	Mays Division	<i>Testing the Winds</i>			46
	Rye	48	Maracaibo	52	
	Gotham City	56	New Westminster	60	
	Ruth Division	<i>No Such Thing As Too Much</i>			64
	Brobdingnag	66	Knoxville	70	
	Hoboken	74	Midwest	78	
	2017 World Series Report		<i>Eric Sheffler</i>		82

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

	Aaron Division	<i>All In</i>			84
	Melrose	86	Kansas	90	
	Calusa	94	Las Vegas	98	
	Mantle Division	<i>Quite A Dogfight</i>			102
	Hudson	104	Columbus	108	
	Munich	112	Detroit	116	
	Williams Division	<i>Shadow Boxing</i>			120
	Northboro	122	Zion	126	
	Warrenton	130	Grand Cayman	134	

FINAL WORDS

Breakthrough				138
Future				139
Editorial		<i>Walter Hunt</i>		140
F. Robby		<i>Walter Hunt</i>		141

future drafts

In many cases, what's on the field isn't the whole story. Some of our teams have quite a bit to say in future drafts, and any evaluation should properly take that into account.

The graphical displays below show how much each team has in the tank. The middle mark on the thermometer (9) represents a full draft (picks #1-#3) in 2020; above the middle line is excess, while below means something's missing.



haves



NEW WESTMINSTER. Two #1s, their own and Rye's; four #2s; two #3s. Next year's team will be completely different.



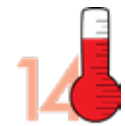
GRAND CAYMAN. Two #1s, theirs and Melrose's; four #2s; two #3s. Also planning on a complete makeover.



STRONG CITY. After delivering the championship: take it apart and start over. Four #1s including two top-half ones.



LAS VEGAS, BROBDINGNAG. Vegas has two top-half #1s, their #2 and #3. Brobdingnag has three #2s.



MARACAIBO, MUNICH, DETROIT. Maracaibo has an extra #2 and #3; Munich has a slightly higher #1 and two extra #3s. Detroit has two #1s.

balanced



KANSAS, ZION,
Their own drafts, likely upper half.



**GOTHAM CITY, HOBOKEN,
NORTHBORO.**
Their own drafts.

have nots



HUDSON. Their own #1 and #3.



RYE, COLUMBUS. Their #2 and #3.



BLUE HILL, WHITMAN. Their own #1s.



MIDWEST. Their own #2.



MELROSE, CALUSA. Their own #3.

all in



**RIVERWOOLF, WARRENTON,
KNOXVILLE.** Riverwoolf drafts in rounds 6 through 10; Warrenton and Knoxville draft in rounds 5 through 10.

These indicators also appear
at the bottom
of each team article,
for your convenience.

t.q. summary

TEAM (DIVISION) OFFENSE DEFENSE PITCHING BENCH TOTAL

The Cream of the Crop



Brodingnag (Ruth)	11.0	3.0	17.5	4.0	35.5
Melrose (Aaron)	11.0	4.0	16.0	3.5	34.5
Knoxville (Ruth)	9.0	4.0	15.0	3.0	31.0
Hoboken (Ruth)	12.0	5.5	9.5	3.0	30.0

The Solid Performers



Hudson (Mantle)	11.0	4.0	10.5	2.5	28.0
Midwest (Ruth)	7.5	6.5	11.0	2.5	27.5
Whitman (Clemente)	9.5	6.0	9.5	2.5	27.0
Columbus (Mantle)	9.0	4.5	10.0	3.0	26.5
Rye (Mays)	8.0	5.5	10.0	2.5	26.0
Northboro (Williams)	8.5	6.5	7.5	3.0	25.5
Maracaibo (Mays)	7.0	6.5	9.0	2.5	25.0

The Transitional Teams



Munich (Mantle)	6.0	6.5	8.5	2.5	23.5
Gotham City (Mays)	8.5	3.5	9.0	2.5	23.5
Kansas (Aaron)	8.0	4.0	9.0	2.0	23.0
Warrenton (Williams)	8.0	4.5	8.0	2.5	23.0
Blue Hill (Clemente)	9.0	5.0	7.0	2.0	22.0
Zion (Williams)	8.5	3.0	7.0	2.5	22.0
Calusa (Aaron)	8.0	4.5	7.0	2.0	21.5

The Rebuilders



Strong City (Clemente)	8.0	5.5	4.0	2.0	20.0
Las Vegas (Aaron)	9.0	4.5	4.0	2.5	20.0
Riverwoolf (Clemente)	7.0	4.5	4.0	2.0	17.5
Detroit (Mantle)	6.5	3.0	4.5	2.0	16.0
Grand Cayman (Williams)	6.0	4.0	3.0	1.5	14.5
New Westminster (Mays)	2.5	4.5	4.0	2.0	13.0

International	299.0 (24.9 average)
National	278.0 (23.2 average)

Division Totals			
Ruth (IC)	124.0	Mays (IC)	87.5
Aaron (NC)	99.0	Clemente (IC)	87.5
Mantle (NC)	94.0	Williams (NC)	85.0

manager roll call

Munich Marauders	Mantle Division	<i>Paul Montague</i>	36th year
Hudson Generals	Mantle Division	<i>Clay Beard</i>	35th year
Elders of Zion	Williams Division	<i>Richard Meyer</i>	35th year
Gotham City Batmen	Mays Division	Anton Greenwald	34th year
Knoxville Outlaws	Ruth Division	Pat Martin	33rd year
Maracaibo Rumrunners	Mays Division	<i>Walter Hunt</i>	33rd year
Brobdingnag Barbarians	Ruth Division	Joe Auletta	31st year
Hoboken Zephyrs	Ruth Division	Steve Powell	30th year
Grand Cayman Havens	Williams Division	Mark Bloom	29th year
Melrose Avengers	Aaron Division	Mark Freedman	26th year
Blue Hill Mudslides	Clemente Division	Mark Ludwig	24th year
Whitman River Rats	Clemente Division	Brian Hanley	24th year
Las Vegas Gamblers	Aaron Division	Paul Harrington	23rd year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Robert Jordan	20th year
Midwest Mongrels	Ruth Division	Darrell Skogen	18th year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Steve Stein	17th year
Strong City Statesmen	Clemente Division	Eric Sheffler	16th year
Rye Herons	Mays Division	Craig Musselman	15th year
New West Whiskeyjacks	Mays Division	Jim Jeatt	15th year
Columbus Jets	Mantle Division	Vic Vaughn	13th year
Kansas Koyotes	Aaron Division	Bill Schwartz	12th year
Warrenton Giants	Williams Division	Jack Chapman	11th year
Detroit Dragons	Mantle Division	Dave Jaskot	8th year
Calusa Indians	Aaron Division	Gordon Rodell	5th year
Riverwoolf Sharks	Clemente Division	Daniel Dumont	3rd year

Ray Murphy is serving his fifth year as our non-playing Commissioner.

Hall of Fame managers in *Bold Italic*.



2019 computer pre-play

by Clay Beard

The good news: I fired Duke. The pre-play has a new manager this year. The bad news: Gustave Robicheaux has issues too. He's better at finding the proper pitcher to be on the hill at the end of a close game, but he has some trouble with pitching limits. I think he's an improvement, but I'll probably try yet another manager next year.

I checked Fatigue only under Fatigue and Injury Rules. I also checked all three of the options at the bottom: *Automatic AIM Subs*, *Enforce BFP*, and that *No PR > 930* thing, which provides some innocuous usage. I also checked the "platoon awareness". All players were active for the whole season. These settings basically allow the season to be played with usage similar to that of the MLB season with some innocuous help. Then I just pushed the button and played the season 10 times. The won/loss records below indicate the average of the 10 seasons.

Brobdingnag is the only team that went to the post-season in all 10 seasons and they should run away with the Ruth despite having two solid wild-card contenders in

the division. Blue Hill will push traditional rival Whitman in the Clemente. Rye looks pretty safe in the Mays. The best action in the IC will probably be for the wild-cards. I have to point out the remarkable consistency of Midwest in this exercise. A seven-game spread might be the tightest shot group I've seen since I've been doing this.



There are two good divisional races in the NC. There's a real good chance the Mantle may place three teams in the playoffs. Probably the strangest result I encountered was Calusa jumping up and beating out Melrose in one of the seasons. Melrose won pretty easily in the other nine, but finished eleven games back in one season. That's one of things I like about this exercise, It doesn't just deal with the probable, it deals with the possible.



International Conference TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Clemente	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
WHITMAN	95	67	--	104	86	5.5	2.5
BLUE HILL	90	72	5	96	77	4.5	2.5
STRONG CITY	70	92	25	83	62	0	0
RIVERWOOLF	57	105	38	68	45	0	0

Mays	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
RYE	93	69	--	100	84	9	0
MARACAIBO	81	81	12	86	75	1	2
GOTHAM CITY	77	85	16	88	64	0	0
NEW WESTMINSTER	59	103	34	72	62	0	0

Ruth	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
BROBDINGNAG	111	51	--	119	97	10	0
KNOXVILLE	87	75	24	96	81	0	7.5
HOBOKEN	88	76	25	94	78	0	5.5
MIDWEST	73	89	38	76	69	0	0

National Conference TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Aaron	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
MELROSE	96	66	--	103	84	9	0
KANSAS	86	76	10	92	77	0	2.5
CALUSA	81	81	15	95	79	1	1
LAS VEGAS	62	100	34	71	54	0	0

Mantle	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
HUDSON	98	64	--	108	90	7	2
COLUMBUS	93	69	5	98	86	2	7
MUNICH	92	70	6	94	78	1	7.5
DETROIT	59	103	39	82	61	0	0

Williams	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
NORTHBORO	85	77	--	93	79	4	0
WARRENTON	81	81	4	87	72	5	0
ZION	79	83	6	89	68	1	0
GRAND CAYMAN	53	109	32	59	42	0	0

fractions reflect ties.

* Highest number of wins recorded
† Lowest number of wins recorded

‡ Division Championships (in 10 seasons)
§ Wild Card appearances (in 10 seasons)

hall of fame enshrinees 2019



Derek Jeter 1996-2015
Cape Cod/Gate City, Hudson, New Westminster

A dynamic player, his 3,399 hits is tops in league history. He scored 100 runs a year until age slowed him down, and was always among league leaders in games played and hits, hit .287-271-1328 lifetime and stole 311 bases. He was a superior-caliber defender. Elected in his second year of eligibility.

Ivan Rodriguez, C 1992-2012
Amherst/Melrose, Northboro, Hudson, Melrose, Las Vegas

Ivan Rodriguez was a very solid hitter (.282-321-1409) for 21 years for various teams, particularly with Melrose. He is best known for being the top defender at catcher; he made only 62 errors in 2,517 games. His best season was 2003 with Northboro (.326-26-79 in only 108 games), and he hit .305 in 1997 with 57 doubles. Elected in his second year of eligibility.



HALL OF FAME

for your consideration



Left to Right: Todd Helton, Gary Sheffield, Chipper Jones, Alex Rodriguez

Todd Helton, 1B

1998-2014

Hudson

There aren't many players who remain with a single team throughout their TBL career, but Helton was a lifer with the Generals. He had 2,555 hits and 397 homers in an outstanding 17 year career, winning two batting titles in 2004 and 2006, and finishing with a .304 lifetime average. His best season was 2004 (.355-35-139). *This is his fourth year of eligibility.*

Gary Sheffield, 3B-OF

1990-2010

Amherst/Melrose, Richmond, Mahopac/Kansas

He hit 499 home runs in his long career, with his best season coming in 2001 with Melrose (.309-61-134, 166 runs scored). His .273 lifetime batting mark is modest, but he struck out only 1,291 times in over 10,000 plate appearances - remarkable for a slugger of his production. He also stole 162 bases. *This is his second year of eligibility.*

Chipper Jones, SS-3B-OF

1996-2013

Council/Summit Glen/Oklahoma City, Mahopac, Maracaibo

One of the steadiest performers in TBL for a decade and a half, he hit 452 HR and drove in 1,617 runs, with a career slash of .283/.370/.499. He hit .301-45-128 in 2000, .308-51-121 in 2002 with 203 hits, and .335-36-98 in 2003 with 224 hits. Four times he hit 40 or more doubles. *This is his second year of eligibility.*

Alex Rodriguez, SS-3B

1995-2016

Brobdingnag, Portland, Hudson

Recent real-life events mar his legacy, but the numbers don't lie: he had 2,923 lifetime hits, 639 homers, and 1,872 RBI. He hit 50 homers four times and 40 or more seven times. In his prime he was the greatest player in baseball, and produced some of the best cards TBL has ever seen. *This is his second year of eligibility.*

Players with carryover votes: Alex Rodriguez 8; Chipper Jones, Todd Helton 7; Gary Sheffield 5; Tim Hudson, Dennis Eckersley, Trevor Hoffman, Don Mattingly, Juan Gonzalez, Andy Pettitte 2; fifteen players with 1.

Work, Clairvoyance, and a Bolt of Lightning

by Robert Jordan

Welcome to the 2019 *TBL Annual*! The Trans-continental Baseball League is back for its 36th season with all the pageantry, prognostications and pratfalls you've come to expect out of this suddenly famous publication. (It took a while, but they're making podcasts out of us now!)

Before we ruin the suspense by gazing into our crystal ball and telling you everything that will happen in the next twelve months, we should take a quick look backwards at an extraordinary 2018 and hand out some words of thanks to the folks that make this production possible.

First, congratulations to Eric Sheffler and the 2018 TBL Champion **Strong City Statesmen**. Eric traded everything that wasn't tied down to supercharge his 2018 title run. The result were exactly what he hoped for – a 112 win regular season (*including a perfect 9-0 record against Northboro, not that I'm bitter...*) and twelve more wins in the playoffs against Richard Meyer, Anton Greenwald, and a much-anticipated conference championship showdown against Bill Schwartz and the Kansas Koyotes. This was Mr. Sheffler's first TBL title.

A deep bow goes to our Commissioner and referee in the ring – Ray Murphy. Ray sailed through a relatively quiet year until the off-season discussions broached the topic of what to do about Openers. This new baseball strategy forced us to re-examine some rules, and tweaks to the dogma are probably on the way, but Ray kept everything in perspective and we enter the 2019 season with solid ownership for all 24 teams. Our ownership roster has been stable for a couple of years, and that's due in no small part to Ray's leadership.

Also worthy of praise is the incredible Steve Stein, who played Wizard of Oz, pulling levers behind the curtain act to perfection once again. The man's talent collided neatly with his free time as a retired tech worker, and TBL is the heavy beneficiary. Our web site, with its detailed history of the league going back to 1984, is just an embarrassment of riches and his technical chops make the draft an exciting day for folks drafting remotely. (*Joe Auletta floated a suggestion that Mr. Stein's extraordinary contribution to TBL gives him a Hall of Fame argument. Just leaving that here...*)

Finally, we must once again acknowledge the drive and excellence of Mr. Walter Hunt, without whose superhuman efforts this publication would not exist. It's a privilege just to work in the presence of our Managing Editor.

The topic of rebuilding is before us – not an uncommon area of research in these pages. Richard Meyer has a few words of wisdom elsewhere in this volume, but I wanted to focus this article on three teams that have completed rebuilds recently and extract some secrets of their success.



Hoboken

What a pleasure it is to see Steve Powell creating a wave of terror in the International Conference. Hoboken won 98 games and lost a heartbreaker to Gotham City in the divisional round last year. This is a young, solid team built on young stars like Francisco Lindor, Javier Baez and Aaron Judge. They should compete for years. This is the rebuilding story we all want to write.

Steve's arrival in the first division took five years, starting with a 48-win ice bath in 2014. In the 2015 draft, Steve took Nick Castellanos in the first round. Castellanos was a sweet swinging third base prospect with defensive questions. But the lightning strike occurred at the #22 pick in that draft, when Hoboken took Javier Baez.

This is a theme you see with many successful rebuilds. When a club is very poor and finds its way to 100 wins and a TBL title run, at some point the manager takes a flier on a kid with obvious talent but just-as-obvious weaknesses, and has him emerge as a superstar. Baez is one of the best infielders in baseball today, but when the club took him in 2015, he was coming off a terrible performance in winter ball. Steve drafted him for upside and youth, knowing that patience would be required. This year, he's a beast (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 1 walk, 17 speed, 2B9). He finished second in the National League in MVP voting last year.

Dr. Steve has a second and even better example of a lightning strike in his pile. Consider the fact that Aaron Judge (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks, OF3) was a third round pick. The Gathering of Geniuses in 2017 found 85 guys they liked better than Aaron Judge. Let's look at that slash line from last year – .278 / .392 / .528. That was an injury-plagued *off year*.

Now Hoboken also boasts the services of Francisco Lindor and Nick Castellanos who were picked very early in their respective drafts and developed into excellent players right on schedule. Knowing who to draft is part of getting to the first division in TBL. But drafting for upside and having guys over-perform to a ridiculous degree is critical to turning a good 92 win team into the kind of juggernaut that chases a TBL title.



Rye

Another team who has had a remarkable resurrection over the last several years is Craig Musselman's Rye Herons. I complimented Craig on his accelerated return to contention at the draft. "I got lucky," he said. Let's see about that ...

In 2019, the stellar draft picks are here – Alex Bregman, J. T. Realmuto, and Jaime Barria were all top picks in recent drafts. They are augmented by some nice trade acquisitions, like Jose Abreu and Marcel Ozuna and especially Chris Sale, who checks in as a Grade 19 this year.

But standing out like a clown on a beach is this bolt of lightning: Whit Merrifield (11 hits, 3 walks, 3 Os, 18 speed, 2B9). This guy was the 104th pick in the 2017 draft. He was a fast, sure-handed second baseman with a light bat, who suddenly turned into Juan Samuel.

It's a little hard to figure where this came from – Merrifield has never done anything like this before. He had a career minor league OPS of .716 – good enough to play in the majors but by no measure an impact player. This year, he's one of the best second basemen in baseball.

The effect on Craig's team of having an impact second baseman materialize out of nowhere is marked. Secure in the knowledge that 2B, SS and C are rock solid, Craig traded for Abreu and Ozuna, moving his club into contention for the Mays Division title. The Rye lineup features two guys who combine for 85 stolen bases last year (Merrifield and Mallex Smith): a real rarity in this age of home run derby.

Rye is picked to win the Mays this year. In 2017 they won 59 games. This is a freakishly fast

rebuild – one of the more amazing turnarounds in the last fifteen years, given the Herons’ problems and age of a few years ago.



Northboro

The third example is a less successful story, because they have never competed for a World Series title. But Northboro is a variation on the theme. This year, Jurickson Profar *finally* showed up with a decent card after battling injuries for years. Joc Pederson has five power numbers. Both of those guys are first round picks.

Northboro won 47 games in 2014, then climbed to 93 wins in 2017. They were picked to finish first by the *Annual* last year – somewhat reluctantly – and missed the division title by one game. This year, they’re picked to win the Williams again, though Warrenton and Zion are hot on their heels. No World Series appearances, but Mr. Stein and that other guy did build a club from scratch and get them back to contender status.

Starting with their emergence from the pit of despair in 2015, the staff leader for Northboro has been Corey Kluber. Kluber has won 71 games in four years for Northboro, and with a healthy Grade 13 backed by a somewhat competent offense in 2019, he should take a run at 20 wins again.

Was the addition of Kluber part of some brilliant insight or clever trade? Heck no: Kluber was taken as a pure flier in the fifth round of the 2013 draft. We drafted him based on his minor league numbers. The guy drafted in front of him was Mike Zagurski. The guy drafted after him was Samuel Deduno. It was a pretty good fifth round – Brian Dozier, Marwin Gonzalez and Freddy Galvis all went in that round. Kansas chose 23 year old Miles Mikolas in the seventh round of

that draft. Micholas was chosen by Zion with the 14th pick in the first round of this year’s draft.

But no one had the impact that Kluber had, and this was simply the finger of God touching the Northboro rotation. Without a stud at the top of your rotation, you’re not winning 90 in this league. Northboro got an ace for free here. And last year, with an offense notable only for its strikeout percentage and a defense that committed 144 errors, Kluber went 21-7.

In 2017, Northboro had a second gift drop from the heavens, when they chose Jesus Aguilar with the 90th pick deep in the third round. People knew this guy could swing the stick a bit – his OPS in 2017 was .837 – but Aguilar went into 2018 with no job, and the preseason rags trashed his chances of repeating his respectable rookie year. This year, Aguilar checks in with 1-1-5-6, 10 hits and 4 walks. He will have a job in Northboro.

Many of these players not only emerged as studs for their respective teams, but play key positions as well. Baez and Merrifield plug holes in the middle infield. (See Northboro’s hilarious attempts to find a competent shortstop if you think that’s easy.) Kluber is a rotation ace. Having a player just explode on to the scene for little cost, and play such a key role as well, makes all your other drafting easier and cuts years off your rebuilding timetable.

Bolts of Lightning

The conclusion one can draw from all this is that while preparation and clever roster handling are important elements of success in TBL, this is after all a game of dice, and luck is a fickle companion. When it arrives and takes a seat,

the speed and direction of an entire franchise can change suddenly and for the better. The lightning strike is an exciting part of the story of many of our contenders.

Fessing Up

We are good at tooting our own horn around here, and it's hard to stay humble when your work is being studied by Ph. D. candidates at universities. Does our operatic brilliance stand up to scrutiny in hindsight? Let's look back and see how our 2018 prognostications fared.

Clemente Division. The *Annual* picked *Riverwoolf-Blue Hill-Calusa-Whitman*. TBL standings: **Blue Hill-Riverwoolf-Whitman-Calusa**. Not one of our better efforts. Blue Hill not only won 97 games, but they beat Riverwoolf in the playoffs, just to put an exclamation point on it.

Mays Division. The *Annual* picked *Gotham City-New West-Maracaibo-Rye*. 2018 TBL standings: **Gotham City-New West-Maracaibo-Rye**. That's more like it. Anton took a team that had the fourth best record in the conference to the World Series. Another terrific season for Dr. Greenwald.

Ruth Division. The *Annual* picked *Hoboken-Midwest-Knoxville-Brobdingnag*. 2018 TBL standings: **Hoboken-Midwest-Knoxville-Brobdingnag**. This was the easiest division in TBL to call last year. There were at least ten games separating the four teams from their nearest competitors.

Aaron Division. The *Annual* picked *Strong City-Kansas-Las Vegas-Melrose*. 2018 TBL standings: **Strong City-Kansas-Las Vegas-Melrose**. Another clairvoyant performance. Kansas was really good last year – arguably the second best team in the league – but Strong City was just a road grader,

and they won the whole thing. The real question was at the bottom of the division where Las Vegas won 2 more games than Melrose.

Mantle Division. The *Annual* picked *Hudson-Columbus-Munich-Detroit*. 2018 TBL standings: **Columbus-Hudson-Munich-Detroit**. The TQs had this race as a dead heat. Clay Beard's preplay had Columbus winning the division comfortably. Score one for Clay. Vic Vaughn's boys won 16 games in October to salt the division away.

Williams Division. The *Annual* picked *Northboro-Zion-Grand Cayman-Warrenton*. 2018 TBL standings: **Zion-Northboro-Grand Cayman-Warrenton**. This was a great pennant race throughout the year, and was decided by a disastrous home series between Northboro and lowly Melrose in November. Melrose took 3 of 4 somehow, and Zion stepped past the Phoenix for the division title. Zion was 8-6 against Northboro in the regular season, and they won the Division by 2 games.

Conclusion

In conclusion. The *Annual* – like the beautiful sport it celebrates – is back and we're happy to have you with us. This year, we're picking Whitman, Rye and Brobdingnag in the International Conference, and Melrose, Hudson and Northboro in the National Conference. If those predictions hold up, TBL will have six new division winners this season. Let's roll some dice and see what happens.

Ray Murphy has sent out his orders to Play Ball. The Red Sox booked their first ninth inning come-from-behind victory of the season against Seattle last night. The sun is melting away the last of the ice in my back yard. We here at the wish you the best of health and good luck in 2019!

Rebuilding: What does it mean – And is it worth doing?



by Joe Auletta

sold folk cures?

What definition should we use for Rebuilding?

NOTE: For the ease of tracking, and to keep my sanity, this work is categorized by franchise, not team name or manager. That may taint the data some because a change of team ownership clearly affects a rebuild, but I am choosing to ignore that for now. Likewise I did no roster makeup analysis to see if there was major turnover, or a slew of off-years and injuries. Those would have been nice to do, but time did not allow.

There are some people who are more devious than they seem. Take Walter for example. No matter how many times I fall for his trick, he seems to be able to get me again the next year around this same time. So innocent sounding: “Do you have any thoughts for an *Annual* article? Something simple?” Ha! Under that calm question usually lies a far more complex question.

Take this year’s topic, Rebuilding. “OK,” I say, “I can whip that out in a few hours.” I put fingers to keypad and quickly discover it would be a lot easier if I had the data. I go to Steve’s awesome repository to start extracting numbers going back 35 years. That is when the trap closes — just what numbers do I need? How do I analyze historical rebuilding trends without deciding what qualifies? We all know what rebuilding is, don’t we? We use the word often enough. I scratch my head, take another swallow of coffee — no one should try to write anything serious without adequate coffee — and that’s when I realize I’ve been had by Walter. Curses, foiled again! I have agreed to write about something I can’t even define.

Rebuild. What actually is it? So I scrap much of the fallacious plan I thought I had for the article and settle upon the real questions: What is rebuilding? How often do we really see it? And is it worth the trouble, or is it one of those over-

It’s actually easier to start with what rebuilding is *not*. It is not a bad season – Munich lost 98 games in 2008 but won 113 games the year before and 109 the year after. It is not a run of injuries and off-years to players too young to jettison. It isn’t a bounce when Dave Suter finished last in 1997 due to trading away Mark McGwire for a quick rejuvenation built around Nomar Garciaparra. No, a rebuild has to have a more sustained period where the team falls on hard times, gets rebuilt, and comes back. But how long is “sustained,” what are “hard times,” and what is “comes back?” All are obviously subjective, and for the purposes of this article I pondered different possibilities and settled on these definitions:

Sustained: 2 or more seasons (One could argue for 3 or more and I couldn’t really object. More on this towards the end.)

Hard Times: Initially I wanted to see a sub-.450 winning percentage, 12+ games out of the Division lead, and no playoff appearance. That sounded good but as I compiled the near-800 Franchise-Year marks I found anomalies I didn’t like. In 1998 Calusa finished within 8 games of the Division lead but was 60-102. Sure looks like “hard times”. Brobdingnag won a division and made the playoffs in 2015 with a 73-89 record, a bad season. So I removed “no playoffs” and “at least 12 games out in the division”. That left “a sub-.450 record for 2+ seasons.” That resulted in only 59 “rebuilt” in 35 years of TBL. Less than 2 per season, which surprised me.

Comes Back (or, When is rebuilding considered over?): As with the start of a rebuild, this is equally unclear. My first thought was “win

enough games *or* get into the playoffs.” Winning enough games passed the sanity test if I set it at 85 wins (again, pushing that up to 87 or 90 is a valid argument, but I used 85). Somehow just getting back over .450 (the equivalent of 73 wins) didn’t seem adequate.

Even getting to .500 usually/often means a team is in the latter stages of rebuilding, but not necessarily “there” yet. Jim Chastain went 82-80 with what is now the Hoboken franchise, but that was the high water mark in a 13 year rebuild (the longest on record, spanning 4 managers) that wouldn’t end until Steve Powell reached 92 wins in 2001. Yes, 85 wins looked OK, since that meant a team was back to being relevant.

But I ditched the “makes the playoffs” as proof of coming back. Knox Bardeen won the Clemente Division with a 68-94 mark in 1998, and I could not accept any definition that said a 68 win team was “back”. That left 85 wins as the sole criteria for a successful rebuild. That meant the 59 rebuilds lasted from two seasons to thirteen.

Are all rebuilds created equal?

The data:

Length	# of Rebuilds
2-3 years	31
4-5 years	16
6-9 years	8
10+ years	4

Half the rebuilds lasted either 2 or 3 years. Three are still on-going after the 2018 season (Knoxville, Melrose, and Rye) and though at least two of those rebuilds look to end in 2019 I did not count them because the duration isn’t official yet. Without them, in 28 of 56 cases the team was back to 85+ wins within 3 seasons.

I did not have time to pursue the core roster continuity for each of these, but since it is very hard to add more than a few key franchise play-

ers in a season, this seems to argue that the two and three year “rebuilds” are more Bounces, Recovery From Key Off Years/Injuries, or reconstructing secondary cardboard around a core. Twenty eight rebuilds of 4+ seasons, spread over 35 seasons and 24 franchises, is not what I expected to find.

A hypothesis I developed based upon this — that would again take more time that I have to research — is that any rebuild taking more than 6 years or so is actually an unsuccessful rebuild that blends seamlessly into a *re-rebuild*. In the longest cases, likely *re-re-rebuilds*. Again, this is an unproven hypothesis. However, whether true or not, the data above leads me to claim: *We over-use the term “Rebuild.”*

There also seems to be a belief that this may be happening more often than in the past. The fear is the number of rebuilds is growing as teams tank for Acuna, Vlad Jr., etc., ripping apart their roster and being a non-contender for years. Does the data support this?

Decade	Rebuilds	Long Rebuilds	Very Long Rebuilds
1980s	12	2	1
1990s	15	6	3
2000s	14	3	0
2010s	17	1	0

Given that the early years had fewer teams, and in the 1980s it was only six years, not ten, the frequency of rebuilds is about constant. And the number of long rebuilds, defined as 6+ years, is decreasing. Are people better at rebuilding now? Are they less tolerant of losing year after year? Are teams tanking differently?

I don’t know, but every one of the “very long” rebuilds — 10+ seasons — started pre-2000. So it is possible there has been a change in why rebuilding occurs, may there is more “positioning for a high draft pick” now, but teams are doing it in ways that are not as long-term destruc-

tive to either their team or to other teams in the league. This may still be an undesirable thing, but it is not what I expected to find. My guess is that managers who do fall into a rebuild — voluntarily or not — are more skilled at getting the rebuild done and returning to relevance.

Are the results of rebuilding worth the pain?

Whatever one thinks about rebuilding — whether it happens too often or not, whether it is done “properly” or not, etc. — one thing is certainly true: it isn’t done because losing a lot of games is *enjoyable*. Winning is *far* more enjoyable than losing. Intentional rebuilding is almost always done as a form of delayed gratification: suffer now to hopefully lay the foundation for greater success in the future. Is that reality or myth? As with the definition of rebuilding, there is no clear rubric to identify *success*. Whether a rebuild was worthwhile is definitely in the eye of the architect — assuming they stay in the league long enough to complete it.

But for purposes of this article, I had to do something — come up with some basic way to triage each of the 59 rebuilds into *Worth the pain*, *Not worth it*, or in the case of ongoing efforts, *Too early to tell*.

In general, the longer the rebuild took, the longer and more rewarding payback I wanted to see before I categorized it as a success — thus I looked at the four categories in the first table with different expectations:

- A 2 or 3 year rebuild needed at least two 85 win seasons out of the next four seasons to qualify
- A 4 or 5 year rebuild had to have a return of three good years out of four
- A 6 to 9 year rebuild, four good years out of seven
- A 10+ year rebuild was more difficult, and almost all gut feel. It turns out three of the four were clearly not worth it, and I gave a passing grade to the 1990-2001 Calusa rebuild that resulted in winning 90+ games in four

years out of five.

With those as the criteria—again admitting their subjectivity—the report card looks like:

Report Card	Pass	Fail	TBD
2-3 year	23	2	6
4-5 yr	8	6	2
6-9 yr	3	3	2
10+ yr	1	3	0
Totals	35	14	10

The “TBD” ones are rebuilds either still ongoing or the reward period is too short to tell yet.

Conclusions from this table

Short rebuilding projects are almost always rewarded with success appropriate to the short term pain. In some cases (Columbus’ two-year build that led to fifteen 85+ win seasons in the next 19; Whitman enjoying 9 high-win seasons out of 10) the reward turned out to be *much* more than merely “appropriate.” This reinforces my belief that many of these “rebuilds” were more “retooling”, and not what I generally associate with a tear-down build-up full-fledged rebuild. I do not believe the core players needed for long, sustained success like that can be assembled in only two seasons. There had to have been significant assets lurking in place in before those down years.

Mid-length rebuilds succeed only slightly more often than not, but nowhere near the rate of the short cycle projects. And while there are some worthwhile rewards reaped (Brodbingnag’s run of four World Series appearances from 1993-1999, Riverwoolf’s 1993-1998 run averaging over 100 wins a season) there were no runs of sustained success as long as the Columbus, Whitman, or Hudson ones following short rebuilds.

Long and Very Long rebuilds were not worth the delayed gratification, with only one exception. Of the eight “losing streaks” lasting seven or more

years, only Calusa in 2002-2006 led to a period of sustained success. Five of the eight resulted in a very short one or two year period of grace, often followed by another prolonged downturn. The 2009-2017 Hoboken rebuild ended with a Division winning 97 wins in 2018, but it is too early to tell if that winning will have legs.

To close. If I were to look back and answer, “What do I think now?”, I would say:

- A true rebuild likely takes at least four years. Less than that is a Bounce. This difference — Under 4 yrs vs. 4+ years — may be a factor in considering anti-tanking rules.
- True rebuilds are rarer than I thought—less than one per season—though there are clearly multiple ones underway in 2018 (CAY, LV for example) that will almost certainly take several years to rebound.
- Real rebuilding is a risky proposition, with positive results being very close to 50%. And as with every dice roll, we are all convinced our roll will be a winner.

There is no shame in rebuilding. Every franchise has done it.

Almost. All except Maracaibo.



SNTs

SNTs, or Shiny New Things, are players that have newly arrived on a team’s roster. Each should be a major contributor to that team’s success, and is highlighted on the first page of the team article.

The following players are the SNTs for 2019.

<i>Blue Hill Mudslides:</i>	Daniel Palka, OF
<i>Brobdingnag Barbarians:</i>	Ronald Acuña, OF
<i>Calusa Indians:</i>	Jack Flaherty, P
<i>Grand Cayman Havens:</i>	Danny Jansen, C
<i>Columbus Jets:</i>	Aaron Hicks, OF
<i>Detroit Dragons:</i>	Gleyber Torres, 2B
<i>Gotham City Batman:</i>	Willy Adames, IF
<i>Hoboken Zephyrs:</i>	Shane Bieber, P
<i>Hudson Generals:</i>	Max Muncy, 1B
<i>Kansas Koyotes:</i>	Jose Rondon, IF
<i>Knoxville Blue Thunder:</i>	Adam Ottavino, P
<i>Las Vegas Gamblers:</i>	Jake Bauers, 1B
<i>Maracaibo Rumrunners:</i>	Seranthony Dominguez, P
<i>Melrose Avengers:</i>	Shohei Ohtani, P-DH
<i>Midwest Mongrels:</i>	Gio Gonzalez, P
<i>Munich Marauders:</i>	Austin Meadows, OF
<i>New West. Whiskeyjacks:</i>	Lewis Brinson, OF
<i>Northboro Phoenix:</i>	Ramon Laureano, OF
<i>Riverwolf Sharks:</i>	Edwin Encarnacion, 1B
<i>Rye Herons:</i>	Jose Abreu, 1B
<i>Strong City Statesmen:</i>	Dee Gordon, 2B
<i>Warrenton Giants:</i>	Mike Trout, OF
<i>Whitman River Rats:</i>	Yadier Molina, C
<i>Elders of Zion:</i>	Miles Mikolas, P



spontaneous unbuilding

by Richard Meyer

The Art (?) of Deconstructing A TBL Franchise

It's September of 2018. In TBL land, the New Westminster Whiskeyjacks are on their way to winning 85 games, and falling four games short of a wild card spot. Scanning the roster, there are some issues moving forward with the ballclub – not enough depth and some bad peripherals in the rotation, some down years from key offensive personnel (Tim Beckham, Jonathan Schoop, Dexter Fowler, Christian Vazquez).

But there appears to be a lot right with the team as well. The rotation starts with 109 starts of Grade 13-12-10-8, and there are two incumbent Grade 5 and 4s to fill the remainder, leaving you free to take the starting pitcher you want rather than one you need. The bullpen is heading for the offseason with 375 innings of 13*+ relief, topped by the best closer card in the set in Blake Treinen. And though the offense has some holes, there are good cards from Jose Martinez, Adam Frazier, Yadi Molina, and Ryan Braun to build around.

Yet before the month is out, the 'Jacks will trade the 30 year old Grade 27*- to-be Blake Treinen and the 27 year old Grade 14*-to-be Matt Barnes to Melrose in a deal that I cannot describe as anything but "baffling." In return, New Westminster gets two *different* relievers – 33 year old Pedro Strop, and 24 year old Grade 12*-to-be Miguel Castro – and the last pick in the 2019 fourth round. Strop is a closer, but Treinen has godlike peripherals to accompany that 27*. Barnes and Castro are both wild young right-handers; but Barnes is the eighth inning man on a soon to be real-life World Champion, and Castro is a promising but raw rookie on the worst staff in the majors. And the only compensation for this Lose-Lose combo is the 96th pick in the draft? And the spontaneous unbuild begins.

Five months later this team, like an aging mansion, has been demolished down to a shell. Four of the six members of the deep bullpen (as well as Strop, who was only passing thru the Pacific Northwest) are gone, along with one starting pitcher and *every one* of the good offensive cards. In their place are largely a passel of futures – eight draft picks in the 2019 draft (2 #2s, 5 #3s, and a #4), and three more extra picks to come in 2020.

New Westminster grabbed a lot of youth with the picks already taken and time will tell how wise those selections were. Early returns are promising for Domingo German, Ryan McMahon and Niko Goodrum who are getting playing time, and less so thus far for Daniel Palka, Max Stassi and Willie Calhoun. But the short term impact is undeniable – the 2019 edition of New Westminster on the field has gone from a strong pitching staff to a middle of the road one, and from a marginally below average offense to one cobbled together from the remainder bin at Goodwill.

And New Westminster is not alone. The defending TBL champions from Strong City, as well as Cayman, Las Vegas, and even to a lesser extent Calusa all spent their off-seasons intentionally diluting the effectiveness of their 2019 rosters as part of deliberate rebuilding efforts. These clubs made their decisions to embark on these rebuilds for different reasons, and it is certainly their right to do so.

So why is the Sensei opening his big mouth about all this? Because, collectively, the wheeling and dealing of the 2018-2019 offseason were, in this scribe's un-humble opinion, far less effective than it could have been for these ballclubs. Many deals suffered the basic losses from friction that I believe accompany any build-up or tear-down – most people trading

away commodities too often settle for 85 to 90 cents on the dollar for their trade goods on the way down, and wind up paying \$1.20 on the dollar for their acquisitions on the way back up. That's a lot of friction to overcome when you're making moves in bulk, as several teams did. And if you throw in an actual flat-out stinker of a trade once in a while, the price of not staying in your lane can get dramatic.

So for anyone who cares to listen, I'd like to try to codify the pitfalls that seem to most often show up in these transactions. As always, I am but one man, talking through my hat. However, despite the fact that my best days are behind me, I'd like to think that my long years playing this game have taught me a few lessons worth learning. So here goes.

KEY PREMISE #1. We (and by this I mean the collective *us* that I am just as much a part of as anybody here) are *not* Joe Auletta. In all my years of dice baseball, I have only seen one other GM who was as adept a trader as our Prince of Darkness. Joe takes the time to figure out what he needs during the offseason, and what he can afford to give up. He knows what other teams are likely looking for, and takes the time to figure out how to use that knowledge to his advantage. When he acquires a pick, he knows what he's likely to be using it for – when he trades a pick, it's because he has decided the names at that moment in the draft are not part of his master plan. It's a lovely thing to watch unfold each year in the draft room, but in general it is a good idea to remember that because we do not have this same level of pinpoint accuracy, our mileage, as they say, will vary.

However, while we are not Joe, you should notice that Joe's unbuilds are spectacularly deliberate and tightly focused. When Joe is unbuilding, he very much has the goal of sucking as horribly as possible to improve Brobdingnag's own draft capital. However, he does this while still retaining most of the key

pieces of his ballclub in place. Joe does not strip his team to the studs. He very selectively lowers his chances of success by introducing a handful of horrible pitchers (hopefully young minus peripheral Grade 1s like Tyler Glasnow who are both intended parts of the future, and game-losing money in the bank in the present) onto his staff, and limiting extra playing time on the offensive bench so that in game moves that might accidentally result in extra wins can be limited without obvious tanking. But he's not trading away regulars unless their 'sell by' date is visible, or someone is willing to pay him their full fair value or more. This is a model worth remembering, and emulating.

KEY PREMISE #2. Many poor deals are the product of an inadequate marketing effort. If you have decided to put someone on the block, put them on the block to *every potentially interested party in TBL*, not just the first guy you email. Take the time to solicit multiple offers. More than that, when you determine which offer is currently best, check back with your runner-ups to make sure they aren't willing to spice up the pot to reverse your decision before you close.

Conversely, when one of Joe's riders or the next message from Avengers Mansion appears on your doorstep (not trying to pick on either of these guys *per se*, it's just the metaphors they use in their trade talks), get a second opinion, or a third – before you do the other guy's deal.

Excellent example of this principle – Boomer's marketing of Julio Teheran this winter. Riverwoolf also seems to make the league as a whole aware when any of its players go on the block. Players who almost certainly did not get marketed fully – Treinen (sorry to keep going here, but that was a clear commodity that every contender would have lusted after, but didn't get the chance to), or any high grade starting pitcher who got sold cheap (yes, this means you, Darrell . . .).

KEY PREMISE #3. One stop shopping is *not your friend*. Most unbuilders who wind up trading multiple good commodities in a single deal do not generally get full value for each of the components of that deal. Some clear cut examples from the past winter:

- *Las Vegas* – Ryu, Wheeler, Familia to Warrenton for late #1, #2 and #3 picks. One pick each is not enough for two top starters.
- *Calusa* – C. Hernandez, C. Santana to Brobdingnag for Villar, a #3 and a #6. If you're assuming Hernandez and Villar is a wash, then somebody forgot to get paid for Santana.
- *Strong City* – D. Peralta, Jennings, Sandoval to Warrenton for Crick and Schebler. Peralta alone should get you Crick and Schebler – where's the return for the other two?
- *Grand Cayman* – Bader, Wade Davis, Gattis, Bud Norris, Santiago to Knoxville for Clint Frazier, 2019 Knoxville #3 and #4, 2020 Knoxville #2 and #3. It's five things for five things *but* overall it feels light.

KEY PREMISE #4. A pick received in trade seems wrapped in infinite promise, but reality is a different story. Even a pick in the back half of Round 2 is far from a sure thing. Any pick in the third round or later can be turned into a useful commodity to aid a contender, but has a lot more trouble becoming a future building block of a future dynasty. So trading a major league regular for a pick in the back half of Round 3 is bad business – the likelihood that the remaining WAR of the guy you're trading, even if that player is in his mid-thirties, will be worth more.

And by the way – getting a #3 and a #6, or a #3 and an exchange of #5s where you go up half a round: for all purposes of practical measurement, you're still getting a #3.

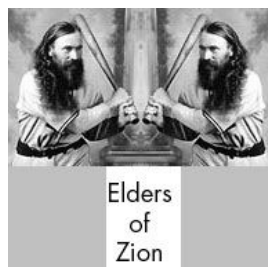
KEY PREMISE #5. Sometimes the market for someone you'd like to get rid of just isn't there. If the return you're being offered is too shallow,

just saying no should remain a fully accredited option. Too many times it appears that once a GM has got it into his head that he'd like to deal someone, there's no turning back – and that's just illogical.

The two most glaring examples of this last winter are:

Midwest's fire sale of Charlie Morton. 30 starts of a Grade 15 (one of the top 20 starter cards in the set!) For a #3, a #4 (which is only borrowed, as you return a #4 to Brobdingnag in 2020) and a #6? In a year in which you're trying to contend, even as you're strengthening one of your major competitors? Oh, wait, and .177 hitting Sandy Leon (like that helps). Made still worse by the fact that later in the same off season you traded two 2020 #3s, Danny Valencia, and Andrew Romine for Gio Gonzalez to refill the starts you essentially gave away here.

Calusa's trade of Hunter Pence for a 7th rounder. Unless you're Cory Lidle and have spent your offseason driving your plane into a building, trading a major leaguer with a real pedigree for so little is the very definition of pointlessness. While I would not personally have expected to get anything like what Pence has put forth in the first six weeks of spring with Texas (and probably in the end, you'll get a fraction of that), still the odds of getting some useful return from his fading husk is a lot higher than the likelihood of getting a tangible return from a seventh round pick.



commissioner's report

by Ray Murphy

It's been five years since I gave up my TBL team, but I haven't fully lost my TBL manager's mindset. I was reminded of that this spring amid this wave of top prospects arriving in the majors. There was Eloy Jimenez and Fernando Tatis at the start of the season, and Vlad Guerrero Jr followed soon after. Recently, this entire wave of guys like Nick Senzel, Keston Hiura, Austin Riley, Brendan Rodgers, Carter Kieboom, and Mike Soroka have followed.

Even though I haven't made a pick in a TBL draft in 5+ years now, my reaction to this prospect influx is "Man, the TBL draft is going to be pretty deep this year!"

That's the beauty of this league to me: the way it gets in your head and just stays there. Sure, it has ebbs and flows, but TBL a true year-round hobby. Even when you're not banging out your monthly games, the league still inhabits your very consciousness. Heck, I'm on year five of a detox, and I haven't even shaken it yet. I think that's pretty cool.

While researching this piece, I also just went down the wildly-enjoyable rabbit hole that is the league history section of our web site. With a few clicks I got to flash back into my own franchise history, review the members of my 2006 championship team (never gets old), and once again be amazed at how many of us have been associated with this league for so long.

Recently, I was at a retirement dinner for my day job. It's an annual event where they honor everyone from the university who retired in the past year. This year, there were 32 honorees

with a combined 943 years of association with the university.

I couldn't easily do this math on the TBL web site, but I bet Steve or someone else can get to TBL's total number of years of experience for its current managers. That has to be an equally staggering number.

So, consider this my periodic reminder, from the perspective of someone who continues to maintain a one-foot-in, one-foot-out straddle relationship with this league: what we have here is both unique and special. By all means, do everything in your power to compete as hard as you can against each other.

Try to scratch and claw your way to the top. But somewhere in that deep level of your consciousness where TBL resides, take a few moments every now and then to appreciate how undeniably cool this league is.

Then get back to scouting next year's first rounders. Because you know darn well that Joe is already doing it, so you need to be as well.



The Bullpen Manifesto

An Argument for Re-Thinking Conventional Wisdom

All TBLers know that every contender must have one – and preferably several – “closer grades”. If you don’t have a reliever graded 18*+, you may as well hang up your dice and start thinking about next year.¹ Nobody even comments about this phenomenon anymore.

As a result of this conventional wisdom, every year there is always a scramble for those relievers. The large majority of such pitchers don’t approach that height again, and are soon discarded. Yet they represent a tangible sunk cost that team after team pays, year after year, in the game of “pursue the pennant” (*not* trademark...)

Need it be so? Must we live under such a bullpen tyranny? Can a pennant winner lack an 18*? Is such a thought heresy?

“Come, let us reason together!” (*Isaiah 1:18a*) I argue that the price we pay for those 18*s is higher than it should be, and that many teams – even contenders - can (should) spend their draft picks and trade chips in a different pattern than pursuing *closer-closer-closer*.

The Narrative

I started thinking about this three years ago. In 2016, Munich followed conventional wisdom, compiling perhaps the most dominant bullpen in TBL history. No fewer than *seven* TBL-closer grades finished the season on Munich’s roster. All of them had at least a HR+24 rating, and three of them also had significantly positive control. Should have been ‘set cruise control’, right?

Outcome: 113 wins in the regular season. That bullpen put up an other-worldly 1.76 ERA while

by Paul Montague



yielding just 228 hits and 108 walks in 398 IP, good for 26 wins and 49 saves. And oh, by the way, Munich won the pennant. Yay – and doesn’t that support conventional wisdom, you’re thinking?

But it didn’t *feel* like that dominant bullpen produced the pennant. They contributed 12 losses during the regular season, so the bullpen W/L% was 68.4% – actually below the team’s 69.8%. Meanwhile the number two, three, and four starters (with Grades of ‘only’ 15, 15, 13; I’m leaving off mid-season trade acquisition Zach Greinke with his Grade 20) more than held their own with a 2.67 ERA in 514 IP. So the bullpen, with an average Grade of over 20* and the benefit of +5’s and being spotted where they could do the most good, definitely did not overshadow a starting staff that averaged 5-6 points lower in grade.

Then consider the playoffs:

NC Semi-Finals versus Melrose: The closer grades gave up Munich leads in *four* games, and yielded insurance runs to Melrose in two other games. The only game that did *not* feature a bullpen fail was Zach Greinke’s complete game shutout in Game 5. In the classic game 7, the closers choked, turning a 1-0 Melrose lead into 5-0 late, although the hitters stormed back with a pair of three-run homers in the last two innings to take the game and series for Munich. The closer grades pitched 19.2 IP, yielding 13 hits, 7 walks plus an HBP, and 5(!) HR, for a pedestrian 3.66 ERA and 1.07 WHIP.

In fact, Munich won the series only because Melrose’s three closer-grades did even worse than Munich’s five. Their cumulative stats were 6.2 IP, 14 H, 14 R, 14 ER, 4 HR, 6 BB, 6 K, 1 HBP for a staggering 18.09 ERA and 3.15 WHIP. From the series wrap-up email: “A.J. Ramos’s

¹ And, be it noted, MLB general managers have learned from us, as they too are now competing to build deep quality bullpens and downplaying starting pitching.

(Melrose's nominal actual closer) stats: 0.2 IP, 5 H, 7 R (all earned), for a mind-numbing 94.03 ERA. *He failed to record an out* (emphasis added) in 3 of his 4 appearances...." Zounds!

NC Finals versus Maracaibo: Munich won the first three games on two CG shutouts sandwiched around an 8-run offensive burst. In game 4, though, the closer-grades almost gave up a *five* run lead in the middle innings. Then came this (quoting the game writeup): "Home 9th, Munich ahead by two, bottom of the Maracaibo order due up, and an 18* on the mound. No sweat, right? Wrong, (Captain) Obvious!" – as the closer-grades *did* let the Rumrunners tie it. Munich managed to win it in the 10th. But the series sweep was no thanks to the closer-grades. As in the semi-finals, the key Munich damage was done against the other team's closer-grades, notably the two winning runs in the final game off of Matt Albers (19*).

World Series versus Whitman: More of the same. Game 1 – Greinke shutout. Game 2 – David Price shut out Munich; the Munich 'pen gave up two of Whitman's four runs. Game 3 – Munich's bullpen finally delivered, shutting out Whitman over 4.2 IP as the Marauders won 4-2. Game 4 – in the fifth, the closer-grades turned a 3-1 Marauder lead into a 7-3 deficit... Thankfully, they shut the door from there, and the offense again came back to tie the game, then win it 11-7 in 12 innings. Game 5 – Whitman won 4-3 although Munich's offense nearly came back from a 3-run deficit in the ninth off Whitman's closer J. J. Hoover. Game 6 – Munich took a 7-1 lead after five innings; the bullpen held on, but gave up a run in the seventh and two in the ninth to make it 'interesting'.

Another series writeup snippet: "Relief 'ace' Javier Lopez's Grade 27* H resulted in 4 ER in his 2.0 IP, for a sparkling 18.00 ERA... Darren O'Day, of the Grade 20*, had an 8.10 ERA for the series... for the third playoff series in a row, Munich was especially hard on the opponent's closer, as J.J. Hoover matched O'Day's 8.10 ERA

during his three appearances and 3.1 IP." In summary, from the NC Semi's game 7 writeup: "(Why do we pay for these 20*+ relievers, anyway???)"

The Analysis

So that got me thinking – every one of those playoff series saw multiple *awful* bullpen performances by TBL-closer-grade pitchers. Munich's 'dominant' bullpen's work was actually a handicap. The offense had to make up for the loogies the bullpen horked, over and over.

The bullpen stats were simply puzzling. Look at these two playoff stat lines:

	IP	H	BB	K	HR	ERA
A	9.2	7	2	6	2	2.79
B	9.2	5	2	13	2	2.79

One of those stat lines belongs to Hector Rondon (Grade 18* C+31 HR+34), the other to Adam Warren (Grade 10/16* C+0 HR+26 – he pitched mostly as the 16*, but at least a couple of IP as the 10 without the *). So which of them is Pitcher A, which is Pitcher B? (*Warren is A; Rondon is B – the only real clue is the extra whiffs from Rondon's X.*)

Or ponder these:

	IP	H	BB	K	HR	ERA
C	7.1	3	1	4	2	6.14
D	6.2	5	2	2	0	5.40
E	9.0	5	5	8	1	7.00

This time the choices are Javier Lopez (Grade 27* C-26 HR+52), Darren O'Day (Grade 20* C+25 HR+25), and Brett Cecil (Grade 16* C+26 HR+26). Which is which? (*Cecil is C; Lopez is D; O'Day is E.*)

Observation: *Over a short set of results, such as the playoffs*, pitchers can easily have their objective quality (as reflected by Grade+C+HR ratings) be overcome by uncontrollable factors (errors and other fielding outcomes, RP results, the peculiarities of the APBA hit charts), such that their

performances in those games can become indistinguishable.

So if we want to look at this in an economic cost-benefit fashion, the “benefit” of the TBL closer-grade is starting to look hazy.

What about the cost side of the analysis? This can be harder to quantify. Most of the 2016 Marauder relievers were acquired in multi-player trades. But a quick squint at a couple of recent drafts may provide a general idea of how the league values closer-grade relievers.

Most recently, the 2019 draft had only five relievers available with a Grade of at least 18*.² Three of the five were gone by the end of the first round, with the first one coming on pick 10. Another went early in the second round, and the last (who has only 23 IP) in the late third.

By comparison, in the 2016 draft there were 10 such relievers (although only two had over 50 IP). Whether because of the increased supply, or because their likely career values were perceived as lower, the first of them was drafted late in the second round, the last in the fifth round.

I believe the wait to grab a closer in 2016 was an anomaly. In 2017, two relievers were taken in the first round, including one (Alex Reyes) who was known to have an injury that would cost a year of playing time. In 2018, two super-closers, both 25*, were first rounders.

In general, lately³ closers who have significant IP and/or are perceived as likely to remain elite

relievers for several years, go in the mid-late first round, and closer grades (even with few innings) are generally gone by the end of the third round. (I didn’t try to study trades for this article, but my perception is that closer-grades cost similarly in trade as in the draft.)

So, we can perhaps guess that the 2016 Marauders’ closer überstash might have cost something like four first-rounders, two seconds, and a third if they had all been acquired via the draft in the same time frame.

To give a rough idea of the opportunity cost⁴ of that, in the 2016 draft, those picks (if not spent on this theoretically-available bullpen) might have yielded something like: Joc Pederson or Byron Buxton⁵, J.T. Realmuto, Michael Conforto, Eddie Rosario, Travis Shaw, Aaron Nola, and Domingo Santana. Not a bad group, eh? They wouldn’t have helped a lot in that pennant drive – but they’ve actually increased in value as a group since then.

By comparison, of the closer-grades that Munich was leaning on in 2016, exactly one – Andrew Miller – retains any particular value, with three others being fringy major leaguers today, and the remaining three out of baseball. Subjective though it is, this does indicate that these relievers are expensive and may mean passing up players who have significantly more long-term value.⁶

The Counter-Argument

I can hear what you’re thinking: “C’mon, Paul, you’re cherry-picking data based on one year of

² Three of those were ‘openers’, which clouds the perceptions of their usage and value.

³ This wasn’t always the case. For at least the first half of TBL’s history, relievers were scorned in the draft, with closers sometimes not starting to go until the third round. However, even during that period, top relievers could fetch a high price in trade – I seem to recall East Anglia dealing two firsts and a second to acquire two closer-grades, at the start of the winter meetings one year in the late 1980’s or early 1990’s.

⁴ If you’re not familiar with this phrase, it’s economist talk for what you could have gotten for the same price had you chosen not to buy what you actually did buy. If you choose to buy a Mantle rookie baseball card for \$50,000, you can’t use that money to buy a camper and take a leisurely trip across the country.

⁵ Remember that this is before Buxton demonstrated that he is mortal.

⁶ Certainly, the closer-grade value on a contender today may be worth the investment if he brings a pennant – but what if he doesn’t? As my 2016 playoff journey demonstrates, this investment is far from a guarantee, even when the bullpen is Really Really Deep.

one team, and mostly using short-series effects. Plus there's no systematic quantitative analysis of the costs. It feels really subjective. And even *you*, Paul, would rather have a Grade 20* than a 15* than a 10*, other things being equal."

And you'd be right, to a point. Certainly, all of us would agree that a Grade 20* has a better chance of stopping a hit than a Grade 15*. And yes, I haven't done a scientific study of this whole issue; what I'm saying *is* subjective. I'll even add yet another caveat – not all closer-grades are created equal. For example, a Grade 20* C+24 HR+42 (let's say) is worth quite a bit more than a Grade 20* C-15 HR-12. A Grade 20* with 25 IP who is 34 years old is worth much less than a fireballing 23-year-old with 70 IP and a glowing scouting report regarding his future.

So, yes, nothing here is definitive. But the objections aren't either. For example, while the narrative addresses Munich in 2016, recall that every one of Munich's opponents in those playoffs saw their seasons end due significantly to their own closer-grades failing to do what they were 'paid' to do. *Every One Of Them*. It wasn't so much that Munich's bullpen *succeeded* (it really didn't); rather it was that Munich's closergrades *failed a bit less* than the opponents'.

The Manifesto

I listen to a fair amount of fantasy baseball podcast talk. One thing you hear a lot goes like this: "Would you rather take Jones at the end of the second round, or Johnson in the fifth round?" It's a rhetorical question – Jones may be a tad

better, but for what each will cost in the draft, Johnson may well provide better return on investment.

Economists would say that Jones has a slightly higher value but Johnson has a significantly lower "marginal cost", resulting in Johnson being the better investment.

This is the basis of my argument: What is the marginal value of a Grade 20* versus a Grade 15*? I am coming to believe that the TBL market overvalues and therefore overprices Grade 20*s.

I'm putting my money where my mouth is. In the 2019 draft, I passed on the available closer-grades and chose to invest in relievers between Grades 13* and 16* starting in the 4th round. Combined with trades, Munich has well over 500 IP of useful bullpen, almost 300 IP of which is from those grades. No closer-grade. I believe – or at least hope – that this, combined with a decent (not overwhelming) offense and very good starting pitching, will allow the Marauders to contend, perhaps even nose out Hudson in the Mantle Division. Tune in a year from now to see if the experiment succeeds.

"Managers of TBL unite – we have nothing to lose but our (bullpen) chains!"



Back to Normal

We are accustomed to seeing the *Whitman River Rats* at the top of the Clemente Division standings. For more than two decades, **Brian Hanley** has shown great skill in keeping his team in contention – eight division titles and fifteen playoff appearances (including last year) in twenty-three years; eight times the team has won 100 or more games. They’ve only had one shot at the Series, losing to Munich in 2016.



We think they’ll be on top this year, though it doesn’t seem likely that the club will put up 100 wins. It’s a good team, but prob-

ably not a great team, but Mr. Hanley will get as much out of his players as any manager in TBL.

Brian’s old friend in *Blue Hill*, **Mark Ludwig**, will not be making it easy for the Rats to get across the finish line. The *Mudslides* have a ton of young talent, and the team has really come together. We find it hard to bet against it, but they do fall short on statistical categories.

It need not be said that Blue Hill hasn’t enjoyed as much success as Whitman. They’ve only made it to the playoffs five times, but last year was about as good a season as the club has ever had, going to the International Conference championship against Gotham City, after nosing out Riverwoolf and beating them in the playoffs. We expect great things from this club, in the future and possibly now as well.



2018 Clemente Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Blue Hill*	97	65	.599	—
Riverwoolf†	94	68	.580	3
Whitman§	89	73	.549	8
Calusa	72	90	.444	25

* Lost to Gotham City in IC Championship.
† Lost to Blue Hill in the Conference playoff.
§ Lost to Riverwoolf in Wild Card playoff.

New to the Clemente is the defending champion *Strong City Statesmen*, who rolled over the league in classic fashion and won the World Series from Gotham City. It was **Eric Sheffler**’s second time in the Fall Classic, and his first victory (and the franchise’s second one).

Now it is time to pay for all of that. But the club isn’t awful: there are still some talented players on the roster, including a few pitchers, and Statesmen management expresses its desire to win as many games as possible. It might not be the best course for the club, but it is a noble effort. Different folks reap the whirlwind in different ways.



Meanwhile, up in Canada, the *Riverwoolf Sharks* have turned over even more of the roster than usual, and **Daniel Dumont** has also spent most of his 2020 draft to bring in the new crop of players. We’re at something of a loss to discern the plan in place – since we’re kinder and gentler now we don’t presume to suggest that there isn’t one.



But until we settle on a good nickname, our comprehension may continue to be compromised.

Clemente Division

- 
- | | |
|----------------|------|
| 1. Whitman | 27.0 |
| 2. Blue Hill | 23.0 |
| 3. Strong City | 20.0 |
| 4. Riverwoolf | 17.5 |

Paul Goldschmidt,
Whitman

2018 whitman RIVER RATS in review



What went mostly right was the team's record.

by Craig Musselman

2018 in Review

Final Record: 89-73 (3rd, Clemente)

The Whitman River Rats are perennial playoff contenders, having made the TBL playoffs nine of the past ten years, which is a rare feat in TBL.

In what was a somewhat off year, Whitman made the playoffs yet again with an 89-73 record, edging Midwest by one game for the second wildcard playoff berth. Making the playoffs was a struggle. The team sat at 62-58 as of the end of September, but they played well late in the year to salvage a decent record. The season ended with a 4-2 series loss to the Riverwolf Sharks.

The River Rats scored 744 runs and yielded 743, and parlayed that into an 89-73 record. The only way to accomplish that is to win the close ones, which they did.

What went right?

Clayton Kershaw (13-6, 3.24 ERA) and Blake Snell (13-7, 2.82 ERA) pitched well. Kershaw threw five shutouts and led the International Conference in strikeouts. Tyler Clippard was 8-2 in 65 relief appearances.

The offense was led by very fine years from 1B Paul Goldschmidt and 3B Jose Ramirez. Goldschmidt hit 37 home runs, scored 121 runs and had 113 RBI's, fine production by any measure. Ramirez had 27 homers and knocked in 109. Miguel Rojas hit .310 in 90 games at short. The offensive production of the rest of the team was somewhat pedestrian.

What went mostly right was the team's record. They won more games than one might

have expected based on the team's aggregate performance.

What went wrong?

The closers saved a lot of those close games, but they didn't pitch very well with ERA's of about 3.60. Carlos Gonzalez is not the Cargo of old, hitting .251 with 14 home runs in nearly a full season.

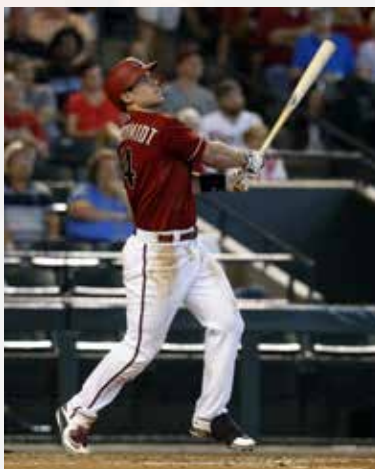
3 Things

1. *The "Big Three" Starters.* Kershaw, Snell and David Price form the nucleus of a fine pitching staff. Pitching has been Whitman's strength for more than a decade, and, with those three, that will continue as long as they continue to pitch well.

2. *How Long Can This Run Continue?* Price is 33, Kershaw 31, but Snell is young and Cy Young quality. 2019 first round pick Joey Lucchesi was selected in hopes of keeping the pitching staff solid going forward. Whitman is playoff-competitive for 2019. 2020 looks competitive, at

least so far nearing the quarter pole. In the near term it looks like it's still running.

3. *Is a Championship In Reach?* Here's the thing, though. In its 23 year history, Whitman has never won the championship. The team has lost two World Series and five conference championships. They risk being the TBL equivalent of the Buffalo Bills in their Super Bowl years. Getting to a championship level will be quite difficult without the ability to restock with premier talent. Still, the team is fun to play, and fun to play against because they're always competitive.



Goldschmidt: Very fine

whitman RIVER RATS



Brian Hanley (24th year)

The real question is what the other parts of the team will do.

It is as much a testament to the management as to the talent on the club that Whitman managed 89 wins and a playoff berth last year. We actually thought they were going to be pretty bad: but as we said, *you place your bets and see how things go.*

They went better than Brian Hanley, the Clemente Division, or anyone else could have expected: the pre-play liked them a little better (77-85 was the “typical season”, though Mr. Beard’s computer simulation did present one and a half pennants and one Wild Card appearance). Getting as far as 89-73 was a triumph of a few very good bats and very good arms carrying the rest of the team on their backs for 162 games. In the end they didn’t get out of the Wild Card round, though, so it was a transition to what’s coming this year. The future has been sacrificed for the present again, and Whitman is loaded. We think it’s enough to win the Clemente . . . though there are more talented contenders in the conference. They’ll be placing their bets again this year, but at a more expensive table.

Pitching: Strong believers.

9.5

The River Rats have always been strong believers in pitching. It’s often wild, usually deep, and regularly left-handed. This year is no exception – and especially when compared to last year, is very much a team strength.

ROTATION. We have become quite accustomed to heaping effusive praise on Clayton Freaking Kershaw in this space, but he is not the first card that springs into view this year. The new ace is lefty Blake Snell (Grade 21 C-16 HR+24);



Snell: This worked out



SNT: Yadier Molina.

Even at age 37, Yady is still one of the best catchers in baseball – and he adds power to the lineup as well. Good contender acquisition.

Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Victor Arano, John Axford, Ryan Larmar, Jorge Lopez, Joey Lucchesi, Seth Lugo, Lance Lynn, Yadier Molina, Brett Phillips, Rene Rivera, Pedro Strop, Anthony Swarzak, Richard Urena.

Departed: John Axford, Drew Butera, Eddie Butler, Santiago Casilla, Yovani Gallardo, Dillon Gee, Daniel Gossett, Alen Hanson, J.J. Hoover, Phil Maton, Ricky Nolasco, Ben Revere, Chris Stewart.

this third-year first rounder certainly worked out. Kershaw’s certainly capable as well (Grade 12 C+34), and David Price (Grade 12 C+15) has returned to form. Together that’s 88 top-notch starts, all lefthanded, in keeping with the theme. Lefties sometimes hit strong head winds in TBL due to L+ platoon splits; but Whitman plays the computer game at home, which should help.

To go with this triple threat are three lesser lights: Ross Stripling (Grade 9 C+36 HR-16), Joey Lucchesi (Grade 9 C+12 HR-25) and Lance Lynn (Grade 7 C-34 HR+31). Stripling and Lynn are righties, rookie Lucchesi is another lefty. While a



step below the top three, these other arms are serviceable, though they're likely to be bailed out more often, and earlier, than the southpaws at the top of the rotation.

BULLPEN. Whitman features a fairly deep bullpen with a number of good arms, both left- and righthanded. Use of the pen will be key to Whitman's success this season, and the standard instructions provide an excellent guide to making the best of them.

Two closer grades top the relief crew. Lefty Tony Sipp (Grade 19* C-14 HR+55) and righty Pedro Strop (Grade 18* HR+33) provide about a hundred fine innings (more for Strop than Sipp); Seth Lugo has 78 fine setup innings as a Grade 16* (C+24 HR+22) and may see some end game use as well.

The rest of the pen is pretty much mix and match, though the instructions do assign specific roles. Tyler Clippard (Grade 13* HR-25), Victor Arano (Grade 12* C+26 HR+15) and Nick Vincent (Grade 10* C+33), all righties, provide reliable middle relief, though Emilio Pagan (Grade 10* C+15 HR-32) and Jake Diekmann (Grade 9* C-52 HR+35) are a little more chancy. Still, there should be little need to see rookie Jorge Lopez (Grade 5) or waiver pickup Anthony Swarzak (Grade 4* C-52 HR-41) as the others have about 320 innings between them.

The staff could use one more solid middle reliever, especially to help the lower end starters, but this is a good group overall.

Offense: 9.5
One, two . . . and uninspiring.

The Whitman offensive attack begins with a very powerful one-two attack at the infield corners: Jose Ramirez (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 5 walks+22,



Ramirez, Goldschmidt: One, two

D33 for 40 SBA, L-7 R+1) and Paul Goldschmidt (1-5-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, F25 for 11 SBA). These two guys are in the lineup every day, and qualify as *Guys You Don't Want To Face*. The third member of this two-man team is the pretty solid Carlos Gonzalez (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, F28 for 7 SBA, L-5 R+1). He'll be in most lineups, as will Nick Markakis (0-6-6, 11 hits, 3 walks), who at least has doubles power in his advancing age. Hunter Renfroe, last year's SNT, has good power but lacks on-base (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks); he bats low enough in the order that he'll provide the occasional lightning strike.

The supporting cast is more pedestrian. Matt Duffy will be the everyday DH (11 hits, 2 0s, 2 10s, E26 for 18 SBA); Nick Williams will be in lineups versus righties (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42); Yadier Molina will get most of the reps behind the plate (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks). The middle infield is fairly weak with Tim Anderson (1-4-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, C30 for 34 SBA: his speed will be curbed by his limited ability to get on base), Miguel Rojas (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+22), Kolten Wong (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42), and Brock Holt (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+42). None are very inspiring.

While the top end of the offense is very, very good, there may well be some empty innings depending on how the dice fall. The team has a surprising amount of speed, and obviously the best cards have power: but there are a number of others that do not. We can imagine some games with a pile of runs, and others with very few.

Defense: 6.0
One, two . . . and more.

Last year's River Rats were given good marks for defense, and this year's team exceeds that rating. The fielders are led, again, by the stellar Ramirez and Goldschmidt (3B5 and 1B5) at the infield corners, with a solid Fielding One catcher in Molina (C8 Th-1). His backup, Rene Rivera, is only a C7, but has a Molina-in-his-prime Th+6 to make up for it. Kolten Wong (2B9) is terrific



Ramirez, Goldschmidt: One, two

when he's in there, as is Miguel Rojas (SS9); the semi-regular shortstop Anderson (SS8) and part time secondbaseman Holt (2B7) not so much. In the outfield Markakis (OF3, 34 arm) is flanked by two OF2s in Williams and Gonzalez (both with 33 arms); when Renfroe plays he's an OF1. Ryan LaMarre is better (OF2, 31 arm). Matt Duffy's 3B4 won't see much action, nor Tony Wolters' C8. It's definitely a team strength.

Bench: 2.5
Versatility is the key.

Much of the Whitman bench strength results from the variety of options for the starting lineup. Rojas/Holt/Anderson/Wong provide choices based on opponent pitching; Williams, Renfroe, and rookie Ryan LaMarre (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L+5 R-5) can be swapped in and out as needed. As noted, Rivera is actually a late inning defense option against faster rival lineups. This versatility is the majority of our positive evaluation of the Whitman bench.

The pure bench players won't see a lot of use. Former power threat Todd Frazier (1-5-6, 8 hits,

4 walks+22) doesn't do much; Tony Wolters (6 hits, 4 walks) will be catching at AAA; and the youthful Richard Urena (2 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks) and Brett Phillips (3-5, 7 hits, 3 walks+22) are lottery picks for the future.

1st

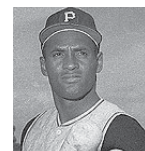
We like Blue Hill's direction for the present and future, but we think Whitman is the canny pick to win the Clemente this year. The starters are too good, the bullpen too deep (and Mr. Hanley is a master of its use). Their two superstars are very good, and will make a difference in close games. These are all matters on which there is no question.

The real question is what the other parts of the team will do. Is the pen deep enough to keep them in games when the lesser starters go, or the lefties face big shifts on the board? Can light-hitting parts of the lineup step up to accompany the more reliable ones? Is the team speed – and there's plenty of it – make enough of a difference?

Those questions make us wonder if Whitman might make one or more moves if they're close down the stretch. The window for this version of the team won't be open forever; key parts are getting a bit old (Molina is 37, Sipp 36, Markakis 35, Price, Stop and Gonzalez are 33, Goldschmidt and Kershaw 31). The desire to win now may crowd out long-term common sense. And why not? It's all about placing those bets.

Let's see what happens.

TQ: 27.0



Whitman RIVER RATS



2018 blue hill MUDSLIDES in review

The only thing that truly went wrong was running into a tough team from Gotham City.

by Mark Ludwig



2018 in Review

Final Record: 97-65 (1st, Clemente)

Blue Hill had one of its best seasons going 97-65 and winning the Clemente Division. The team was consistent winning 49 games on the road and 48 at home. What really helped was going 9-5 against division rival Riverwoolf as we finished 3 games ahead of them in the standings. We followed that up by beating them in the playoffs and advancing to the Conference Championship for the first time.

What went right?

Trevor Story led the team with 36 HR; Manny Pina surprised Blue Hill by leading the team in BA (.316) and Slugging% (.532). Rising star Christian Yelich contributed 37 doubles, and Bryce Harper in a shortened season managed a .301 average, leading the team with .386 OBP. The 2018 team set a franchise record with 223 HR.

Jose Urena went 18-5 to lead the team in wins and Alex Wood led with a 2.61 ERA and 202 strikeouts. The bullpen contributed 45 saves which is the third most ever, and the team ERA 3.55 was the fourth best in team history.

What went wrong?

Blue Hill struck out a franchise record 1,471 times, so moving base runners along was a challenge. There also were few threats on the base paths as Christian Yelich led the team with

only 14 SB. Based on his card, I expected a much better season out of Kurt Suzuki, who only batted .221 with 14 homers; but considering the season outcome, the only thing that truly went wrong was running into a tough team from Gotham City, which ruined any hopes of a World Series berth.

3 Things



Urena: Leader

1. *Title defense.* It's going to be hard to defend the Clemente title, as the River Rats are loaded this year, the Sharks are going to be tough once again, and if that wasn't enough, the reigning World Series Champion Statesmen have moved into the division!

2. *Emerging superstars.* Trevor Story should be even better this year! Also, I expect NL MVP Christian Yelich to put up some big numbers. We won't be breaking the team HR record but we still will hit some and we could challenge the strikeout record.

3. *A thin bench, but a strong closer.* There is not a lot on the bench, besides a limited Luke Voit, so the regulars need to have good seasons. The starting pitching isn't good as last year but hopefully will be good enough; the bullpen isn't as deep but I do have Ardolis Chapman and his Grade 24* ready to close out the games.

blue hill MUDSLIDES

Mark Ludwig (24th year)

It's hard to bet against this much talent.



There is a possibly-apocryphal story that Rich Meyer tells, about a team in another league that sets out to build a long-term contender by adding “one good player a year”. The problem is that by the tried-and-true Anton Rule, you need at least 15 of those guys to really contend; and by the time the team reached Year 15, the Year 1 guy would be selling NutraLife™ back in his home town, the year 2-4 guys would all have arthritic knees, and . . . well, you get the idea.

For a while it looked as if Blue Hill’s trajectory was to draft early, take one or two talented players to go with the talent on the club, only to see other parts of the club fall off the end, leaving them in the bridesmaid position. But lately that direction has changed. Talent has really started to concentrate in the last few years: Harper, Yelich, Eflin, Alonso, Story, Urena, Wood, Devers, McCullers, McNeil; in the meanwhile additional players have come to the roster to supplement them: Voit, Pearce, Anderson, Chapman, Suzuki, Pina . . . this team has a lot of players that other teams would love to have on their rosters. Last year the Mudslides won 97 games, one of their best seasons ever; this year’s club may find it a little tougher sledding, but it’s hard to bet against this much talent.

Turnover Rate: **34%**

Arrived: Jason Adam, Aaron Altherr, Chase Anderson, Justin Anderson, Jorge Bonifacio, Carson Fulmer, Jaime Garcia, Pierce Johnson, Jeff McNeil, Daniel Palka, Sean Rodriguez, Jaime Schultz.

Departed: Darwin Barney, Matt Belisle, Matt Bowman, Odrisamer Despaigne, Juan Graterol, Kendall Graveman, Chase Headley, Luis Perdomo, Luis Valbuena, Jayson Werth, Chase Whitley.

We pick them to fall short of the Whitman club, but with reservations: the River Rats have some great talent, but aren’t a juggernaut. Blue Hill will give them a fight all summer; this should be a great pennant race between old friends. We’re eager to see how it turns out.

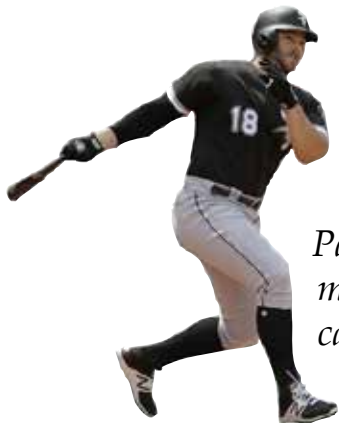
Pitching: 7.0 **Decent grades, but poor peripherals.**

Unlike Whitman, the rotation doesn’t start with a Grade 21; but also unlike Whitman, Blue Hill has a high-grade, lights-out closer in Aroldis Chapman. This pitching staff is overall slightly better than last year’s, and last year’s got them 97 wins.

ROTATION. The top rated starter is the often injured Lance McCullers (Grade 13 C-24 HR+24), who gets 22 opportunities this year. His wing man is the recently-acquired Chase Anderson (Grade 12 C-15 HR-33, 30 starts). They in turn are accompanied by two capable full season starters: Alex Wood (Grade 9 lefty C+25 HR+22) and Jose Urena (Grade 9 righty C+23 HR+12). This quartet gets Blue Hill 110 starts into the season, just over two-thirds of those needed.

SNT: Daniel Palka

The latest power-hitting talent added to the Blue Hill roster, Palka is a work in progress: when he makes contact, the ball goes far. If he can develop major league chops, he’ll be a very dangerous hitter.





The remainder will be filled by some lesser lights. Zach Eflin (Grade 6 C+23) fills about half of them; the rest are split between Brent Suter (Grade 6 C+36 HR-26) and waiver acquisition Jaime Garcia (Grade 6 C-44). Not awful, but not inspiring. Garcia, in fact, is an upgrade, replacing a Grade 1 who would've had to go 10 times. Note that Edwin Jackson, a Grade 14, is being used out of the bullpen.

BULLPEN. Speaking of which, having a Grade 24* at the end of a game is huge. Aroldis Chapman has his faults (C-62) but also his advantages (HR+51, KXY on the boards) and should get a lot of critical outs. His principal setup man is the aforementioned Edwin Jackson (Grade 14 C-24), who has 92 innings of use; he's a decided improvement over lefty Justin Anderson (Grade 13* C-62 HR+44) and rookie Jaime

Schultz (Grade 15* C-62 HR-31 - "I would rather see him come into an inning clean with no base runners." Roger that.) This trio backs up Chapman's 51 innings with 177 more.



Chapman: Huge

After this group it's a flotilla of bulk innings. Blake Parker (Grade 11* C+16 HR-23) is the best of the lot for 66 innings; Adam Morgan and Cory Gearrin are Grade 9*s from left and right; and waiver pickup Pierce Johnson offers 44 innings of a wild 7* (C-44).

The grades are decent at the top end, but there are some problems with peripherals. This team could really use a hundred better innings, and may have to think about the possibility of trading for them if they're at all close down the stretch. Based on the heavy drive toward rebuilding across the league, there should be some arms available.

Offense: Pleasant commentary.

9.0

Now for some pleasant commentary. We must begin with the MVP: the outstanding Christian Yelich (1-4-5-5, 11 hits, 4 walks+22, E32 for 28 SBA). A great card for a great season, and it will put up numbers this year.



Yelich: MVP

He has friends. Trevor Story, who has seemed at times like a free-swinging with no discipline, turned in a wonderful season last year (1-0-0-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks+22, D31 for 33 SBA, L+5 R-4). Bryce Harper isn't quite the monster he was but is still dangerous (1-0-0-0-0, 8 hits, 6 walks, F31 for 16 SBA); rookie Daniel Palka (1-1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks) hints at greater cards to come. Luke Voit (1-1-1-0-0, 11 hits, 4 walks) is terrific in part time use, while Steve Pearce, Red Sox hero, has a solid half season (1-0-0-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks+42), and rookie Jeff McNeil (3 0s, 12 hits, 2 walks+42, E34) is a nice addition for 63 games.

The rest of the lineup positions are more pedestrian, but have a little power. Kurt Suzuki (1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+42+22) and Manny Pina (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks) share the catching; Yonder Alonso (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks) and Hunter Pence (3 0s, 9 hits, E32) will be in some games, as will Rafael Devers (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks) and Yolmer Sanchez (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-8, E27).

Most of the offense is very solid, with excellent power. The difference between the top-heavy lineups in Whitman and Riverwolf might be the Mudslides' advantage in a divisional pennant race, and makes them a dangerous team every day.

Defense: The boys can field.

5.0

And by the way: the boys can field as well. Trevor Story is great on both sides of the ball: he's a defensive standout (SS9). So is Yelich (OF3, 31 arm) and Harper (OF2, 36 arm). The catchers are solid at C8, though Suzuki's Th-3 is a liability; Pina, on the other hand, is an outstanding Th+5. Alonso (1B4) and Sanchez (3B5) round out the Fielding One players.

The rest of the lineup is solid Fielding Two. Altherr, Palka and Pence (OF2), McNeil and Sanchez (2B7), Voit and Pearce (both 1B3s) will neither help nor hurt. Devers (3B3) appears to be safely off the field most of the time.

Bench: Mostly it's about platoons.

2.0

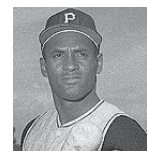
The best of the team is usually in the starting lineup, due to usage constraints, but there are a few options for Blue Hill management. Careful use of Voit and Pearce will be helpful; the same is true of McNeil, who has limited use but a great card.

Aaron Altherr (3 Os, 7 hits, 5 walks) is a bit of a bearded lady with a L+2, but it's an ugly card; Jorge Bonifacio (3 Os, 8 hits, 4 walks, L+6) is more or less more of the same.

Still, it's a characteristic of a team that approaches or is in the midst of contention that there are options for lineups and platoon switches. Blue Hill is some ways away from the also-ran days of pat lineups and no real threats in the offense; still, they could use a good backup player and may want to go look for one if they're in the hunt come the fall.



Story: Defensive standout



blue hill MUDSLIDES

2nd

Our TQ ratings, notorious in their fallibility, says that this club is a fair distance behind Whitman, and a long way ahead of the rebuild in Strong City and the – whatever the hell is going on up in Rivière-du-Loup. Confidence in our predicting suggests that we should believe the numbers, but as noted, there is a lot of talent here.

Still, the pitching is somewhat suspect, and some of the cool hitting toys don't get to play every day. It will take some good management to get the best out of the roster. But a quick look at these guys suggests that, unlike some teams close by, the key contributors could be around for some time to come. We see good things ahead.

Blue Hill Youth Movement

Ages as of 07/01/2019

- 28: Altherr, P. Johnson, Voit, Wood
- 27: McNeil, Palka, Sanchez, Schultz, Urena, Yelich
- 26: J. Anderson, Bonifacio, Harper, Story
- 25: Eflin, Fulmer, McCullers
- 22: Devers

TQ: **23.0**



2018 strong city STATESMEN in review

Of course it was worth it.

by Eric Sheffler
(and the *Annual* staff)



2018 in Review Final Record: 112-50 (1st, Aaron)

(Note from the editor. The following is what we received from Sheffler.)

In an effort to guarantee I stay within format guidelines here is my report for the 2019 *Annual*.

Statesmen take it all in 2018!

What went right:

- 1) We won the Aaron Division
- 2) We won the National Conference
- 3) We won the TBL Championship

What went wrong:

- 1) We didn't win every game

2019?

- 1) We are switching to new division, conference, and game format
- 2) We won't win it all
- 3) We have Four 1st round draft picks in the next draft

(We feel obliged to provide a little more information.)

What went right?

Pretty much everything. The team won 112 games to lead the league, and was also tops in ERA, third in batting average and homers, scoring the most runs and allowing the fewest. It's a wonder they didn't win every game.

Carlos Carrasco was the mound ace (22-4, 2.73, 258 Ks in 215 innings). The bullpen, led by Andrew Miller (5-1, 0.76, 42 saves) was lights out. Khris Davis khrushed 53 homers, second only to

Giancarlo Stanton's 54. Three other players topped the 30 mark. It was a dominant team on both sides of the ball, and rolled to a championship.

What went wrong?

As far as 2018 was concerned, really nothing. If there is any remorse, it's buyer's remorse: the team was built for the archetypical one-year run, and it's likely to have a serious down year in 2019. They earned their trophy, and opponents will weep crocodile tears as they bring the Statesmen back to earth this year.



Carrasco: Ace

3 Things

1. *Of course it was worth it.* Teams stretch themselves to get a chance to play in the World Series. Not every team in TBL gets there. This club has a lifetime record of 2856-2758; the franchise has won both World Series it's appeared in, this year and in 2006 as the Portland Possum. As for Mr. Sheffler, he's been to the Series twice – this year and way back in 1989. He'll take his lumps because it was worth it.

2. *Draft again, vigorously.* A rebuild is in order, but there are some good pieces to build around. It will be a little while before this caliber can be achieved again, but Mr. Sheffler is nothing but patient.

3. *Musselman was right.* On a similar occasion, and after similar results, the Rye manager was ready for a rebuild after a Series win, and said, "boy, that was fun." We completely agree.

strong city STATESMEN



Eric Sheffler (16th year)

Keep an eye on this Sheffler guy.

No further observations are required with regard to the Strong City romp through TBL last year. They were that good: they did what they came to do, and now they get to reap the whirlwind. It's quite a whirlwind, too, especially the pitching staff, which was unstoppable last year; it's become far more stoppable.

Still, it's not a terrible team. We know: we've seen terrible teams, and the presence of players like Carlos Carrasco, Nolan Arenado, Kris Davis and Justin Upton suggests that whirlwind reaping out in Strong City isn't quite what it is in Brobdingnag, Munich, or Warrenton. This team is not a contender: most of the rotation is troublesome, the bullpen is very thin, there are games (and hits and walks) missing from the batters. We're pretty sure that .500, the optimistic goal mentioned in the Statesmen instructions, is out of reach. An axe has been taken to the roster, as shown above right: two thirds of last year's team is gone elsewhere or disappeared from the league. Only a handful of guys with 2018 rings remain in Strong City.

So the question is: are we looking at a rebuild or a bounce? It's unclear. There are, indeed, four #1 picks in hand for 2020, and the guys that remained are the guys you want to have. In some ways, it's what we recommend: if you're going to rebuild, keep the guys who will be still solid in the next contender. They'll be a long way from the worst in the league.

Keep an eye on this Sheffler guy.

Pitching: **4.0**
Things have changed.

Teams stepping back traditionally give up pitching first: it's often what contenders want to

Turnover Rate: 66%

Arrived: Steven Brault, Alex Claudio, Zach Duke, Brian Flynn, Adam Frazier, Jarlin Garcia, Leury Garcia, Dee Gordon, Jordan Hicks, Tommy Hunter, Jordy Mercer, Frankie Montas, Kevin Newman, Daniel Norris, Chris Owings, Luis Perdomo, Michael Pineda, Kevin Plawecki, Drew Pomeranz, Fernando Rodney, Sergio Romo, Addison Russell, Taylor Ward.

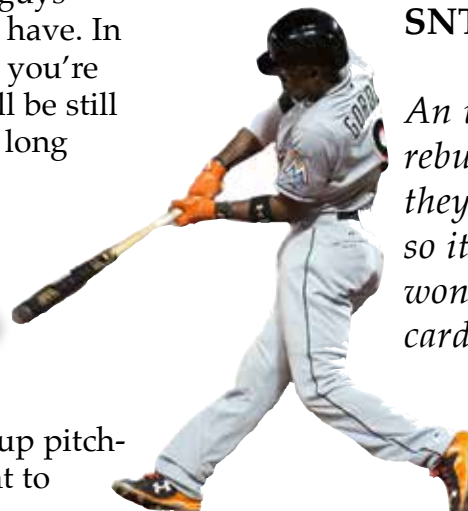
Departed: Alexi Amarista, Chase Anderson, Chris Bassitt, Austin Bibens-Dirkx, Steven Brault, Steve Cishek, Zack Cozart, Kyle Crick, Nelson R. Cruz, Scott Feldman, Adeiny Hechavarria, Tommy Hunter, Adam Lind, Ryan Madson, Jhan Marinez, Jefry Marte, Jeff Mathis, Joe Mauer, Stephen Strasburg, Anthony Swarzak, Matt Wisler, Jimmy Yacabonis.

acquire. The axe fell very hard on the champs' pitching staff, leaving a thin bullpen and a rotation that requires nine guys to fill all the starts.

ROTATION. Before diving into the clown car, let's take a few moments to appreciate Carlos Carrasco (Grade 11 C+31 HR+16, 30 starts). He's the #1 starter here, and could be a top notch guy just about anywhere.

SNT: Dee Gordon.

An unusual choice for a rebuild; the Statesmen say they want to be competitive, so it makes sense ... but it won't help a lot. Still, nice card to have – or to trade.





strong city STATESMEN

From there, we drop to Zack Godley, a full season Grade 7 (C-31 HR+25). That's just about all the good news; Jarlin Garcia is a scary Grade 16 (C-23 HR-46) for 7 starts.

The rest of the starters are there to give up runs. Frankie Montas has a mere 11 starts as a competent 6 (HR+34), Daniel Norris is a Grade 5 (C-24 HR-16) for 8 starts, and Andrew Cashner is a full season Grade 4 (C-22 HR-14). The rest of the turns belong to Grade 3s – Drew Pomeranz (C-56) and “opener” Sergio Romo (C+14 HR-15) – and Grade 1 Luis Perdomo.

They're going to give up runs, and lots of them. Carrasco will try to go as deep as possible, and the rest will do what they can.

BULLPEN. This too is problematic. Carl Edwards (Grade 17* C-62 HR+51) has been promoted to closer; he's a poor man's Aroldis Chapman. His setup crew includes Jordan Hicks (Grade 13* C-61 HR+55),

Fernando Rodney (Grade 12* C-41 HR+22) and former closer Andrew Miller (Grade 10* C-26 HR+32) and veteran Sergio Romo (Grade 10*). That's about 290 innings of competent relief. It's nowhere near enough. Consequently, there are 140 additional lefty innings of Grade 6*: Zach Duke (HR+61) and Brian Flynn (C-24 HR+41). The slop innings belong to the great-peripherals Alex Claudio (Grade 1* C+43 HR+43).

Instructions call for the use of as many relievers as needed. “It is okay; really it is.” We are reminded of the dog-in-burning-room-drinking-coffee meme.

Offense: 8.0
They'll hit . . . sometimes.

There are some solid bats in the Strong City lineup, starting with the sublime Nolan



Davis: Boom stick

Arenado (1-1-6-6, 10 hits, 4 walks, L+11 R-6). His platoon shift will cause some problems, but he's the sort of guy you love to have in the middle of your lineup. His best assist comes from the boom stick of DH Khris Davis (1-1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42); he might not hit 53 homers as he did last year, but is probably

good for at least 40. Yoenis Cespedes has only about a quarter season, but it also is a great card (1-1-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22). Daniel Murphy is solid (1-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks, L-11 R+2); he'll only have to play first base, not second base. Adam Frazier (4 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-11 R+1) will be a solid bat when the platoon shift doesn't take him out of the lineup. Jotdy Mercer (4 0s, 10 hits) is decent at shortstop.

Frazier's outfield companions are more pedestrian. Justin Upton has power but it was a bit of an off year (1-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, 9 13s, F31 for 10 SBA); Billy Hamilton (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, C30 for 44 SBA, 20 speed) is here to run when he gets on; and Leury Garcia (2 0s, 10 hits, E35 for 13 SBA) is, well, *Leury Garcia*.

The rest of the lineup is just all right. Yasmani Grandal has power but not a lot else (1-5-6, 8 hits, 5 walks+22); the same for Albert Pujols (1-5-6, 9 hits), a shadow of his former greatness; and Dee Gordon (2 0s, 10 hits, C28 for 42 SBA) is another guy who can only use his speed when he's able to reach. Addison Russell (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+3) can fill the quarter season that Mercer is missing.

There are some serious deficiencies against left handed pitchers on the boards; fortunately, the Statesmen have moved to the computer game this year, so they might not feel it quite as much. Still, any lineup with Arenado, Davis and other friends is one not to be overlooked. They'll hit . . . sometimes.

Defense: They catch the ball.

5.5

For a rebuilding team, the Statesmen catch the ball fairly well. The top glove belongs to Nolan Arenado, who has lost the sublime 3B6 but is still Fielding One (3B5). He is joined by Dee Gordon (2B8) and, at times, Addison Russell (SS9). Most of the time Jordy Mercer (SS8) will take that position, but Russell can be used for defense. Behind the plate, Yasmani Grandal and Kevin Plawewski are both C8s with Th-1 arms. Both Murphy and Pujols are 1B3s.



Arenado: Top glove

In the outfield, there are two OF3s: Justin Upton (35 arm) and Billy Hamilton (34 arm). Leury Garcia is an OF2 with a 33 arm, and Adam Frazier is an OF2 with a 31 arm. On rare occasions Yoenis Cespedes' OF2/37 may get shown off. Khris Davis (OF1) will not need to carry a glove in his duffel bag, as there are plenty of out-field games to go around.

Bench: Mostly here for the future.

2.0

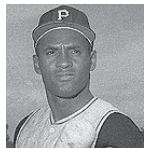
Cespedes is the best card off the bench, but is severely limited by use (38 games); beyond that, most of the remaining bench players aren't much use and are on the roster because of the possibility for future use.

Chris Owings is the utilityman (OF2, 2B7); he's mysteriously not a shortstop, which was his original pedigree. He has mild power and speed (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, D28 for 15 SBA) but a less-than-useful L+5 R-7 platoon split. Taylor Ward has 7 hits, Kevin Newman 8, and even on a team beginning to recover from the debt that came with last year's championship run, neither will play any role. Only the mild flexibility among the starters will give the Statesmen bench moves during games.

3rd

As usual, we're not sure that our numerical total accurately reflects what the team may do on the field. The pre-play agrees with us, getting the club to an average 70 wins – which seems about right for a 20 TQ team. It's not a contender but the power in the lineup will beat up on some rebuilders' staffs. The question is what will happen when Carlos Carrasco isn't starting (or, we suppose, Zach Godley, who will at least take 9s on a regular basis.)

This is all fine; Mr. Sheffler should be commended for his earnest desire to win games. In this respect, the Strong City rebuild reaps the whirlwind in a way very unlike the Brobdingnagian one – bouncing from Really Bad to Big Freaking Juggernaut in one or two years, collecting draft picks and then spending them. In a Brob down year, there are just barely enough games and innings and starts to meet league minimums; there is no bench. This isn't what we see here. There may be more dignity in this – but let's see if it helps in the long run.



strong city STATESMEN



It's OK.

TQ: 20.0



2018 riverwoolf SHARKS in review



No one should be buying property in Riverwoolf.

2018 in review

Final Record: 94-68 (2nd, Clemente)

Our friend in Rivière-du-Loup traded everything except his plate of Christmas *tourtiere* to push his Sharks forward in 2018. The successful result was a 94-win campaign and two show-down playoff series against teams in their own division. Brian Hanley went up and fell to Riverwoolf 4 games to 2, but the Sharks fell to Mark Ludwig's Mudhens 4 games to 2.

The bill for all this fun came later – Riverwoolf had almost no draft in 2019 - but he has already shown the ability to wheel and deal and make lemons from lemonade.

What went right?

Riverwoolf 2018 was built around solid pitching, and they finished fifth in team ERA at 3.64. The starting pitching was terrific.

Mike Clevinger was 11-5, Kyle Hendricks was 11-4, and Gio Gonzales paced the club with 14 wins. Pat Neshek recorded 42 saves in the closer role, while Jacob Barnes (9-2, 2.92) and Yusmeiro Petit (2-2, 2.66) were outstanding in relief.

Avisail Garcia (.314–19–72) was wonderful all year long, while Logan Morrison (35 homers) and Matt Adams (56 XBH, 84 RBI) delivered enough power to get Riverwoolf into contention for the Clemente Division title. There was also some speed: Dee Gordon stole 51 bases.

What went wrong?

Riverwoolf was picked to win the Clemente by the *Annual* last year, but plans were scuttled

by the overachieving Blue Hill Mudslides, who stole the Division title from Daniel in the regular season, then bounced them from the playoffs in the second round.

The offense was shallow after the hitters mentioned earlier. Eleven of the hitters hit .235 or less. The pitching staff, though outstanding most of the year, was vulnerable to the long ball - 214 homers allowed last year. Defensively, Jordy Mercer committed 27 errors at shortstop.

3 Things

1. *More trading.* Daniel's trading style is more like the Chicago Merchantile Exchange - assets are acquired, and if another offer comes in for that same asset that will yield a return, off they go. It's hard to tell sometimes if the 24-hour market that is Riverwoolf in the offseason is part of a grand plan, or Mr. Dumont is just having a ball up there in the frosty north.
2. *Drafty in here.* Daniel does not stockpile draft picks - they get traded for players. The team has no picks in the 2020 draft before Round 7. If this is rebuilding, this is going to take a while.
3. *No one should be buying property in Riverwoolf.* Players who do may be sent packing on the midnight train before the ink is dry on the mortgage application. Will there ever be a Riverwoolf untouchable? Place your bets, boys.



Garcia: Wonderful

riverwoolf SHARKS



Daniel Dumont (3rd year)

The Annual staff would like to say that we know what's going on. But we've got nothin'.

In their second year in TBL, the Sharks won 94 games, finishing just behind the Blue Hill club and dropping a tough series to them in the playoffs. It came after a season where 77% of the roster had been turned over since the first year (when only 71% of Taylorville's final roster was changed). It might be thought that 94 wins and a playoff run would mean that Riverwoolf was a club that was only a move or two away from another contending season.

Tell me another one. After 71% turnover, and then 77% turnover, it should have come as no surprise that our newest manager outdid himself. 83% – five-sixths of the roster – went elsewhere. Many of the players sent packing had arrived for the 2018 season, of course. What replaced them will not generate 94 wins: more likely they will lose 94, perhaps even more. Logically, if this is a rebuilding season, you'd think that there would be a healthy 2020 draft. Nothing doing: the cupboard, before Round 5, is bare. . . or you'd think there would be a fair number of players 25 or younger, and you'd be wrong again: there is exactly one – Jacob Nix, who is 23, and is a Grade 1. The majority of the roster is older, especially the key players: Nelson Cruz is 39, Edwin Encarnacion 36, Clayton Richard and Alex Gordon 35, Melky Cabrera 34, Tyler Flowers 33, Eric Thames, Ivan Nova and Michael Brantley 32, Justin Wilson and Zach Britton 31, D. J. LeMahieu, Tommy LaStella and Adely Hechevarria 30. There are a few others in the 27-29 age range, but none of them are the next Mike Trout or Clayton Kershaw.

The *Annual* staff would like to say that we know what's going on. But we've got nothin' – we don't even have a nickname for Daniel

yet. We're certainly open to suggestions – and eager for explanation.

Pitching:
We have this.

4.0

Last year's rotation was very strong, and the bullpen was pretty solid. They're all gone now, needless to say.

Turnover Rate: 83%

Arrived: Brad Boxberger, Jackie Bradley, Michael Brantley, Melky Cabrera, Nelson R. Cruz, Edwin Encarnacion, Marco Estrada, Cam Gallagher, Alex Gordon, Alen Hanson, Adeiny Hechavarria, Felix Hernandez, Jim Johnson, Matt Koch, Jake Lamb, D.J. Lemahieu, Tommy La Stella, Devin Mesoraco, Jacob Nix, Clayton Richard, J. T. Riddle, Trevor Rosenthal, Aaron Sanchez, Marcus Stroman, Blake Swihart, Eric Thames, Mark Trumbo, Danny Valencia, Vince Velasquez.

Departed: Matt Adams, Buddy Baumann, Alex Claudio, Mike Clevinger, Jacoby Ellsbury, Avisail Garcia, Dustin Garneau, Ryan Goins, Gio Gonzalez, Nick Goody, Dee Gordon, Robbie Grossman, J.A. Happ, Kyle Hendricks, Aaron Hicks, Lance Lynn, Jordy Mercer, Logan Morrison, Mike Napoli, Omar Narvaez, Eduardo Nunez, Gerardo Parra, Hernan Perez, Yusmeiro Petit, Enny Romero, Adam Rosales, Trevor Rosenthal, Ervin Santana.

SNT: Edwin Encarnacion.

In the head-spinning offseason, Riverwoolf added a hard hitting power bat to its lineup. Who knows how long he will be here.





ROTATION.

Instead we have this: seven pitchers cover the season's starts. The ace, such as he is, would be Ivan Nova (Grade 6 C+34 HR-22). He, Vince Velasquez (Grade 7 C-22) and two-thirds of a season of Aaron Sanchez (Grade 8 C-51 HR+24) give Riverwoolf half a season of acceptable starts.



Nova: Ace

It goes downhill after that. Clayton Richard (Grade 5 C-14) and Felix Hernandez (Grade 5 C-24 HR-16), added just before roster freeze, have to make many starts; Marco Estrada (Grade 4 HR-25) and Marcus Stroman (Grade 3 HR+31) must also pitch. We've certainly seen worse rotations, but this may be the worst of the upcoming season.

BULLPEN. The instructions demand that starters go five innings, primarily because there is not enough usage among the relievers. The closer role falls to Zach Britton (Grade 16* C-55 HR+34, 41 innings). He's set up by 117 innings of Grade 13* Wilsons: lefty Justin (C-62 HR+23) and righty Alex (C+26). It is expected that they would pitch in setup roles, along with 24 innings of Pat Neshek (Grade 11* C+36 HR+25). Brad Boxberger (Grade 11* C-52 HR-22), Jacob Barnes (Grade 9* C-25 HR+31) and Jim Johnson (Grade 9* HR-11) have 165 innings between them; and Matt Koch (Grade 7 C+24 HR-42, 87 non-reliever innings) and Jacob Nix (Grade 1) are available for bulk use.

Nothing makes a rotation less functional than a weak bullpen; this will be a very, very long season north of the border.

Offense:

7.0

A few cards, and some misfit toys.

There are a few good cards on the roster. The most dangerous boom stick belongs to Nelson Cruz (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+3 R-3). He was a principal acquisition during Riverwoolf's busy offseason. He is joined by Edwin Encarnacion (1-1-6, 9 hits, 4 walks+22), and the fine card of Michael Brantley (1-6-6, 11 hits, 3 walks, F31 for 15 SBA, L-9 R+2) and the isolated power of Eric Thames (1-1-4-6, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, L-7). Those four have varied platoon shifts, but will often make the lineup potent especially against righthanded pitching.

A quick look through the cards reveal no others with 11 hits; a few have 10, but many have 9 or fewer. D. J. LeMahieu is a step down from his batting title but still has a good card (0-0-6, 10 hits, 2 walks, 3 3Is, L+6 R-5), and Melky Cabrera is certainly competent (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks+22), as is Alen Hanson (one of the youngest players on the team: 4 0s, 10 hits, D27 for 10 SBA, L-12 R+2). The half season of Mark Trumbo (1-5-5, 10 hits, 2 walks+22) is helpful, and Tommy LaStella has 10 hits and 3 walks (but a less useful L-8).



Cruz: Boom stick

Things go a little south after that. Jackie Bradley, Jr. was tolerable in Boston last year because he hit in the clutch – something APBA does not seek to directly reproduce; his card is underwhelming (4 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, E35 for 18 SBA). Danny Valencia (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+5 R-6), Adelyn Hechavarria (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+6 R-4), Alex Gordon (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, F33 for 14 SBA, L-7 R+1), Blake Swihart (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-15 R+5), and J. T. Riddle (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-11 R+1) round out the collection of regularly-used misfit toys. None of them will strike fear into anyone's heart.

Defense:
Can generally catch the ball.

4.5

4th

The Sharks can generally catch the ball. When in the lineup, D. J. LeMahieu (2B9) can certainly pick it; when he's not in the lineup, it falls to 2B7s (Hanson or LaStella). Similarly, Hechevarria is an SS8, but J. T. Riddle received an SS9. So up the middle can be mediocre, or good, or some combination. Behind the plate is another example of this: Tyler Flowers (C8 Th-2) shares time with Blake Swihart (C7 Th-0). Of the infielders, first base is mediocre (Encarnacion and Thames are both 1B3s) and third base will largely be problematic (LaStella and Valencia are 3B3s, though Hechevarria can slide over as a 3B4).



LeMahieu: Can pick it

The outfield is better news. There are actually three OF3s: Bradley (35 arm), Gordon (34) and Brantley (30). Melky Cabrera is an OF2 with a 32 arm. They'll be handling plenty of advancing baserunners, so good fielding will help.

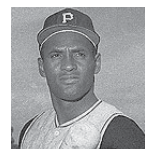
Bench:
Flexibility, but mostly the starters.

2.0

Beyond the top cards, there are many choices for starting players, and plenty of usage to go around, allowing Riverwoolf management to make moves. There are also a few cards that likely won't get much usage: Jake Lamb (3 Os, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-7 R+1); Devin Mesoraco (1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, C8 Th-3); and Cam Gallagher (5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks+22, C7 Th+1).

Gallagher is actually an interesting possibility; with the injury to Salvador Perez, he may get some playing time this summer in Kansas City, and thus might have some value next year – probably, given Mr. Dumont's track record, on someone else's roster.

And by a considerable margin. As questionable as the Strong City staff might be, almost all of their starters are better than almost all of the ones on this team. The same is true of the bullpen: and the same is largely true of the lineup.



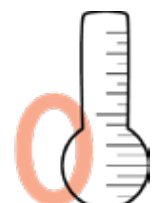
riverwoolf SHARKS

Not to cast doubt on our own prognostications, but the difference between third and fourth place in this division might well be more than the 2.5 TQ points we record. What high points we see on the roster – Encarnacion, Cruz, Brantley, LeMahieu, Sanchez, Britton – are not that good. The lineup is far more 9 hits than 11, doesn't really walk much at all, and a number of the principal players have significant platoon penalties on the boards.

As we noted at the outset, this is a hard team to identify, in the sense that it's unclear which way it's going. Mr. Dumont loves to trade. Seriously. More than anyone else in the league, and more so than most managers in recent memory. More than Trader Jack, and that's saying something.

The question is not whether trading is a good thing or a bad thing. Everyone in the league makes trades, some managers more than others: but these transactions are made for particular purposes – to acquire a favorite, to fill a need, to convert present value into future value, or vice versa. We are just waiting for some indication of the plan, and can't discern one. Time will tell.

TQ: 17.5



Testing the Winds

There are some pretty strong headwinds blowing from the Ruth Division this year. To go with the big trade of Mike Trout, the Prince of Darkness has tooled up for a serious playoff run, though he'll have competition all year. But there are some good teams in the Mays Division. The question is whether they're good enough to make it past the juggernauts.

Craig Musselman's Rye Herons are airborne again, a few years after we documented their geriatric nature. A rebuilt pitching staff and rejuvenated roster is enough to make them the class of the Mays Division. The club has some deficiencies, but may be in position to make some moves.



Down in *Maracaibo*, the *Rumrunners* are improved from last year, particularly the pitching staff; but the offense is modest – not powerless, but not exactly scary. The question is how far guile, cunning and a solid bullpen can take *Walter Hunt's* team – one that never quite seems to get around to rebuilding.

2018 Mays Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Gotham City*	93	69	.574	—
New Westminster	85	77	.525	8
Maracaibo	79	83	.488	14
Rye	74	88	.457	19

* Lost World Series to Strong City.



Over in *Gotham City*, *Anton Greenwald's Batmen* are recovering from what it took to get them all the way to Game 6 of the TBL World Series.

The lineup is still very potent, but the defense has lots of holes, and the pitching leaves something to be desired. Does the Good Doctor get everything out of his players? *Yes. Yes, he does.* Is that enough to make Gotham City a contender? No, probably no more than Maracaibo. But it's a long season.

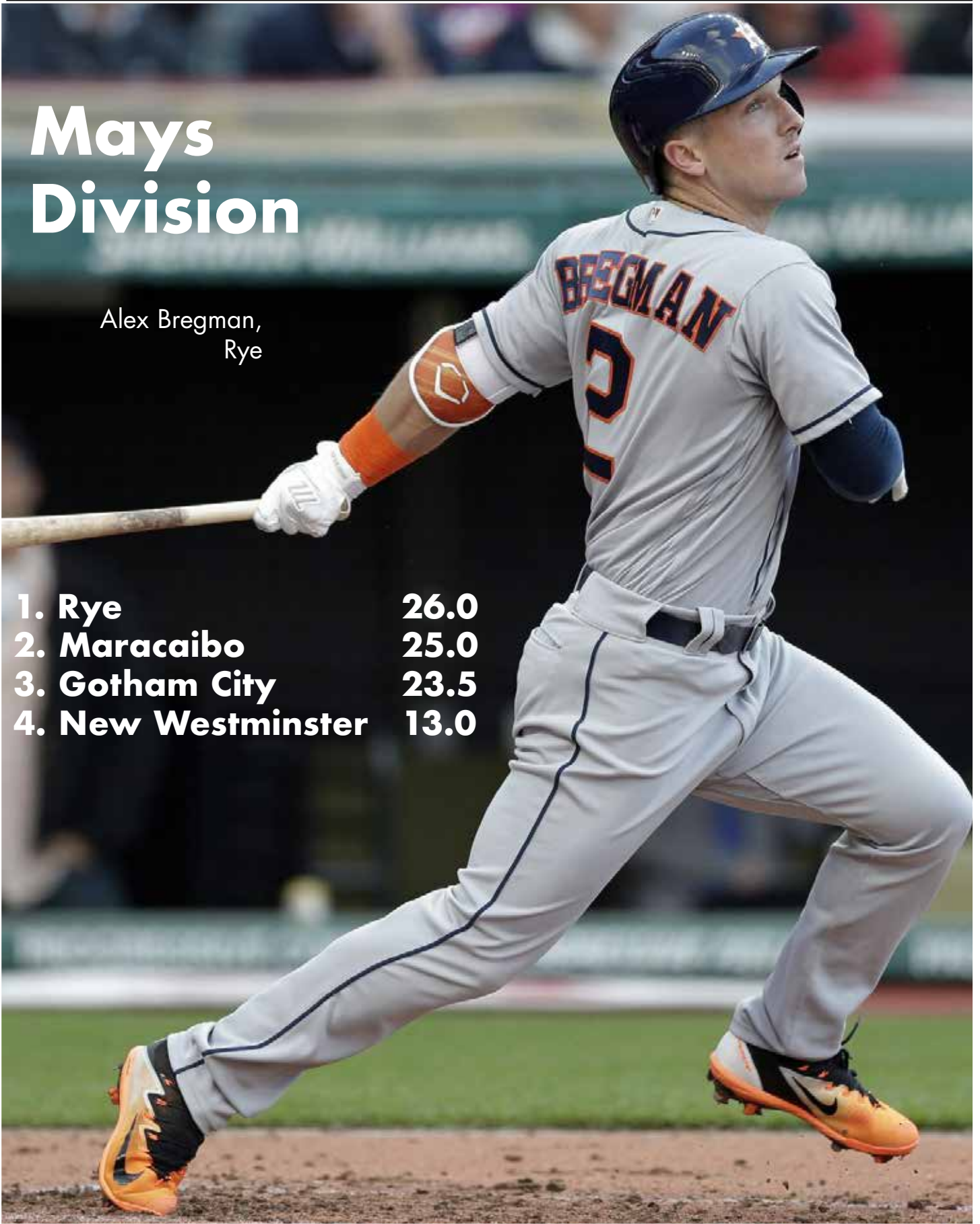
And speaking of long seasons, it's going to be a long season up in the frozen north. The *New Westminster Whiskeyjacks* have traded just about everything not nailed down in order to achieve a dominant 2020 draft position. As noted in the analysis articles above, this process has its risks, and it remains to be seen how long it will take for *Jim Jeatt* to make his team back into a contender. The club has been here before . . . and it's back here again.



Mays Division

Alex Bregman,
Rye

1. Rye	26.0
2. Maracaibo	25.0
3. Gotham City	23.5
4. New Westminster	13.0



2018 rye HERONS in review



The future looked, and looks, promising and interesting.

by Craig Musselman

2018 in review

Final Record: 74-88 (4th, Mays)

In 2018, the Rye Herons weren't good, but they weren't too bad either. The team scored almost as many runs as it surrendered, and finished ninth in hitting and right in the middle among TBL pitching staffs.

What went right?

In his rookie season, shortstop Paul DeJong hit 39 home runs and had 100 RBI in only 107 games, making great impact on the offense. Alex Bregman in his second year was rock solid (.284-24-97, 13 steals), one of those players who you just plug into the lineup every day. The team stole 125 bases and could have stolen a great deal more, if they'd only run on the road. I think they get tired when they're staying in hotels, or something...



DeJong: Rookie power

Jeff Samardzija was solid on the mound, going 13-11, 3.85 with 238 strikeouts. In fact, he pitched better than Chris Sale. Trevor Williams had a fine rookie season going 12-5.

As the year went on, it was nice to see that low draft picks Whit Merrifield and Mallex Smith came into their own as solid contributors, and that a bullpen lacking big names all were having near-career years in MLB.

What went wrong?

The record and the cellar-dwelling status were not unexpected, but the future looked, and looks, promising and interesting. Still, Jameson Taillon (6-7, 5.48), Kendrys Morales (.213) and

others, youthful and veteran, had some trouble, making the offense and pitching somewhat inconsistent – which probably contributed to the handful of games that separated the club from a .500 finish.

3 Things

1. *Elite Core.* Rye has four players who are among the best in MLB at their positions – Chris Sale, J.

T. Realmuto, Alex Bregman and Whit Merrifield. Barring injuries, all should be elite for the next four years or so. None of them are demanding long term contract extensions.

2. *Poised to be Elite.* Three players are on the cusp of being elite – Jose Abreu (who is elite but coming off a slightly down year), Jameson Taillon (he's a pitcher), and Marcell Ozuna (he has a high upside).

3. *Built for a Competitive Run.* This is contrary to the boom/bust TBL tradition. Rye went over the proverbial cliff, but started to fly again before completely crashing. This team is young, fast, has all the bases covered, and is built to be competitive for some years into the future. For 2019, the team is competitive, a likely playoff contender, but not yet likely of championship caliber. If the "poised to be elite" do indeed become elite, and if the back end of the rotation and at least one of three young outfielders develop as hoped, Rye will be ready to go all in and compete for a championship in the next couple years. But then again, the best laid plans of mice and men often go afoul. Time will tell.

rye HERONS



Craig Musselman (15th year)

Craig gets the slow clap . . . for playing the cards in the envelope.

The Rye Herons' rise from the ashes of their dismal 2017 season – when this club won only 59 games – was so rapid that Craig Musselman barely had time to gather all the pieces one would normally associate with a division title threat. They have no closer grade in the bullpen. They have good power, but really only one superstar card in the lineup: Alex Bregman.

The entire Mays Division is taking one step backward this year, and Craig sees a chance to steal a division title while working on his TBL title run. The price of his opportunism is the chance to stock

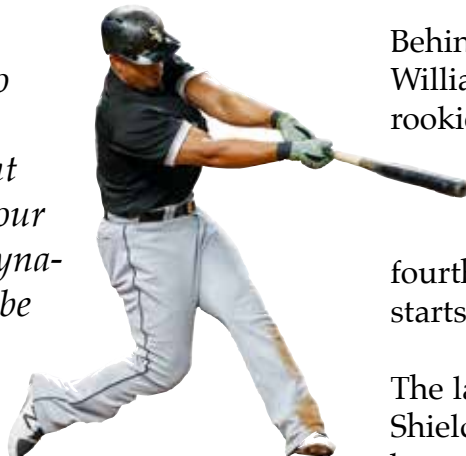
Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Jose Abreu, Jaime Barria, Chasen Bradford, Nick Delmonico, David Fletcher, Paul Fry, Tony Kemp, Tyler Olson, Marcell Ozuna, Martin Prado, Austin Slater, Steven Souza, Jeffrey Springs.

Departed: Aaron Altherr, Keon Broxton, Simon Castro, Grant Dayton, Ben Lively, Robby Scott, Steven Souza, Kelby Tomlinson, Chase Utley, Kennys Vargas.

SNT: Jose Abreu.

When a team begins to contend, it brings in veterans to supplement its run. Jose Abreu's four power numbers and dynamite hitting card will be a big part of the Rye offense.



up on draft picks by dealing away good older players like James Shields, Josh Fields and Jared Hughes, all 34 years old or older this season.

But this is a very good team, so Craig gets the slow clap from Rich Meyer - and the *Annual* - for playing the cards in the envelope.

Pitching: 10.0
Stop and stare.



Sale: Dominant

ROTATION. One reason to go for it is when a great player delivers a big year - like Chris Sale (Grade 19 C+25 HR+34, 27 starts). Sale

was absolutely dominant last year over everything except his physical health. He is missing a month of starts due to shoulder inflammation in August of 2018. This is the second highest starter grade in the set this year - only Whitman's Blake Snell graded out higher.

Behind Sale are two nice Grade 12s - Trevor Williams (Grade 12 C+13 HR+23, 31 starts) and rookie Jaime Barria (Grade 12 C-15, 26 starts, 21 fatigue). Jameson Taillon (Grade 10 C+26 HR+14, 32 starts) has a more modest grade but should contribute nicely as the fourth starter. The top 4 rotation guys have 116 starts. The Herons will win a lot of those.

The last 46 starts are a more challenging. James Shields (Grade 9 C-16 HR-16, 33 starts) has not been a quality starter since 2015, but he has a



RYE HERONS

full generic season. Joe Musgrove (Grade 7 C+35 HR+15, 19 starts) and Jeff Samardzia (Grade 3, C-52) take the rest. This is a rock solid rotation with a legitimate ace at the top. The rest of the division can only stop and stare.

BULLPEN. The bullpen starts with two veterans who had bounceback seasons in 2018. Jared Hughes (Grade 17* C+14 C+41, 79 IP) is a gigantic guy who has pitched well in quiet hamlets in the NL for the last five years. Cincinnati kept running him out there – 79 innings! – and he responded with his best season yet. Josh Fields (Grade 17* C+21 HR+13, 41 IP) was fortunate to land with the Dodgers in 2016, and has thrived in the pitcher-friendly atmosphere. There are 120 late game innings here.

There are three very nice setup men. T. J. McFarland (Grade 14* C+21 HR+41, 72 IP) is the kind of solid, big inning middle man who makes managing a bullpen easy. Tico Ramos (Grade 15* HR+21, 43 IP) and Brandon Workman (Grade 14* C-24, 41 IP) help in the sixth and seventh. These three have 156 innings to steal 8s without help. In addition, there are five short-inning relievers who will help in a variety of situations, particularly when helping a starter with short fatigue. Nick Wittgren (HR+53) (Grade 12* , 34 IP) and Paul Fry (C-23 HR+55) are both Grade 12*s with 72 innings between them. Chasen Bradford, Jeffrey Springs and Tyler Olson pad the bullpen out to 461 innings, all of it useful. This group will help the starters.

Offense: 8.0
A mix that matches up.

So once upon a time, the idea of having speed at the top of the lineup was a popular idea. This was before Bill James ruined baseball by proving that a fat slow guy who walks a lot was a better

leadoff man than your light hitting shortstop. We still remember his essay on Luis Aparicio.



Smith: Gazelle

What's old is new again in Rye, as they enter the 2019 season with two gazelles at the top of their hitting attack.

Mallex Smith (3 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks, 2 11s, 19 speed, 30 SSN for 52 attempts) is the leadoff man. Whit Merrifield (3 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks, 31 SSN for 55 SBA) bats second. That happens every day; if an opponent does not have a good throwing catcher, there will be stolen bases aplenty with these two.

The star of the stack is Alex Bregman (1-5-6-6, 9 hits, 5 walks+42, 28 SSN for 14 SBA), who plays this year as 25 year old. He may be the best third baseman in baseball already, and he's just getting started. Behind him are veteran power hitter Jose Abreu (1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+22) and catcher J.T. Realmuto (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+42). The top of the lineup is scary good: a mixture of speed, on-base ability and power that matches up with almost any team in TBL.

The lower part of the order has some decent power as well. Kendry Morales (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, R+3) is a nice bat and that righty shift will help a lot. Paul DeJong (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, 115 games) starts at shortstop against righthanded pitching. David Fletcher (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks) plays against southpaws. Marcell Ozuna (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+4) is another everyday player. He hits further down in the lineup against lefties, despite the nice shift. Tony Kemp (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, 17 speed, 29 SSN for 12 attempts) is the impressive #9 hitter against righthanded pitching.

Against lefty starters, guys like John Hicks (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+5), Daniel Robertson (3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks + 42, 88 games), and Guillermo

Heredia (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 16 speed) get to strut their stuff.

This lineup has balance, speed, power and an aggressive set of instructions. Craig has a lot of text describing when to steal and hit and run. Expectations are high for the Rye attack this year.

Defense: 5.5
Strong defensively.

It's great when your best players can really field, and Rye is strong in this area. J.T Realmuto (C8, Th+1) is a rock solid catcher with a decent arm. Alex Bregman (3B5, SS8) is as cool with the leather as he is at the plate. Paul DeJong (SS9) is the shortstop most days, but gives way to David Fletcher (2B8, 3B4, ss8) in some lineups. Whit Merrifield (2B9) is as good as it gets at second. First base is a soft spot defensively. Jose Abreu (1B3) is the regular first baseman, and there is not much backing him up.



Realmuto: Rock solid

The outfield has one top-shelf defender: Marcel Ozuna (OF3, 33 arm). After that, the field is full of OF2s - Tony Kemp (OF2, 31), Delino Desheields (OF2, 29), Steve Souza (OF2, 31), Guillermo Heredia (OF2, 33), Mallex Smith (OF2, 30), and Austin Slater (OF2, 31). The arms are pretty pedestrian, and that could cost the Herons a few games.

The starting lineups will be very strong defensively because of the strength in the middle of the diamond, at catcher and at third. This defense will help the pitching.

Bench: 2.5
Speed, but with some filler.

If your offense looks like an afternoon at the dog track, what could be more fun than

another blazer off the bench? Delino Deshields (2 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks, 19 speed, 32 SSN for 24 SBA), who is a reminder to those of us that saw his father play that we're not getting any younger, is the late inning pinch runner for the Herons.

The rest of the bench is just filler like Austin Slater (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 35 SSN for 7 attempts), Martin Prado (9 hits, 3B4), and utilityman Daniel Robertson (9 hits, 5 walks+42).

Outside of DeShields and Robertson, this bench will be most useful to scare lefthanded relievers. There is some depth in the starting lineup, and that may be the best bench strength.

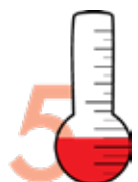
1st Rye is moving firmly forward in a year when the rest of the division is regrouping.

The rebuild, so skillfully executed and augmented by some nice offseason trade acquisitions, leaves us a nice team with a dynamic offense, but a pitching staff that may need another toy or two - particularly in the bullpen - to make a deep playoff run.

TQ: 26.0



rye HERONS



2018 maracaibo RUMRUNNERS in review



In a transition year, they did what Jordan says we always do.

by Walter Hunt

2018 in review

Final Record: 79-83 (3rd, Mays)

It is a Jordan cliché that Maracaibo clubs tend to outperform. If ever there was proof of that, it was the 2018 Rumrunners. Inferior power? Yep. Not enough on-base percentage? Check. Platoon shifts an obstacle? Sure enough. Not enough pitching, too many bad grades and peripherals in what was there . . . oh yeah.

And somehow, 79 wins. 179 homers (18th in TBL); 1,338 batting Ks (7th); .301 OBP (20th). The pitching was . . . average. John Lackey's 13 wins led the team. Keone Kela was phenomenal, but only had 37 innings. If they'd not gone 7-13 in the final month they might have even gotten over .500. Still, in a transition year, they did just what Jordan says we always do: overperformed.

What went right?

In his sendoff year, John Lackey once more led the staff (13-8, 3.55, 189 Ks and only 38 walks in 195.3 IP). Jaime Garcia won 12 games, and rookie German Marquez chipped in 10. Keone Kela (23 saves, 1.45 ERA) led a bullpen that won 21 of the 79 that the team achieved. As usual, the Rumrunner bullpen kept the team in the game.

Brandon Phillips, another departing veteran, was the best offensive weapon (.293-17-58, 39 doubles). Mitch Moreland hit 31 homers and drove in 78, leading the team in each category. Salvador Perez (.268, 24 HR) was a solid contributor. Lorenzo Cain stole 21 bases.

Overall, the team scored 679 runs and gave up 747 and still almost went .500.

What went wrong?

It was a frustrating team to manage. 410 walks in 162 games and a .245 team average meant that it was like having a lineup of 9 hits and 2 walks.

The bullpen was fairly deep and disturbingly wild. By late in the season there was just not enough of it, which contributed to the last month slide.

Some Maracaibo stalwarts didn't do much to help the club. Cole Hamels (7-10, 5.09) was beat up hard; Jesse Chavez (5-10, 5.41) pitched way too much. Jake Lamb hit .203. Brandon Drury hit .260 before he was sent away in a trade. The bottom end of the lineup was a dead letter.

3 Things

1. *Say goodbye.* Ichiro, Lackey, Phillips were a big part of the last several years, and none will be a part of the teams to come. Some TBL managers have no trouble turning over the roster; around here we're a little more nostalgic. But sometimes you have to say goodbye.
2. *Fix the problems that the draft and the league provide.* This year there was pitching, and lots of it, in the draft. Maracaibo took a bunch of it. This year's pitching staff is more like those of past contenders.
3. *Go with the trends.* Because things change in the majors, things change in TBL. We didn't get the full time DH, but we did draft an "opener" to go with the one already on the roster. It means assigning a caddy and thinking differently: but any sensible manager learns to adapt.



Lackey: Once more

maracaibo RUMRUNNERS



Walter Hunt (33rd year); Hall of Famer

Frequently, Walter Hunt is racing the car while changing the oil at the same time.

[Jordan takes on Maracaibo again. – Ed.]

TBL Hall of Famer Walter Hunt has never been a fan of losing. This is Mr. Hunt's 33rd year in our league. He has had 25 winning seasons against only 6 losing seasons. What this means is that this team has never had an actual rebuild in their 35 year history. (Richard Meyer owned Maracaibo for three years before Walter. And won 2 World Series, thanks for playing.)



Marquez: Wonderful

Pitching: 9.0 Team strength.

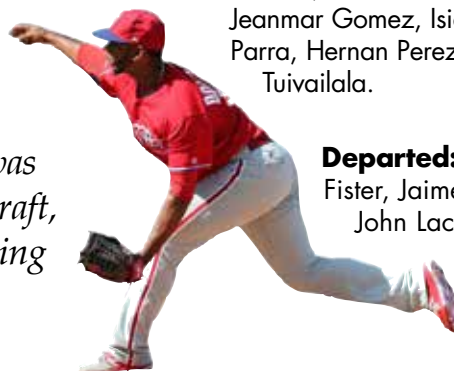
ROTATION. Time to talk about openers. Maracaibo has 16 starts of Matt Strahm (Grade 13/17*, HR+15, 5 starts, 48 RIP) and Diego Castillo (Grade 16/18* HR+15, 11 starts, 40 RIP). This is the top end of their rotation and these starts are important to the team's overall performance this year. Castillo has a starter fatigue of 6, Strahm has a starter fatigue of 10.

So the challenge for the analyst - and I get saddled with this assignment a lot - is to figure out what the heck is going on with these guys. Frequently, Walter Hunt is racing the car while changing the oil at the same time. He has had several seasons recently when he's drafted like a rebuild, but made trades like a contender. The result is a team that has definite strengths - the pitching on this club is excellent - but also pronounced weaknesses.

When Walter Hunt sits down to play this game, he gives away nothing as a game manager. Typically his teams overperform the cards. So if this club stumbles into a wild card slot, don't be all that surprised.

SNT: Seranthony Dominguez.

A hard-throwing young reliever was Maracaibo's top pick in the TBL draft, and is the top example of the pitching staff makeover still in progress.



These guys start 11 times at home, and only five times on the road. The instructions leave them in for two reductions, and they are backed by one of the deepest bullpens in TBL. Mr. Hunt is serious about winning these games. It will be very interesting to see if this plan works out.

The rest of the rotation is 146 starts of 9s and 10s. The guy I was wrong about is German Marquez (Grade 10 C+21, 33 starts), who was wonderful for Colorado last year - and if you can pitch in that place, you can pitch, period. The secret sauce was his sudden ability to miss bats - his K/9

Turnover Rate: 40%

Arrived: Jake Arrieta, Ryan Borucki, Ryan Braun, Diego Castillo, Wilmer Difo, Seranthony Dominguez, Heath Fillmyer, Jeanmar Gomez, Isiah Kiner-Falefa, Peter O'Brien, Gerardo Parra, Hernan Perez, Dan Straily, Wander Suero, Sam Tuivailala.

Departed: Carlos Asuaje, Jesse Chavez, Doug Fister, Jaime Garcia, Jim Johnson, Tom Koehler, John Lackey, Jake Lamb, Brandon Moss, Brandon Phillips, Sergio Romo, Daniel Stumpf, Ichiro Suzuki, Andrew Triggs, Mark Trumbo.



maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

rate went from 8.2 to 10.6, and his FIP dropped a full point. He also has a terrific move to first – MF+3. He'll pitch this year as a 24 year old. Cole Hamels (Grade 10 HR-14, 32 starts) is back for another full season. Hamels has won 159 games with Maracaibo since 2007. Heath Fillmyer (Grade 10 C-23, 13 starts) and Dan Straily (Grade 10 C-21 HR-22, 23 starts) contribute another 34 starts at Grade 10.

The rest are Grade 9 starts. Jake Arrieta (Grade 9, 31 starts) is a generic starter this year, but his durability is a plus. Ryan Borucki (Grade 9 C+13 HR+35, 17 starts) was the 26th pick in the 2019 TBL draft. The rotation is solid all the way to November.

BULLPEN. Maracaibo looks for specific things in the bullpen, and the ability to defeat the homer is the one that jumps out when you break down their relievers. In the 2019 draft, which was thin in closer grades, the club selected Seranthony Dominguez (Grade 19* C-14 HR+32, 56 RIP) with the #10 pick. There followed the aforementioned Diego Castillo (Grade 18*

HR+15, 40 RIP). These two closer grades give the Rumrunners 96 innings to bring home wins in close and late situations.

Matt Strahm (Grade 17*, HR+15, 48 RIP) is the top setup man from May to November. Getting to Strahm may be the challenge, Nate Jones (Grade 13* C-41 HR+13, 30 IP) and Keone Kela (Grade 14* HR+22, 52 IP) will form the bridge to the strongest part of the bullpen. Mr. Hunt will make this work, but work it will be. There are 226 innings of Grade 13*+ relief here.

The middle relievers start with the very useful James Pazos (Grade 12* C+16 HR+32, 50 RIP). He gets help from Joe Kelly (Grade 11* C-43

HR+42, 66 RIP) and Wander Suero (Grade 10* C+21 HR+25, 48 RIP) Add in the rather scary Greg Holland (8* C-62 HR+46, 46 RIP), and Maracaibo boasts 436 innings of Grade 8* or better. When things go south, Mark Melancon (Grade 5* C+15 HR+43, 39 RIP) and Jeanmar Gomez (Grade 5* HR+16, 25 RIP) can burn a few innings. Sam Tuivailala (Grade 7*) was added in the waiver draft. There are more than 500 innings here - enough to help the starters, and allow the Rumrunners to win close games. This is the strength of the team.

**Offense:
Will struggle.**

7.0



Cain: Great

Here's the rub. In the age of walks and homers, the Maracaibo offense will rely on speed. In their best years, they lead the league in hits and put constant pressure on the other team's pitching and defense.

What's missing this time around are the 11 hit cards that make it work.

That said, there are some great players here. Lorenzo Cain (3 0s, 11 hits, 4 walks, 17 speed, 31 SSN for 37 SBA) and Starling Marte (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 18 Speed, 27 SSN for 47 SBA) are two tremendously talented outfielders, and they play very day. Ryan Braun (1-0-0-0, 9 hits 3 walks) provides some middle of the order power. Maikel Franco (1-5-5, 10 hits, 2 walks, R+1) is still only 26 and is gradually emerging as the middle of the order power source we all expected him to be. What is missing is the walks – only 29 in 131 games for Philadelphia last year. Nevertheless, he bats fourth against right handers on the boards and fifth on the computer.

Another Guy We Like is Mitch Moreland (1-4-6, 9 hits, 4 walks), who adds power and excellent

defense to the Rumrunners. Moreland was acquired from Dallas in a 2011 trade. Last year he hit 31 homers and 32 doubles for this team. He committed 1 error in 131 games at first last year.

The rest of the lineup is not intimidating. Ian Desmond (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 16 speed, 30 SSN for 26 SBA) leads off against left handers. He has been a quality power/speed option since moving to Colorado. Only 12 on-base numbers, however, and that's a theme here. Gerardo Parra (2 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, 28 SSN for 15 SBA) bats second in most lineups. Wilmer Difo (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 16 speed, 30 SSN for 13 SBA) is the everyday shortstop. Josh Harrison (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, 16 speed) wishes he had 12 on-base numbers. He plays second on the boards. Hernan Perez (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 30 SSN for 14 SBA) plays second on the silicone. Salvador Perez (1-5-5, 9 hits, 1 walk+42, 129 games) is the everyday catcher, but not because of his bat.

The offense generated 679 runs last year – 19th in the league. There are two guys in the lineup with four power numbers. Maracaibo will struggle all year to generate runs.

Defense: **6.5**
Will help the pitching staff.

The Rumrunners are almost always terrific defensively and this year is no exception. Hernan Perez (2B8, OF2, 3B4, SS-8), Wilmer Difo (2B8, 3B4, SS9), and Josh Harrison (2B8) are excellent in the middle of the infield. Mitch Moreland (1B5) will catch it when they throw it.

Salvador Perez (C9 Th+6) is the best catcher in the card set this season. The outfield boasts Ryan Braun (OF3, 31 arm), Lorenzo Cain (OF3, 34 arm) and Starling Marte (OF3, 34 arm); Ian Desmond is an OF2 with a 34 arm and will also get reps as a 1B3.

That leaves third base as the only weak spot. Maikel Franco (3B3) starts but will get fielding

help from newcomer Isiah Kiner-Falefa (3B4, C6 Th+1). There are even good fielders on the bench. A. J. Ellis (C8, Th-2) is a competent backup catcher and Gerardo Parra (OF3, 34 arm) is a very nice fourth outfielder. This defense will back up the excellent pitching staff nicely.

Bench: **2.5**
Options.

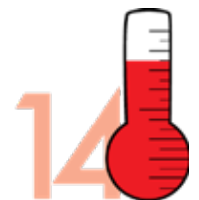
There are some decent options on the bench. Pete O'Brien (1-0-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, 70 PAs, L+4) is a very nice hitting toy and should keep many opposing lefty relievers in the bullpen. There are enough catcher games to make A. J. Ellis (2 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, 66 games) a decent pinch-hitting resource. Everyone runs, so there are pinch-running options everywhere. The bench will be a plus this year.

2nd They won't catch Rye, whose pitching staff is just as good, but Craig has a better offense.

Never underestimate Mr. Hunt, however. Statistical analysis has this team in the high 70s for wins this year. Smart money says 85 or so.

[As a matter of personal privilege, the Editor feels it necessary to express some skepticism regarding Jordan's exaggeration of our ability. This franchise is the last one in TBL to avoid 100 losses, and this edition won't lose 100 – but we're expecting to be around .500 and that only because of the pitching. If we perform as our colleague suggests, we'll buy him a steak.]

TQ: 25.0



maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

2018 gotham city BATMEN in review



What went right? We were in the World Series.

by Anton Greenwald

2018 in review

Final Record: 93-69 (1st Mays)

Gotham City had a very fine year, nearly getting to game seven in the World Series against a juggernaut Statesman team. How could this happen when we were rated good but not great? Most playoff-bound teams are built to kill right handed pitching – after all that makes up about 70% of the starters one will face. Then you get to the playoffs and face Gotham City with an all left handed rotation by deliberate choice. Oops. And that is why I think we got to the World Series.

What went right?

We were in the World Series of TBL. There's not much more "right" than that. Apparently, average pitching had an overall positive homerun allowance as my best hitters went below expected norms – Giancarlo Stanton had 54 HR and Zimmerman had 27 HR with 3 and 2 first column 1s respectively – and no one on my team exceeded expectations in this category. For those batters with significant playing time, only Ryan Zimmermann exceeded his MLB batting average (.311 TBL vs .303 MLB). Part time players going with their shift did much better by comparison, but this is expected. Our results show that going for a division lead with several players having much better years in MLB in 2017 than expected (Pham, Zimmerman, Chirinos, Albers, E-Rod) was the right choice this time.

What went wrong?

We lost the World Series. The team's starters didn't perform exceptionally, though the bullpen was solid. As noted, most of the offensive

players underperformed as well, and seven players struck out more than 100 times. The team had very modest speed, and other than homers, didn't have a lot of extra-base hits.

3 Things

1. *Stepping back.* MLB injuries and drops in performance may leave Gotham City out of the playoffs this year. Some of the players look like they're in the end phase of their career, and

others have to adjust to new leagues and circumstances.

2. *Some folks will be better – but they're getting older.* I expect Pham, Lucroy and Carpenter to do better in 2019 but they are getting older as is Zimmerman. I drafted Willie Adames as my future hope for a good infield

but he looks like he fell in love with a homerun or nothing approach to batting – not a good sign. On the plus side, my late round lottery tickets may cash in. Based on early evaluations, seventh and eighth round picks, backup catchers and others are overperforming . . . for now.

3. *Pitching will be interesting.* Will our past first round pitchers return? Reyes appears in good shape but has been sent to the bullpen. Montgomery probably will not return before the All-Star break. Meanwhile, Eovaldi seems to have returned after a second Tommy John surgery and could be surprisingly good. Anibal Sanchez also seems to have recovered from injuries and could be also be good. Other starters I own could also be good. Interesting. Bullpen? We will we see what I have at the end of the season.



Zimmerman: Exceeded

gotham city BATMEN

Anton Greenwald (34th year)

Let's see how far he can push these cards.



Gotham City had a great 2018, winning his division and making it all the way to another World Series ñ the fifth of his long, impressive career.

No one noticed except the *Annual*, but Dr. Anton Greenwald did something last year that may never have been done before in TBL history: he went to the World Series with a team that had the fourth best record in his conference. Our playoffs are almost always dominated by Super Teams – clubs that win over 100 games with Sugar-high lineups juiced by selling off the following year's draft picks. The TBL World Series is frequently a showdown between the teams that have won the most regular season games.

Last year, the Batmen broke the mold, winning only 93 games, but hammering their way to the conference championship. And they made a good showing against Strong City, winning 2 games and nearly winning a third before the Statesmen asserted themselves.

This year will be a year to regroup after 2018's successes.

Pitching: 9.0
Fine starters; short on relief.



Freeland: Full season

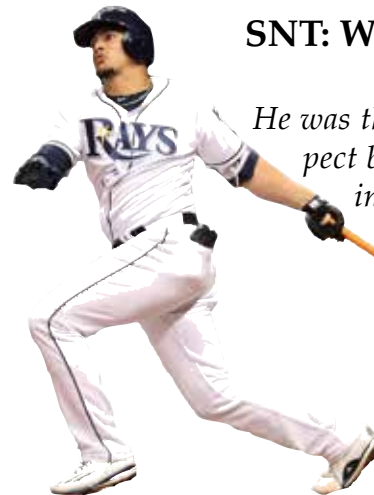
ROTATION. There's nothing wrong with this part of the team. Michael Wacha (Grade 14 C-32 HR+14, 15 starts) and Anibel Sanchez (Grade 14, 24 starts) lead the way. Both guys were slowed by injuries last year, but together they make a good #1 starter.

Turnover Rate: 29%

Arrived: Willy Adames, Ji-Man Choi, Travis Jankowski, Matt Magill, Tom Murphy, Wandy Peralta, Yusmeiro Petit, Will Smith, Daniel Vogelbach, Steven Wright.

Departed: Fernando Abad, Matt Albers, Danny Barnes, Josh Edgin, Craig Gentry, Felix Hernandez, Dixon Machado, Zach McAllister, Ryan Schimpf, Paul Sewald.

SNT: Willy Adames.



He was the #10 rated prospect by Baseball America in 2018, and projects to be a very nice power/speed guy at a critical position as he develops his bat.

They are followed by Kyle Freeland (Grade 12 HR+25, 33 starts), and Red Sox World Champions Eduardo Rodriguez (Grade 11, 23 starts) and Nathan Eovaldi (Grade 9 C+35, 21 starts). The top of the rotation has 116 starts above Grade 9.

Danny Duffy (Grade 7 C-31 HR-11, 28 starts) and Jake Junis (Grade 7 C+25 HR-22, 30 starts) handle the other 46. Having Grade 7s at the bottom of the rotation is a high floor. This unit will allow Gotham City to consistently compete.

BULLPEN. You have to love Dellin Betances (Grade 18* C-16 HR+21, 67 IP) as a late inning specialist. You want overpowering? How about 115 Ks in 67 innings? Once again he will be one



gotham city BATMEN

of the most dominant closers in TBL, someone anyone would like to go to.

Red Sox World Series Champion Steven Wright (Grade 16* C-43 HR+25, 54 IP), Will Smith (Grade 15* C+26 HR+36, 53 IP) and Chaz Roe (Grade 15*, 50 IP) form the bridge to get to Betances in close and late situations. This is not a perfect situation but there is bulk here – 157 innings. Things get *really* bulky when you add in rubber-armed Yusmeiro Petit (Grade 13* C+41 HR-13, 93 IP). The total of 317 innings above Grade 13* is enough to bring home the Ws when Anton is playing with a lead.

The only bad news is that the pen is short on innings. Richard Bleier (Grade 11* C+52 HR+62, 33 IP) and Hunter Strickland (Grade 9* C-21 HR+15, 45 IP) are both useful pieces, but the only guy left after them is

Mike Wright (Grade 3* C-21). The 400 good innings here will have to be carefully managed throughout the year.

Offense: 8.5
Best hitting in the division.

Gotham City has three cards in the stack that would be welcome in any envelope in TBL. Giancarlo Stanton (1-1-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks) had 73 XBH and an astonishing 211 strikeouts for the Yankees last year. His card is surprisingly generic



Stanton: Generic

outside of the power numbers, but there's enough thump here for him to bat cleanup all season long.

Matt Carpenter (1-5-5-6, 9 hits, 5 walks) bats third against higher grade right-handed starters and plays every day. Tommy Pham



Betances: Got to love him.

(1-4-5, 10 hits, 4 walks, 16 speed) is the leadoff hitter in most lineups and he has developed into a terrific on-base guy.

There's a good support staff for these three beasts. Mark Canha (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42) got a chance to play regularly last year and

put up some nice numbers. Travis Jankowski (2 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, 2 11s, 18 speed, 30 SSN for 30 SBA) is an outfield burner who will drive teams with weak armed catchers crazy. Ji-Man Choi (1-5-5-6, 9 hits, 4 walks, 61 ganes) is only a part time player but he has plus power. Ryan Zimmerman (1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, L+14, R-7) is a lefty killer who also plays first against lower rated righties.

Other regulars have quieter cards. Ian Kinsler (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 15 speed, R+2) is still here at the age of 36. He plays second against righties. Robinson Chirinos (1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks + 2 42s) is the regular catcher with help from Jonathan Lucroy (0-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) is the regular catcher. Willy Adames (1-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, 16 speed) and Alcides Escobar (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks) play shortstop.

There are a couple of soft spots, but there's plenty of power here, and enough speed to scratch out runs when necessary. This is the best hitting attack in the division.

Defense: 3.5
Not the best fielding in the division.

This is where Gotham City gives away some ground to Maracaibo and Rye. Ian Kinsler (2B9) has developed into a smooth fielder late in his career. He is not the problem.

The shortstops on this team are Alcides Escobar (SS8) and Willie Adames (SS7). The regular

catcher is Robinson Chirinos (C7, Th-4). This is trouble: with weak defenders in key positions. Jonathan Lucroy (C8, Th+1) is some help behind the plate, but he is not the regular starter.



Kinsler: Not the problem

At the infield corners, Ryan Zimmerman (1B4) is solid, but Matt Carpenter (1B3) plays a lot of first as well. At third, Carpenter (3B3) shows up again but the regular hot corner guy is Jedd Gyorko (3B4) who is solid.

In the outfield, Tommy Pham (OF2, 33 arm), and Stanton (OF2, 36 arm) are pretty good but Mark Canha (OF2, 29 arm) is just waiting for his next at bat. Fred Jankowski (OF3, 31 arm) is a nice outfielder and is the regular center fielder.

The holes at catcher and short are painful, and are the only thing separating the club from making another division run.

Bench: 2.5
Useful pieces.

There are very few pure bench players here. Almost everyone starts against specific pitching. Gotham City does boast enough lineup balance to field a nasty group of lefty killers. Ryan Zimmerman (L+14) and Jedd Gyorko (L+5) hammer lefties, and we don't even get to mention Giancarlo Stanton (L+7) in this section.

Jose Pirela (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+3) comes in to play second against southpaws. Jarrod Dyson (2 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks, 19 speed, 32 SSN, L+6) and Jedd Gyorko (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+5) also hit lefties well. A lefty-killer lineup is not typically something you see outside of the top contenders.

Against righties, Daniel Vogelbach (1-5, 7 hits, 5 walks, R+4, 87 AB) has a nice shift to work

with, although his card is a little thin on hits. Tom Murphy (4 0s, 9 hits, 1 walk) is also here, although his role is unclear.



Dyson also gives Gotham a nice pinch running option. There are useful pieces here.

3rd They are very close to Rye and Maracaibo is every area except team defense. That's not usually a part of the crucial difference between contending and not contending; the offense is very solid, better than Maracaibo and Rye – there's power all over the place and speed in spots. With Anton at the helm, the talent will be used to the limit. The pitching is very solid. If the other two clubs are just treading water in late summer it might be possible for Gotham City to go pick up some relief pitching and make another run at the playoffs.

Anton has made a habit of surprising us; let's see how much far he can push these cards.

Players 30 and over (as of 07/01/2019):

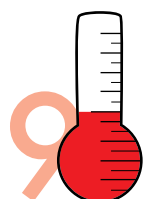
- 37: Ian Kinsler,
- 35: Anibal Sanchez, Robinson Chirinos,
- 34: Yusmeiro Petit, Ryan Zimmerman, Jarrod Dyson, Steven Wright
- 33: Jonathan Lucroy, Matt Carpenter,
- 32: Chaz Roe, Richard Bleier, Alcides Escobar,
- 31: Dellin Betances, Jedd Gyorko,
- 30: Hunter Strickland, Danny Duffy, Mark Canha, Tommy Pham

Players 27 and under (as of 07/01/2019):

- 26: Jakob Junis, Eduardo Rodriguez, Kyle Freeland
- 23: Willy Adames

gotham city BATMEN

TQ: 23.5



2018 new westminster WHISKEYJACKS in review



The brief competitive window has closed.

by Jim Jeatt

2018 in review

Final Record: 86-76 (2nd, Mays)

The New Westminster Whiskeyjacks in 2018 had a good season, when measured against the franchise's history. A total of 85 wins is the fourth best in the 21 seasons of the team's existence. The team hit a franchise record 205 home runs and scored 725 runs the most since 2010. From a TBL perspective, however, the team finished second in the Mays and failed to make the playoffs.

What went right?

Four players hit 20 or more homers: Jonathan Schoop (29), Jose Abreu (24), Yadier Molina (24) and Brian Goodwin (22). Schoop led the team offensively in RBI (93) and runs (79). In just 73 games, Goodwin hit 22 homers with 56 RBI. Other notables: Abreu (.274-24-84); Molina (80 RBI).

Robbie Ray had a solid season the mound (17-8, 2.19). He led the International conference in ERA, H/9, and WHIP, and was second in wins and shutouts. Dan Straily went 14-9, 3.88. Leiter, Colome, McGee, Castro and Baez all finished with under-2 ERA over 200 relief innings pitched going 13-7 with 6 saves.

What went wrong?

Most everything else. Jason Vargas was unable to help with an ERA of 5.91 and 172 innings and a 7-14 record. Three starters had an ERA over 6, going 12-14 in 193 innings. The bullpen had some good moments with Buchter chipping in 31 saves but a rough 5.38 ERA. Ryan Braun and Dexter Fowler contributed basically nothing in a large amount of PA.

Management believes that the brief competitive window has closed, and drafting 12th didn't help. 2019 looked to have few prospects coming through the system and a pitching staff with limited arm strength.

Many of the previous year's assets had been consumed trying to make the team competitive, so, the order was given to start the tear down,

leaving only the core of the team (Vazquez, Schoop, Ahmed, Herrera, Newcomb and Ray – a spine and a couple of arms.) The biggest surprise is Ahmed's SS-10, and the biggest disappointment Schoop – the Brewers couldn't figure out how to use him.



Ray: Solid season

3 Things

1. *Change in philosophy.* We have become more scout-based while still using analytics. All 14 picks from the 2018 draft have made the 35 man roster, including hyped prospects Kingery, Brinson, German and McMahon who will play, but perhaps not well, for 2019.

2. *Restocking the cupboard.* The 2020 cupboard has been stocked with nine picks in the first three rounds to give some depth to the rebuild. An overall total of 16 gives the team some flexibility to react to any positive progress from the players currently on the roster.

3. *Patience is the key.* The franchise has rarely won more than 82 games. There were six years between the last two consecutive winning seasons and it could be that long again.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

Jim Jeatt (15th year)

Very little, however, depends on this year's performance.



In 2018, the Whiskeyjacks posted their second straight winning season at 85-77, finishing in second place in the Mays behind Gotham City, and four games out of a wild card berth. The two year run is a modest taste of success, but Jim will take it – his last winning season before 2017 was 2010. It's been a long road back to respectability.

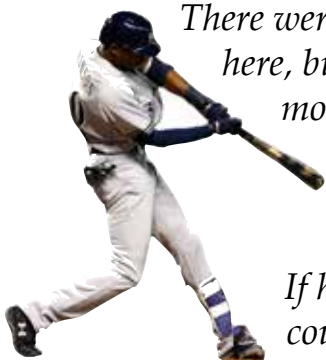
And the road ends right here. This club will be in the Vlad Guerrero, Jr. conversation. This isn't a 36-win East Anglia train wreck, but while the future is bright – Jim's 2020 draft is loaded – this is not going to be pretty.

Pitching: 4.0 **Expectations are not robust.**

ROTATION. It starts out ok. There are 54 starts of Sean Newcomb (Grade 12 C-44 HR+14, 30 starts) and Robbie Ray (Grade 13 C-61 HR-16, 24 starts). Ray's grade offers false hope: he has wretched control and 23 fatigue, and is left-handed. And this is the good part of the rotation.

Junior Guerra (Grade 8 C-16, 26 starts) and Jefry Rodriguez (Grade 8 C-62 HR-15, 8 starts) are the only other starters that steal hits without help.

SNT: Lewis Brinson.



There were a few choices for SNT here, but Brinson might have the most upside. He's already been involved in a few high profile trades, so his talent is highly regarded. If he can break through he could be a superstar.



Ray, Newcomb: Starts out ok

After that, it's batting practice for opposing offenses. Doug Fister (Grade 6 C+15 HR-15, 12 starts, picked up on waivers); Domingo German (Grade 7 C-15 HR-16, 14 starts, 17 RIP); and Adam Plutko (Grade 6 C+15 HR-51, 12 starts) will be pitching with the wind blowing out.

Chris Stratton (Grade 5 C-13 HR-11, 26 starts) and Sam Gaviglio (Grade 4 C+15 HR-15, 24 starts) will mop up the rest. The grades are not there after Guerra, and the peripherals will be annoying all season. Jim has a section of his instructions entitled Valets and Blowout Specialists. It is safe to say expectations are not robust.

BULLPEN. The closer, who will have plenty of time to work on his tan this year, is Ryan Buchter (Grade 15* C-14 HR+22, 39 IP). If there were any chance of this team needing a closer, he would be a little short on innings. If they lead,

Turnover Rate: 46%

Arrived: Tim Beckham, Lewis Brinson, Willie Calhoun, Phillip Ervin, Doug Fister, Dustin Fowler, Domingo German, Niko Goodrum, Scott Kingery, Phil Maton, Ryan McMahan, Adam Plutko, Jefry Rodriguez, Pedro Severino, Max Stassi, Dan Winkler.

Departed: Jose Abreu, Pedro Baez, Johnny Barbato, Ryan Braun, Wilmer Difo, Adam Frazier, Mark Jr. Leiter, Seth Lugo, Jose Martinez, Brad Miller, Yadier Molina, Jake McGee, Addison Russell, Robert Stephenson, Dan Straily, Pedro Strop.



the Bridge Company consists of Alex Colome (Grade 13* C+15 HR+22, 66 IP), Miguel Castro (Grade 12* C-46 HR+22, 86 IP) and former Northboro Phoenix southpaw Jerry Blevins (Grade 10* C-43 HR-13, 43 innings). The useful Daniel Winkler (Grade 11* C+13 HR+43, 60 IP) will probably prove to be just as effective as the setup crew. There are 294 pretty good innings here. Then we fall into the crevasse.

Trevor Hildenberger (Grade 5* C+25 HR-15, 73 IP) and Phillip Maton (Grade 6* C-33 HR+36, 47 IP) will take their lumps, and Jason Vargas (Grade 2, C+14 HR-31, 92 IP) will probably make way too many appearances.

Offense: 2.5
Trouble scoring runs.

There's no closer, but there is some bulk – 540 relief innings. The shaggy starters will need plenty of help. Hmm. Yeah...well, here's the thing.



Ahmed: Closest to stud (1)

You would like to say that there are hitters here that have 14 on base numbers, power, and other skills. But there are not. The closest New West gets to a stud, middle of the order hitter is this guy: Nick Ahmed (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 15 speed). Nick is an honest-to-Pete cornerstone of the next New West contender – a plus bat and one of the best fielding shortstops in baseball. Ahmed bats seventh in the lineup against right-

ies and is one of only two guys on the team with four power numbers. Cleanup hitter Niko Goodrum (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 16 SBA) is the other. Max Stassi (1-6-6, 8 hits, 3 walks + 42, 88 games) bats third for half a season. Odubel Herrera (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks) has some pop and plays every day. He bats fourth and fifth in the lineups.

Other regulars include first baseman Ryan McMahon (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 91 games, L+7), and outfielder Brian Goodwin (1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, 15 speed, 75 games). Having your key lineup pieces game limited is an issue here. Phil Ervin (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 16 speed) is the leadoff man, and he has only 78 games. Jonathan Schoop (1-5-6, 9 hits, 1 walk) is the regular second baseman. He has good power, but reaches base about twice a week. Yangervis Solarte (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, 4 24s) is a guy that the Whiskeyjacks want to see primarily with the bases empty.

Defense: 4.5
Better news.

Christian Vazquez (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks) and Dexter Fowler (2 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks, 15 speed) start against lefties, but neither of those guys will make much contact.

This team will struggle to score runs all year long, and the lack of punch will stress the thin pitching staff.



Ahmed: Closest to stud (2)

There is better news here. Nick Ahmed (SS10) gets the coveted top grade at shortstop this

season, and Jonathan Schoop (2B8, SS8) will be a nice running mate for him. Christian Vazquez (C8 Th+2) may not be much of a hitter, but he is sublime behind the plate. Playing on a team that won 108 games last year, it's a wonder he didn't get a C9. Max Stassi (C8 Th+0) also gets starts at catcher, and he won't embarrass himself out there.

Yangervis Solarte (3B4, 2B8) is the solid regular at third, and backs up Schoop at the keystone. Ryan McMahon (1B3) will Bill Buckner his way through the year at first.

Bench: 2.0
Move along.

The outfield is a bunch of average guys with below average arms. Except Phil Ervin (OF1, 31 arm), who pretty much blows. Odubel Herrera (OF2, 32 arm), Dexter Fowler (OF2, 30 arm), and Brian Goodwin (OF2, 31 arm) are the regulars. They won't be awful, but there's not even an OF3 on the bench to back them up in close games.

Ahmed and Schoop make this a pretty good defensive team, but there are soft spots. Scott Kingery (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, 17 speed, 30 SSN for 13 SBA), New Westminster's first round pick in 2019, will back up all over the place. He's not a great player yet, but his versatility and speed will be helpful. Tim Beckham (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, 96 games) is what passes for a power hitter off the bench in these parts. After that there's a few guys waiting for next year's cards, like Lewis Brinson (3 0s, 8 hits, 1 walk) and Willie Calhoun (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks). Pedro Severino (C8, Th+1) is a serviceable backup catching option.

Nothing happening here: move along.

4th And there will be a considerable distance between this club and the rest of the division. Jim traded Jose

Abreu to Rye in the offseason, so it's not like he didn't see this coming. New West has 8 picks in the first 3 rounds of the 2020 draft. The return to respectability will be enhanced by the influx of kids.

A quick look at the relative ages on the team (see the block below) shows just how young the team is; 13 of the 35, or roughly a third, were born in 1992 or before, making them 27 or younger (and thus in, or coming into, their prime productive years). An additional 15 have birth dates between 1988 and 1992, making them 27-31 years of age. All of that ticks up one year, of course, but it means that the core of the team (plus the prodigious draft) is in the correct demographic for a rebuild.

We think that there is some hope in that. But a lot depends on next year's draft. Very little, however, depends on this year's performance.

Players born in 1992 or after (13):
Brinson, Calhoun, M. Castro, Ervin, Du. Fowler, German, Goodrum, Kingery, Maton, McMahon, Newcomb, J. Rodriguez, P. Severino

Players born in 1987 or before (7):
Blevins, Buchter, Fister, De. Fowler, J. Guerra, Solarte, Vargas



new westminster WHISKEY JACKS

TQ: 13.0



No Such Thing As Too Much



Something is definitely conjured in the mind when we talk about a contending team down in *Brobdingnag*. When the *Barbarians* get ready to win, the first thing we

think of here at the *Annual* is *overkill*. Now let's not sell *Joe Auletta* short: to win in TBL you really need to go all out – add lots of pitching, develop a solid bench and killer lineup, spend the present and sell the future.

Of course, that's not how *Joe* does it. Truly, we're still not completely sure how he can add Ronald Acuna and Juan Soto and Walker Buehler and Charlie Morton and still have a plus 2020 draft . . . oh yes, Mike Trout has left town. We won't criticize the move, but it may be a while before we know whether it worked out.

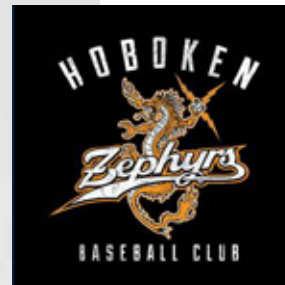
In another article a team manager observes that he chose his division wisely. This may not be the case for *Pat Martin* and the *Knoxville Outlaws*, who will be spending 2019 looking up at the all-in *Barbarians*. Still, they have stocked up with as much relief pitching as anyone should need. We've been wrong before, but this team looks playoff bound.



2018 Ruth Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Hoboken*	98	64	.605	—
Midwest	88	74	.469	10
Knoxville	62	100	.358	36
Brobdingnag	46	115	.333	51.5

* Won World Series against Grand Cayman.




Another team that looks seriously playoff bound is *Steve Powell's* *Hoboken Zephyrs*. This club is loaded with talent, though they seem to be short

on the bullpen. There are available draft picks that might help this out. Between Hoboken and Knoxville, Brobdingnag should have a good fight on its hands.

Which leads us to the “best fourth-place team in TBL” – a title we award annually to a team that would be good enough to contend in most divisions, but is stuck in one where there are three better teams. The TQ for the *Midwest Mongrels* is high enough to lead at least a few divisions in TBL, but *Darrell Skogen's* boys are in this one. This will be a tough challenge, and requires either Pat's or Steve's club to falter for them to sneak into the post season. Not that it can't happen – it's why we play the games – but the cold hard numbers say it's unlikely.



A photograph of baseball pitcher Walker Buehler in a white Los Angeles Dodgers uniform, captured in the middle of a pitching motion on a baseball field. He is wearing a blue cap and a white jersey with "Dodgers" and the number "64" in red. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators.

Walker Buehler,
Brobdingnag

Ruth Division

1. Brobdingnag	35.5
2. Knoxville	31.0
3. Hoboken	30.0
4. Midwest	27.5

2018 brobdingnag BARBARIANS in review



How high the rebound will be is TBD.

by Joe Auletta

2018 in review Final Record: 46-116 (4th, Ruth)

Even before 2017 ended in a title, it was clear 2018 was going to hurt—too many key pieces of the 2017 campaign were already retired, and the recent draft was used to patch holes and acquire mercenaries, not build the farm system. 2018 was payback. The first two months the team went 13-27, and that pattern persisted. Young arms (Glasnow, Middleton, Holder, Montas) were thrown into the fire with good days and bad—more bad. Top draft pick Yoan Moncada showed he too needed more development. 2019 will reap some maturation rewards, but how high the rebound will be is TBD.

What went right?

To be honest, not a lot. Mike Trout (.292/.409/.524) was clearly the best hitter on the team, but injuries limited him to 114 games. He did reach 1000 hits in his 7th TBL season. Mookie Betts (153 G, team leading 76 runs) and Manny Machado (87 RBIs, 160 hits, 68 extra base hits, all team bests) held down the middle of the lineup. Jonathan Villar filled in adequately and Jackie Bradley provided some well appreciated power (28 HRs) and glove work, but only hit .225. On the mound Steven Strasburg (9-9, 3.01 ERA) pitched well before he went to Strong City in the late trading period. Craig Kimbrel collected 26 saves, making him only the 5th TBL reliever to top 200 saves and is positioned to move into 3rd place this season.

What went wrong?

Most everything else. The offense was, well, offensive. But they were a broad, multifaceted last. Last in runs, average, on-base, slugging, and errors. Only four hitters stayed healthy enough to play in more than 117 games, and one of those was Chris Davis: 127 games of truly memorable .174/.277/.289 with 36 RBIs from a man who not too long ago was a triple crown candidate. Pair that with Hanley Ramirez,

another former team MVP who hit an almost identical .172/.277/.313 with 38 RBIs and the offense was doomed. Brandon Nimmo was the team's offensive rookie of the year—he of the .186 batting average. Six points better than Moncada. At least there isn't much down side for a sophomore slump.

By comparison the pitching was almost tolerable. Almost. They did finish above Warrenton in ERA and wins — but no one else. Homer Bailey and Chris Tillman both lost 20 games, and Phil Hughes 17. Together they went 6-57 with an 8.88 ERA. After Strasburg was shipped to Strong City, only middle reliever Cam Bedrosian (5-0, 4.05 ERA) had more than 3 wins.

Sean Connery said it long ago. There can only be one. In reality, all three questions about the Barbarians revolve around one question. One point. How can you trade a 27 year old Mike Trout?



Machado: Leader

3 Things

1. *Is The Trade a Good Trade?* It might be. With Trout, it was Jaws Meets Dracula scary: Nimmo-Soto-Betts-Trout-Machado. Without Trout it is a step back from that, and in exchange there is Acuna. But the rotation adds Clay Buchholz (Gr 15/+26/+21) as a demigod 5th starter, Strasburg is a 6th starter, and Oliver Perez (Grade 25* C+43 HR+52) left handed closer. The team will be better overall

2. *What about 2020 and beyond?* The longer term equation is Trout for Strasburg, Acuna, and 2020 WAR #2. If Trout does maintain a .487 OBP/.573 SLG level as his new norm, it will be very hard for Brob to come out on top.

3. *How desperate is Vlad to win in 2019?* Trading Trout and the WAR 2020 #1 together may be showing some very un-Brob like tendencies, and feeling some need to win now. On the other hand, the lineup now has six starting players 26 or younger.

brobdingnag BARBARIANS



Joe Auletta (31st year)

Why did he trade Mike Trout? Perhaps it was the only way to assemble the embarrassment of riches now gracing the team's roster.

After taking a year off, falling all the way from 113 wins to 46 wins, the franchise that has won six TBL Championships — and lost three more — is back again. Mr. Auletta has built another juggernaut out of the ashes of the 2018 squad, but what's missing from this team is also as important as what's here: Mike Trout.

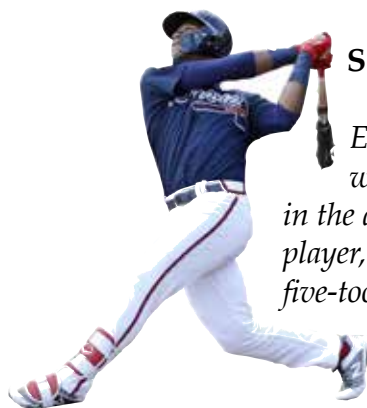
There are few players in baseball one might deem untradeable, and Trout certainly heads that list as arguably the Best Player in the Game. So why did he do it? One suggestion is that he couldn't decide which young outfielder to take in the draft. A more apt notion is that it was the only way to assemble the embarrassment of riches now gracing the team's roster. Let's hope — for the sake of the rest of TBL — it proves at least a short-term advantage.

Pitching: 17.5
As strong a staff as we've seen.

Grades are important, and a strong starting staff is often enough to get a team to the playoffs all by itself. But it takes a deep bullpen to get to the World Series. And Mr. Auletta has built such a bullpen for this team. There may be some cracks in the foundation, this is as strong a pitching staff as we've seen in recent years.

Beyond grades, positive peripherals can be the difference between a disappointing season and a championship season. While the rotation has few big negative peripherals, it has few big positive ones. The bullpen has some big positives, but the top end of the pen, with one exception, lacks the put-away power of the best bullpens.

ROTATION. Remember all those Grade 1s here last year? Gone. A strong draft and scrupulous



SNT: Ronald Acuña, Jr.

Even though young Acuna was Mr. Auletta's second pick in the draft and the second youngest player, he gets the nod here for his five-tool skillset.

Turnover Rate: 54%

Arrived: Ronald Acuña, Willians Astudillo, Jose Briceno, Clay Buchholz, Walker Buehler, Rajai Davis, Cesar Hernandez, Charlie Morton, Collin McHugh, Omar Narvaez, Oliver Perez, Jace Peterson, Carlos Santana, Juan Soto, Ryne Stanek, Stephen Strasburg, Christian Villanueva, Matt Wieters, Ryan Yarbrough.

Departed: Homer Bailey, Cam Bedrosian, Christian Bethancourt, Jackie Bradley, Allen Cordoba, Chris Davis, Derek Fisher, Phil Hughes, Ian Krol, Sandy Leon, Devin Mesoraco, Frankie Montas, Daniel Norris, Michael Pineda, Hanley Ramirez, Aaron Sanchez, Chris Tillman, Mike Trout, Jonathan Villar.

trades have built as strong a staff as we've seen in recent years. Well-traveled Justin Verlander (Grade 16 C+34) heads a staff that includes acclaimed rookie Walker Buehler (Grade 16 C+16 HR+22) and Ryne Stanek (Grade 16 C-31, fatigue 6). That's 86 starts of Grade 16.

But they're not done. Charlie Morton (Grade 15 C-22 HR+21), back-from-the-dead Clay Buchholz (Grade 15 C+26 HR+21), and part-timer Tyler Glasnow (Grade 13 C-36) add 57 more starts. For



Verlander: Well-traveled



brobdingnag BARBARIANS

the remaining 19, former ace Stephen Strasburg (Grade 10) fills in admirably. There are plenty of opportunities for the bullpen in the Stanek, Glasnow, and Strasburg starts.



McHugh: At the top

BULLPEN. When your rotation features 143 starts of Grade 13+, how many relief innings do you need? The answer, according to Mr. Auletta, is 654. At the top is Collin McHugh (Grade 20* HR+26), but he's joined by lefty Oliver Perez (Grade 25* C+43 HR+52), Craig Kimbrel (Grade 24* C-56), and Stanek (Grade 19*). That's 193 innings of closer-grade relief, even with some poor peripherals.

The rest of the deep pen has Seunghwan Oh (Grade 15* C+24), Scott Oberg (Grade 14* C+26 HR+32), Roberto Osuna (Grade 13* C+46 HR+54), Jonathan Holder (Grade 13* C+23 HR+41), Will Harris (Grade 11* C+24 HR+43), Glasnow (Grade 11*), and lefty Ryan Yarbrough (Grade 10* for almost 119 innings). Yarbrough acts as a caddy, but there are plenty of mix-and-match opportunities for everyone.

Offense: 11.0
Get on base, then flash the power.

What do you do after winning an MVP and a World Championship in the real world? Try to duplicate the feat in TBL. Mookie Betts (1-4-5-5-6, 12 hits, 5 walks, L+5 R-3, 36 SBA with 32

SSN) is in a league all his own. He's so good, he's got a 14 on 21. Really, when's the last time you've seen that?



Betts: MVP

He's backed up by SNT Ronald Acuna (1-5-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks+22, 21 SBA with 29 SSN), Manny Machado (1-5-5-6, 11 hits with two 10s, 3 walks, 16 SBA with 34 SSN), and forgotten Juan Soto, the first pick of the last draft (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 5 walks, L-6). These guys all rake. They find ways to get on base, and then flash the power.

And that's what this Brobdingnag team does exceptionally well: get on base. Acquisition Carlos Santana (1-0-0, 8 hits, 6 walks) is known as Mr. On-Base. Brandon Nimmo (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks+42, L-8, 15 SBA with 24 SSN) has a power-speed combination. Even Cesar Hernandez (2 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, 25 SBA with 29 SSN) lives and dies by his OBP.

Then there's the catching platoon of Omar Narvaez (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, L-9) and Matt Wieters (1-6, 9 hits, 4 walks+22), who do a pretty good job getting on. Christian Villanueva (1-5-5, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L+14 R-9) is a funky toy for a team that can afford it. Lots of walks. Lots of speed. Good power. This offense will make things happen.

Defense: 3.0
Where is Omar Vizquel?

The highlights are fewer here. Betts (OF3 with a 35 arm), Machado (3B5), and Wieters (C8 with Th+1, when he plays) are the defensive stars. Acuna and Soto are OF2s with average arms. Correa (SS8) and Hernandez (2B7) are just average up the middle, which may extend many innings. Santana (1B3) and Narvaez (C7, Th-2) get to play a lot. This is not a team strength, and

there's no one on the bench to rescue the average fielders in the late innings. Where is Omar Vizquel when you need him?

Bench: 4.0
Everyone has a role to play.

You want a pinch-hitter? How about Willians Astudillo (1-4-6, 13 hits, 1 walk+22, no shift) and David Freese (1-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks+22, L+2 R-4). A pinch-runner? There's Rajai Davis (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+42, but with 28 SBA with 29 SSN) and Jace Peterson (3 0s, 7 hits, 5 walks, but with 15 SBA with 341 SSN). And then there's Jose Briceno (C6, but with Th+5, which is the reason he's here). He can also handle the stick (1-5, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L+9 R-10). Everyone but Yoan Moncada has a role to play.



Astudillo: Hitting toy

1st

Playoff-ready? Yes. Juggernaut? Maybe. There enough cracks in the foundation to suggest that this team will take a bit more work than most other juggernauts in league history.

But it's managed by Mr. Auletta, who been to the World Series nine times in 30 years. That's a hell of an average in any league. The *Annual* won't bet against them.

Rebuilding, Brobdingnag style: When they're bad, they're *really* bad. When they're good, they're *really* good. There are exactly four seasons in Mr. Auletta's 30 years in TBL when his team won between 76 and 86 games, and two of those were near the beginning of his reign. A

master at building up (*see this year's team*) or building down (*see last year's team*), Mr. Auletta has a long history of rebuilding his teams.



While he's never done the bounce — win the World Series one year, finish with the worst record the next, and then win the World Series in Year 3 — he's attempting a version of it this year. He didn't finish with the worst record last year (he was second worst), but he did trade for the first pick in the draft in the now-famous Mike Trout deal.

Most of the time, Mr. Auletta builds a team that's competitive or even championship-quality for at least several years in a row, a difficult task in this league. In his last such iteration, before last season's purposeful self-destruction debacle, his teams captured five straight Ruth Division crowns and won two World Series. Not a bad day at the office.

Before that run, though, his teams missed the playoffs for four straight years, never winning more than 77 games. That stretch equaled the longest non-playoff run of his TBL career. If he accomplishes his goal this year of another championship season, it puts another feather in his already full cap. Maybe that's worth losing Mike Trout.

brobdingnag BARBARIANS

TQ: 35.5



2018 Knoxville BLUE THUNDER in review



The conventional wisdom is pitching beats hitting.

by Joe Auletta

2018 in review Final Record: 62-100 (3rd, Ruth)

At first glance the 2018 season for the Blue Thunder was similar to the 2017 season. The record improved by a couple wins. In 2017 the offense scored 827 runs, fifth-best in the league, but the team's 5.67 ERA was dead last, and the run differential was -248. In 2018 the pitching improved by half a run per game — but the offense fell off significantly, scoring only 629 runs, beating out only the anemic Brob offense. Net effect: the run differential was an almost identical -233.

What went right?

The pitching staff matured. Gerrit Cole became a workhorse, logging 216 innings and winning 16 games. Patrick Corbin also reached 200+ innings and a respectable ERA of 4.51. By the end of the season they had a five man rotation that showed they could stay healthy and were coming into their own.

Offensively the lineup had some depth. Miguel Sano led the team with 28 HRs and 72 RBIs in only 116 games. Young Tommy Joseph swung and missed far too often, but showed emerging power with 18 homers and 53 runs driven in. Byron Buxton finally started to look like he might hit enough to play regularly and use his speed as his average was north on .250 and had 13 triples to accompany 22 steals in 24 attempts.

What went wrong?

The young guys were getting better, but the still had a ways to go. While the starting pitchers

were showing promise, the relief staff was not. Other than Blake Parker's very good (2.12 ERA) 29 innings, the rest of the staff recorded only 10 saves. Other than Cole, no pitcher had more than seven wins, and five of them lost 12+ games — though admittedly many of those were the result of weak run support.

Offensively the drop-off from the year before was across the roster. Justin Turner (.906 OPS) and Sean Rodriguez (33 HRs, .596 slugging) were gone. Chris Gimenez dropped 98 points on his BA and Jose Peraza dropped 58 points. And no one stepped up to become the lead dog. As a team the batting average dropped 20 points and 54 homers.



Sano: Leader

3 Things

1. *Can the maturing starting pitching lead them?* With health, and decent run support, this can be one of the best starting staffs not only for 2019, but beyond. Can they continue the downward drift on the team ERA?
2. *Is the bullpen up to contender status?* The bullpen has some experienced names like Ottavino and Wade Davis, but the top six relievers in the depth chart only pitched about 100 innings for Knoxville last season. How will the chemistry and the definition of roles work out?
3. *Which will win out: starting pitching, relief, hitting, or a balanced approach?* All the Ruth teams are good enough to make the playoffs, but at least one will not. They are going at it with four different approaches. The conventional wisdom is pitching beats hitting — and Knoxville will test that wisdom this year.

knoxville BLUE THUNDER



Pat Martin (33rd year)

With Brobdingnag gearing up, will it be 'Clash of the Titans' or 'Davey and Goliath?' That's what we're here to determine.

2015 seems like a long time ago. That the season ended in the semi-finals despite winning 105 games during the regular season makes it all the more bittersweet. Mr. Martin has been quietly rebuilding since then. Losing 100 or more games for two straight years is painful, but it did add some significant fresh blood to the Blue Thunder gene pool.

Now rested and ready, the Team That Pat Built is ready to take on all comers — and that's where the problems begin, at least as the *Annual* sees it. This is also a year that division foe Brobdingnag is gearing up for a pennant race. Will it be "Clash of the Titans" or "Davey and Goliath?" That's what we're here to determine.

Pitching: 15.0
Playoff-quality staff.

It's a coming of age story with three of the team's top starters experiencing break-out seasons. Along with SNT Adam Ottavino anchoring the bullpen, all looks bright and rosy, right? Hold on — not so fast.

Poor Mr. Martin has only collected one closer grade for his bullpen. Brobdingnag has three. Knoxville has two top starters with grades over

Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Harrison Bader, Jesse Biddle, Charlie Culberson, Wade Davis, Evan Gattis, Caleb Joseph, Colin Moran, Bud Norris, Adam Ottavino, Fernando Romero, Hector Santiago, Kohl Stewart, Lou Trivino.

Departed: Christian Arroyo, Jett Bandy, Jorge Bonifacio, Alan Busenitz, Brian Duensing, Tyler Duffey, Clint Frazier, Chris Gimenez, Justin Grimm, Chris Herrmann, Tommy Joseph, Shelby Miller, Sam Tuivailala.

SNT: Adam Ottavino.

Ottavino arrived as the closer in Knoxville via a trade in the early off-season, as Mr. Martin prepared to ramp up his team for a playoff run.



13. Brobdingnag has five, not counting a split-grade. But Knoxville has a playoff-quality pitching staff, and as the saying goes: anything can happen in a short series.

ROTATION. The two aces are strong, young, and nearly carbon copies of each other. Gerrit Cole (Grade 16 HR+23) and Mike Foltynewicz (Grade 15 HR+21) contribute 63 breakout starts. The two best supporting starters are veteran Pat Corbin (Grade 12 C+25 HR+26) and break-through starter Kyle Gibson (Grade 12 C-23). They add 65 more starts.

Mike Fiers (Grade 10 C+31 HR-24) starts 30 of the remaining games, leaving the last four for



Cole, Foltynewicz: young, strong aces



knoxville BLUE THUNDER

rookie Fernando Romero (Grade 6 HR+22) instead of veteran Jake Faria (Grade 8 C-44). Those four games are inconsequential in the larger scheme of things, but Fiers' starts will require a deft hand, as his HR rating may lead to some, er, explosive outings.

BULLPEN. A deep bullpen (652 total innings) is available to come in early and often to rescue starters like Fiers. Closer Ottavino (Grade 22* C-32 HR+33) is a bit wild, but he's otherwise a rock with over 77 innings. The rest of the pen features a good mix of righties and lefties, several strong peripherals, and many, many innings.

The set-up crew includes Lou Trivino (Grade 16* C-22), Ryan Pressly (Grade 15* HR+31), Jesse Biddle (Grade 14* C-26 HR+21), Wade Davis (Grade 14* C-26), Andrew Chafin (Grade 13* C-44 HR+62), and Trevor May (Grade 13* C+32). They offer more than 424 innings of 13*+ relief. At the bottom of the pen are Hector Santiago (Grade 12* C-55), Kohl Stewart (Grade 11* C-44 HR+55), Bud

Norris (Grade 11*), and Robert Gsellman (Grade 7* C+21 HR+21).

Offense: 9.0
Good mix of power and speed.

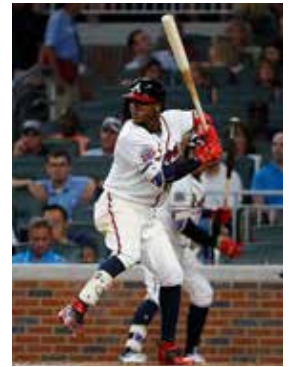
We often like to start this section with the scariest card of the team. The 2019 Blue Thunder have a solid offense, but they don't have a definitive "monster" card. They do have Matt Kemp (1-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks), who most teams would love to roster even though he doesn't run much anymore. He plays almost every day.



Kemp: Love to roster

Knoxville does have players with more power, including the dynamic twins Eduardo Escobar and Matt Chapman, who have virtually identical and awesome cards (1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22).

Even their shifts (L-3 R-1) are the same. Last year's SNT Ozzie Albies (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+6, R-4, 17 SBA with 32 SSN) turned in a solid sophomore season.



Albies: Solid soph

But wait, there's more power. "Rookie" Charlie Culberson (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+22) and veteran Kevin Pillar (1-6-6-6, 10 hits, a walk+22, 17 SBA with 32 SSN) both had nice bounce-back years. Then there are Justin Bour (1-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-8 R+2) and Evan Gattis (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks) who have solid power.

Filling out the lineup are table-setters Jose Peraza (3 0s, 11 hits, a walk+22, 29 SBA with 31 SSN) and Harrison Bader (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+4 R-4, 18 SBA with 32 SSN). Mitch Garver (3 0s, 10 hits 3 walks, L-6) is a rare good-hitting catcher. The team has a good mix of power and speed up and down the lineup with few real weaknesses, but can it keep up with Brobdingnag? The Annual's ratings say no, but this team will score a lot of runs, especially against lesser pitching.

Defense: 4.0
Pockets of bad news.

There are two 3B5s (Chapman and Escobar) on the roster, but Escobar plays mostly at short (SS8), where he's just average. Albies (2B8) scoops up everything, and Pillar and Bader (OF3s with plus arms) are highlight reels waiting to happen. But pockets of bad news are waiting to sink this ship. Garver (C6, Th-3) and Gattis C6, Th-4)

are hitters masquerading as catchers. Culberson (1B2) and Bour (1B3) try to catch the ball, and Kemp (OF1, but with a 34 arm) will be an adventure in left field.

Bench: 2.0 **Useful pieces.**

The good news here starts with Caleb Joseph (C8, Th+3) who can rescue the catchers late in the game. But he's not much with the stick (3 0s, 8 hits, 1 walk). Leave that to PHs Colin Moran (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-12) and Jorge Polanco (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L-9 R+2, 14 SBA with 20 SSN). Manny Margot or Byron Buxton (OF3s) can sub for Kemp with a lead, but neither Margot (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 21 SBA with 21 SSN) nor Buxton (2 0s, 6 hits, a walk, 20 speed) can match Kemp's bat. Not even Miguel Sano (1-5-6, 7 hits, 4 walks) helps much. No big bat or power here, but useful pieces, especially to cover the defensive issues.

2nd This should be a playoff-bound team. On paper, it may not stack up against Brobdingnag, but it has enough pitching, power and speed to enjoy a big winning season. But back in 2016, we wrote: "This is a well-balanced team that lacks only a monster power card. They have decent pitching, especially with the deep bullpen. They have a relentless offense with some power and good speed." That description could serve this version of the team. But that team went on to win just 78 games ... and it didn't have Brobdingnag in its division.

Rebuilding, Knoxville Style: Mr. Martin doesn't tend to bounce up and down in the standings. He's done it before, especially when he first joined the league. From 1988 to 1991, the team jumped from 93 wins to 66 to 111 back to 60. Most of the time, the Knoxville club builds more slowly and steadily toward a crescendo of 96 or more wins. He builds the core through drafts

and then trades to get the guys he needs to compete.

In fact, Mr. Martin likes to trade, and not just when he's rebuilding. Of his current 35-man roster, only 14 were selected through the draft, and of those, only four were selected with a Knoxville draft pick. And despite how the 2019 season turns out, Mr. Martin has already traded away his first three picks of the 2020 draft.

He also likes to acquire present and former Minnesota Twins, not that there's anything wrong with that. But like Mr. Chapman of the Warrenton Giants knows, as the hometown team goes, so goes the TBL team. Has it slowed his rebuilding process? Maybe. Sometimes. But if that's his strategy, who are we to criticize it?

Looking back, there was a sub-.500 drought of six long years back in the early 2000s, but every other rebuilding period has lasted just three years. Now, after exactly three third-place finishes, the Blue Thunder are ready again to be heard. It's time.

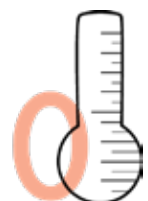
Players born in 1992 or after (13): Albies, Bader, Buxton, Chapman, Faria, Gsellman, Margot, Moran, Peraza, J. Polanco, Romero, Sano, Stewart.

Players born in 1987 or before (9): W. Davis, Fiers, Gattis, K. Gibson, Joseph, M. Kemp, D. Norris, Ottavino, H. Santiago.

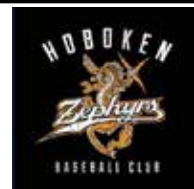
TQ: 31.0



KNOXVILLE BLUE THUNDER



2018 hoboken ZEPHYRS in review



When the bombs were not going off, runs could be scarce.

2018 in review

Final Record: 76-86 (2nd, Ruth)

The Zephyrs had been stockpiling talent in the draft, mostly with high draft picks: Lindor, Baez, Judge, Dahl, Bradley . . . The record slowly improved from 48 wins to 54, and then a couple of seasons close to .500, finishing second in the Ruth in both 2016 and 2017. In 2018 that talent came together (especially offensively) and resulted in a 22 game improvement and the best record in the Conference and second best record in franchise history. Hoboken was a top-5 team in runs scored, and led the league in homers. The pitching was decent, the team 3.76 ERA in the top quartile, but a full step behind the best staffs. The season ended prematurely in the Conference semi-finals with a 4-3 loss to the eventual Conference champion Gotham City.



Judge: Big bat

What went right?

The things that went well start with the big bats. Aaron Judge slugged .588 with 51 homers, and topped the century mark in both runs (101) and RBI (118), except for the runs scored, all leading the Zephyrs. All told, nine batters reached double digit homers. Francisco Lindor had a great year in the field (7 errors in 158 games), hit 35 HR, and scored 107 runs.

The pitching staff did not have as many big names, but it was a team effort with 17 different pitchers recording wins, led by Kenta Maeda's 15-4 mark. Only a few tail-end relievers had an ERA above 4.50. The one pitcher who had a stellar stat line was closer Archie Bradley who had a 1.61 ERA in 65 games, with 40 saves and 6 wins.

What went wrong?

During the regular season, not a lot went wrong, and more importantly, the team was able to circumvent the things that did. While the team led the league in batting and was top-3 in power, they were near the bottom in walks (20th) and steals (17th), so when the bombs were not going off, runs could be scarce. Lindor hit lead-off much of the season, but his .234 average and .288 OBP was symptomatic of this problem.

3 Things

1. *Can the offense repeat* — or even step up — the power and run production? The core of this lineup is scary. There are five full season offensive (in a good way) cards built around Lindor & Baez, and a couple part-seasons of a monster Judge and a very good Dahl. They should score a lot, but will it be enough given....
2. *Just how much of a step back?* The 2019 draft pool was not kind to Steve. Hoboken needed 70+ starts to get to a contending level rotation, and there were few full season quality grades to be had. From their first picks the decision was to go for young prospects with high up-side (Bieber, Chirinos) that may well develop, but for 2019 they are a pair of grade 5 starters.
3. *How good will the Ruth be?* In the past few seasons the Ruth Division has not been good from top to bottom. Often the second place team has been sub-.500. This season the early results seem to say all four Ruth teams may well finish above .500.

hoboken ZEPHYRS



Steve Powell (30th year)

The team is an ace and a couple of real set-up relievers away from a championship-caliber team. Its offense can score against anyone.

As the *Annual* predicted, the Zephyrs ran away with the Ruth title last year by 10 games. While they were stopped in the Conference Championship series, it's still a victory, as 98 wins marked a seven-year high. It was also the first winning season since 2012.

Mr. Powell has gradually accumulated young talent, and the current iteration of the Zephyrs, with careful draft picks and trades in the future, may be competitive for some time to come. The coming year, though, will be a struggle with a revamped Brobdingnag team and a retooled Knoxville club, but most of the same Guys We Like are still here.

Pitching: 9.5 How to explain this bullpen.

This year's Zephyrs boasts a competent rotation. They have an ace, and the useful grades go seven pitchers deep. Therein lies the dilemma, though: the top five starters only qualify for one post-season start each. Should the team make the playoffs, Hoboken will face some interesting choices.

The rotation is backed by a bullpen that features a terrific closer and a bunch of middle relievers. There seems to be a whole tier of relievers missing, as if the Greek God of the West Wind (also known as *Zephyr*) blew them all away. Those who know mythology may argue that a zephyr is a light breeze, but how else do you explain this bullpen?

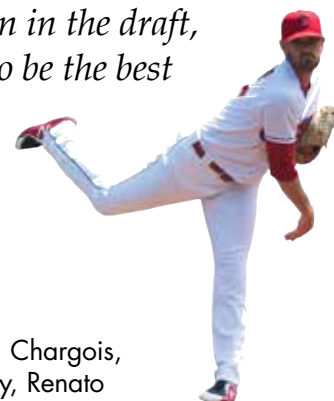
ROTATION. Like last year, the TBL rookie draft provided the team with its ace. This year, Dereck Rodriguez (Grade 13



Jeffress: Breakout

SNT: Shane Bieber.

The ninth starter taken in the draft, Bieber may turn out to be the best of the bunch. That's good news for a team in search of an ace.



Turnover Rate: 23%

Arrived: Shane Bieber, J.T. Chargois, Yonny Chirinos, Blaine Hardy, Renato Nunez, Cody Reed, Trevor Richards, Dereck Rodriguez.

Departed: Parker Bridwell, Tyler Lyons, Matt Moore, Marcell Ozuna, David Phelps, Brett Phillips, Jose A. Ramirez, Josh Tomlin.

HR+31) fills that role, but just for 19 starts. Carlos Rodon (Grade 12 C-35), Jeremy Hellickson (Grade 11 C+31), Blaine Hardy (Grade 11 C+23), and Kenta Maeda (Grade 9) each chip in a little to bring the total up to 91 starts.

Trevor Richards (Grade 8) and last year's ace Luis Castillo (Grade 8 HR-23) together add 56 more starts, a veritable bonanza. Part-timer Cody Reed (Grade 7) and SNT Shane Bieber (Grade 5 C+33) round out the staff. Now, if everyone could stay healthy and productive for a whole year ...

BULLPEN. Jeremy Jeffress (Grade 22* HR+33) had the kind of breakout year every team is jealous of. He will anchor the pen with almost 77 innings. But then, the



hoboken ZEPHYRS

set-up crew drops to Yonny Chirinos (Grade 13* C+22 HR+32), J.T. Chargois (Grade 13* C-21), and Brad Peacock (Grade 12* HR-21). Even with mix-and-match movement, there may be some games that get away before the 9th.

Middle relievers include Ryan Tepera (Grade 12*), lefty Matt Grace (Grade 11* C+34 HR+24), Archie Bradley (Grade 11* C+21), and wild Sam Freeman (Grade 11* C-62 HR+36). Austin Pruett (grade 6* C+25 HR+23) is the mop-up guy. All told, there are 545 innings, and they do, for the most part, support the starters. But it could be a lot stronger with a couple of Grade 15* or better relievers.

Offense: 12.0
Lineup runs eight deep.

This team can hit for power and for average. By the *Annual's* ratings, it's the best offense in the division, better than Brobdingnag's. Let's start with part-timer David Dahl (1-1-4-6, 10 hits, 2 walks, L-9). Mr. Powell has had to wait a few years for this card. He gets to play with All-World Javier Baez (1-0-0-0-0, 11 hits, a walk, 30 SBA with 27 SSN). It's a potent 1-2 punch vs. righties.

And that's not all. Nick Castellanos (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, L+6 R-4) found his stroke this year. Meanwhile, Francisco Lindor (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L+6 R-4, 35 SBA with 28 SSN), Aaron Judge (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks), and rejuvenated Stephen Piscotty (1-5-6-6, 9 hits 3 walks+42) all add punch to a deep lineup.

Table-setters include Albert Almora (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks), Starlin Castro (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks), and Josh Bell

(3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks) find ways to get on base. Finally, there are the catchers, who bat ninth in the lineup and are prime candidates to be pinch-hit for. Austin Romine (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) is the good-hitting catcher, and James McCann (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks, L-5) is the good fielding catcher.

With the catchers, this is a lineup that runs eight deep. Six batters have first-column 1s, and three regulars have 11 hits.

You could argue that these players have hits or walks, not both, but that's picking nits. This team can find ways to beat you with a run of hitters you don't want to face in a critical situation.

Defense: 5.5
Highlight-reel quality.

Up the middle, the Zephyrs turn everything into a gentle breeze. Lindor (SS9) and Baez (2B9) are among the best – Baez in particular, as he's an SS9, 1B3 and 3B4 as well. Castro (2B8, playing as a 3B4) and Bell (1B3) are mere mortals at the corners.

The outfield, including the CF platoon, features all above average arms, including Judge's 36 cannon. He and Almora (OF3s) are highlight-reel quality, while Dahl and Piscotty are average OF2s. McCann (C8 Th+3) can handle the tools of ignorance with aplomb, and even Romine (C7 Th-0) doesn't embarrass himself back there.

There are no obvious weaknesses when the team is on the field, which has the advantage of keeping innings from being extended – helpful given some of the pitcher control ratings.



Baez: All World

Bench: 3.0 Embarrassment of riches?

What other team has two OF3s on the bench? Josh Reddick (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+3 R-3, 9 SBA with 30 SSN) would start on other teams. Jake Marisnick (1-5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks+42, 8 SBA with 29 SSN) is a perfect bench player.

Renato Nunez (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-5) and Freddy Galvis (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+3 R-3) have nothing to do, even though Galvis (SS9) could help another team. Greg Bird (1-0-0-0, 7 hits, 3 walks) could help on defense (1B4). It's almost an embarrassment of riches.

3rd

Only a point behind Knoxville's score, this team could sneak through to second place and maybe even secure a playoff spot. Then, it would get complicated, given the rotation.

The team is an ace and a couple of real set-up relievers away from a championship-caliber team. Its offense can score against anyone with its combination of hits, power and walks (although not all in the same place). But it will be up to the pitching to keep them in games until Jeffress can close them out.

Rebuilding, Hoboken Style: This is Mr. Powell's 30th season in TBL. The Dallas Eagles/Hoboken Zephyrs franchise has posted nine winning seasons under his direction, but seven of those nine have come in the past 13 years. The team is currently young and talented, so the winning may



Baez: All World

continue no matter what happens this year.

But there were many lean years in the distant past. From 1995, Mr. Powell's first year in the league, through 2005, inclusive, the team managed two winning seasons, including an odd 82-81 record in 1999, the result of a tie for the last playoff spot that year (they lost the 163rd game to Maracaibo).

The year after the team lost the World Series in 2011, they made it back to the Conference Championship Series. Five losing seasons followed, leading up to last year's division crown. The point here is that when the team's bad, they tend to be bad for an extensive run. On the other hand, when the team is good, it tends to be good for more than one year at a time.

The records show that Mr. Powell is not an active trader, preferring to build his team through the draft. That's not to say he doesn't trade; he does. But he's more selective in his dealings. He's also become a shrewd judge of talent. A look at his current roster reveals just five players (and just one pitcher) whom he directly traded for. It's an impressive draft record of achievement.



Hoboken ZEPHYRS

TQ: 30.0



2018 midwest MONGRELS in review



The team was about pitching.

by Darrell Skogen

2018 in review Final Record: 88-74 (2nd, Ruth)

After two years of cellar dwelling, the Dawgs made a good bounce upward in 2018, finishing second in the Ruth Division and missing the Wild Card playoff round by one game. The plan to build a bullpen first and fill in with serviceable starters combined with better offense to up the win total to 88 in 2018. Over the winter, the bullpen was reinforced even more with a Wild Card finish the goal for this season. The Ruth Division is stacked, and the Dawgs hope to be third in the division and sneak into the playoffs. Time will tell.

What went right?

Some guys did hit well, led by rookie Cody Bellinger (.242, 29 doubles, 35 HR, 91 RBI). Eric Hosmer had his every other good year (.292, 36 doubles, 22 HR). Returnee Dawg Adam Jones hit .237 with 24 doubles and 18 HR. Eddie Rosario and Trea Turner proved to be the real deals, with Rosy hitting .266 with 40 doubles, 37 HR and 96 RBI, and Turner .282 with 49 SB.



Hosmer: Every other year

This team was about pitching, however, holding opponents to 602 runs with a 3.29 team ERA. The newly departed Charlie Morrton was 11-4 in 25 starts with a 2.23 ERA. The rest of the starters were all around .500, but the bullpen was marvelous. Chad Green and Felipe Rivero shared closer status, combining for 37 saves and 161 whiffs in about 120 innings pitched. Edwin Diaz, Scott Alexander, Tommy Hunter, and Fernando Rodney were like one piece of cardboard that produced eerily similar stats throughout the season.

What went wrong?

Bad drafting position made it difficult to completely fix the offense, and the team suffered with too many players who could not hit lefthanders. The power output was good with 192 home runs, but a team batting average of .241 produced only 665 runs. Max Kepler (.221), Roughned Odor (.183 and 160 Ks), Rene Rivera (.229), Andrew Romine (.208), Danny Santana (.224), and Danny Valencia (.167) all saw more playing time than a contender really should have.

3 Things

1. *Rework the rotation.* The Guru trading away two solid starters for draft pieces. The loss of Morton and Jhoulys Chacin will be made up by Gio Gonzalez, Eric Skoglund, and Dylan Covey. The bullpen will be used early and often as those last two starters become openers in this year's experiment in pitching.
2. *Improve the lineup.* We should score more runs this year. The return of Yuli Gurriel solidifies an infield with Hosmer, Turner and Odor, with Eduardo Nunez as super sub a definite upgrade over Romine. The outfield is solid as well. And defense will be fantastic with these boys. How will Joe Mauer do behind the plate? If he fails, his replacements will be Kevan Smith and Sandy Leon.
3. *Double down on the bullpen,* The pen must excel once again. We are hoping for a return to greatness by Diaz, Rivero, Yates, and the cast of thousands.

midwest MONGRELS



Darrell Skogen (18th year)

At the Annual, we applaud their efforts and question the cynicism of the 14 season-ticket holders.

It's safe to say that so far, the Ruth Division hasn't been kind to the Mongrels. 88 wins last year, the first winning season since 2015, didn't produce a playoff appearance. This year, the team has a mix of young and retiring talent. Perhaps Mr. Skogen saw the Black Riders from the North and decided to hedge his bets.

Unlike his 14 season-ticket holders, the *Annual* trusts that Mr. Skogen knows what he's doing. His instructions indicate that he knows what moves the team will have to make, and he has the personnel in place to make them. It would've helped, though, if his offense had more pop and fewer reasons to bunt.

Pitching: 11.0 **Talent in the bullpen.**

With a few exceptions, this is still a pitching-first team. This year, however, the pitching staff is led not by the rotation, but by a deep and talented relief corps. It's an experiment in APBA philosophy, a TBL version of the "opener" trend without using any MLB openers. The team has talent in the bullpen, but it's still untested waters.

Midwest's rotation doesn't really extend past the first three starters, so the bullpen will be given lots to do. But there's lots of bullpen to draw on, from caddies all the way up to the closer. Will the strategy work? Can a team rely on its bullpen for almost 45 percent of its innings pitched? Our Magic 8-ball says, "My sources say no."

ROTATION. The "ace" of this staff is young Jose Berrios (Grade 12). Madison Bumgarner (Grade 11), once a prized commodity, is solid, but also disappointing, considering what he was once traded for (again and again). SNT Gio Gonzalez (Grade 8 C-34 HR+21) is important,

Turnover Rate: 40%

Arrived: Pedro Baez, Chad Bettis, Dylan Covey, Gio Gonzalez, Yulieski Gurriel, Bryan Holaday, Sandy Leon, Joe Mauer, Eduardo Nunez, Victor Reyes, Richard Rodriguez, Edgar Santana, Magneuris Sierra, Eric Skoglund.

Departed: Jhoulys Chacin, Bartolo Colon, Cheslor Cuthbert, Leury Garcia, Tommy Hunter, Jose Lobaton, Charlie Morton, Justin Nicolino, Trevor Plouffe, Rene Rivera, Fernando Rodney, Andrew Romine, Danny Santana, Danny Valencia.

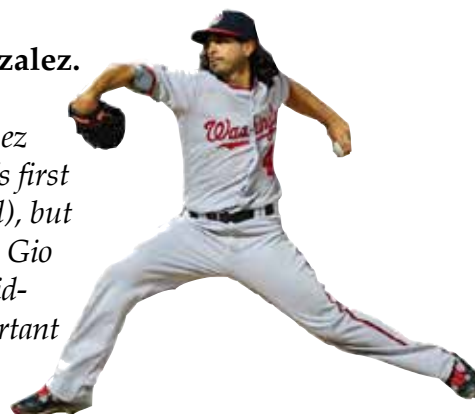
giving the team 85 starts in which the pitcher can steal hits by himself.

The rest of the rotation may only go three innings per start ... or less. Eric Skoglund (Grade 7 C+21 HR-21), the third lefty, may have a chance to pitch into the 4th inning, but Chad Bettis (Grade 6), Chad Kuhl (Grade 6 HR-21), Zach Davies (Grade 5 C+21), and Dylan Covey (Grade 5 HR+23) are all likely to be pulled early in favor of a "valet" reliever — because no one in the Midwest apparently uses a caddy.

BULLPEN. Closer Edwin Diaz (Grade 22* C+23 HR+34) is one of the best, and he's set up by Kirby Yates (Grade 18* with slight positives).

SNT: Gio Gonzalez.

Richard Rodriguez was Mr. Skogen's first pick (third round), but trade acquisition Gio Gonzalez was Midwest's most important new addition.





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Diaz: One of the best

These 136 innings of closer-grade relievers will also strike out a ton of opponents. That's good news. And they're followed by a bevy of talented middle relievers.

Shawn Kelley (Grade 15* C+35), Richard Rodriguez (Grade 14* C+24 HR+31), Chad Green (Grade 14* C+34), lefty Jose Alvarez (Grade 14* HR+45), and Pedro Baez (Grade 13* HR+33) bring the total of reliever goodness to 450 innings. Felipe Vazquez (Grade 12* HR+41), Scott Alexander (Grade 11* C-32 HR+35), and Edgar Santana (Grade 10* C+41) add another 200 quality innings.

Offense: **7.5** Not an offense you can count on.

Let's begin with the awesomeness that is Eddie Rosario (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks, L-4, 10 SBA with 31 SSN). He's become the offensive star of this club. There are exactly three other players with a first-column 1: Cody Bellinger (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, L-7 R+2, 15 SBA with 35 SSN), Roughned Odor (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42), and Max Kepler (1-4-6, 8 hits, 4 walks).



Rosario: Awesomeness

To be fair, returning Adam Jones and Yulieski Gurriel have identical cards (3 Os, 11 hits, 1 walk+22, with no second-column singles) and are strong, if on-base-challenged. Gurriel (L+5 R-4) has a shift, but Jones doesn't. Also, Trea

Turner (3 Os, 10 hits, 3 walks, 52 SBA with 32 SSN) is a weapon on the bases. The Mongrels will rely on these three for big seasons.

The "catching" platoon of Joe Mauer (3 Os, 10 hits, 3 walks), who ends his career with a decent card, and Kevan Smith (2 Os, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, L+17 R-9) can at least hit some. Eduardo Nunez (3 Os, 10 hits, a walk) was an important acquisition for this team. That leaves disappointing Eric Hosmer (3 Os, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11 R+4) as the final regular.

In this era of launch angles, this team is considerably under-powered. They also tend to put the ball in play instead drawing walks. That may shorten some innings. Hosmer and Kepler play every day, making the bottom of the lineup a hit-or-miss affair. A stronger offense would make the bullpen-first strategy a better idea. This isn't an offense you can count on to come back again and again from a deficit.

Defense: **6.5** Highlights abound.

Where they're strong, they're incredibly strong. Where they're weak, they're incredibly weak.

But highlights abound. Turner (SS9) and Odor (2B9), when he plays, become the league's best middle infield. Hosmer (1B5) scoops up everything.

The entire outfield is composed of OF3s, and Rosario (34) has an above-average arm. Nunez (2B7) is at least average at the keystone when Odor has to rest. But Gurriel (3B3) starts at the hot corner with no one to protect him, ever. And the catching platoon — Mauer (C5, Th-4) and Smith (C7, Th-4) — can be safely labeled "a defensive black hole."

Bench: Two defensive catchers.

2.5

There's not one but two defensive catchers: Sandy Leon (C9 Th-1) and the underappreciated Bryan Holaday (C8 Th+6). Neither can hit. The acting Assistant GM, Victor Martinez (3 Os, 9 hits, 2 walks, no shift), who doesn't bow out in as grand a fashion as Mauer, will be counted on to PH. Victor Reyes (2 Os, 9 hits, 10 SBA with 34 SSN) can pinch-run and pinch-bunt. That leaves Magneuris Sierra (19 speed) trying to learn a new skill.

4th

With a stronger offense, this team could be counted on to come back in many of the games in which it will trail because of the team's weak starting staff.

With a stronger starting staff, they could be expected to hold opponents off the scoreboard.

As it is, the prognosis is a fourth-place finish. The bullpen can't protect leads that don't exist, and this team may trouble scoring runs, especially the stronger staffs even in its own division.

Rebuilding, Midwest Style: This franchise used to be located in Jessup, as the Coal Barons. In its three-year run, Lou Umile's team won 328 games and one World Series. We bring this up because the team floundered after that, winning no more than 78 games for 10 straight years, until Mr. Skogen took over the franchise.

Since 2003, the Mongrels have won one World Series and made it to another, a seven-game loss to Brobdingnag. 2015 finished a run of four straight years of winning 90 or more games. By all measures, the Midwest team has experienced success on a level that's unprecedented since the Jessup years.

Mr. Skogen apparently likes to gain critical mass before committing to winning. He suffered

through two straight 100-loss years when he started in TBL before five straight winning seasons, culminating in the World Series victory. A two-year rebuild is his modus operandi, as he's done it twice since that first go-round. Each time that process has led to lasting success, not a one-year wonder.

At the *Annual*, we applaud their efforts and question the cynicism of the 14 season-ticket holders. After losing 114 and 108 games from 2017 to 2018, they clawed to 88 wins last year. Based on historical trends, they should finish over .500 this year too. Sometimes, though, historical trends don't predict the future.

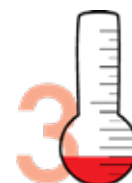


midwest MONGRELS



Jessup's Sandberg: Those were the days

TQ: **27.5**





Strong City vs. Gotham City

Both Strong City and Gotham City had a tough path to reach the World Series. Gotham City fought its way through a seven-game series with Hoboken, and then took the surging Blue Hill club in six; Strong City had a slightly easier time, defeating the Elders of Zion in six games and then taking division rival Kansas in five. The Statesmen came in as the clear favorite, having led the league in wins and just about everything else; Gotham City had the fewest wins of the three division winners in the International Conference, but was no pushover. The stage was set for a great World Series.

Game 1 at Strong City Montgomery vs. Strasburg

Game 1 in Strong City featured the aces of each staff, Strasburg and Montgomery. Unfortunately for the visitors, the game was over before it was less than 2 innings old. Strasburg registered 4 K's early and was in control throughout the game. Montgomery started the 2nd giving up 2 singles and hitting Cruz to load the bases. Davis then walked in the 1st run of the game.

Lind hit into a 4-6 FC for an RBI followed by an RBI single from Grandal. Cozart lifted a breaking pitch that did not break over the LF wall to give the home team a 6-run lead and they would not look back. Strasburg allowed an unearned run with 2 outs in the 9th for his only blemish.



Strasburg

Strong City 11, Gotham City 1
WP - Strasburg LP - Montgomery

Game 2 at Strong City Rodriguez vs. Anderson

In Game 2, Anderson and Rodriguez were cruising along with neither facing too much of a problem from the opposing batters. Cozart stroked a lead off 2B in the 6th and came around to score on a 2-out RBI 2B by Arenado.



Anderson

After surrendering a lead off BB to Mauer in the 7th, Rodriguez disposed of Cruz and Hamilton on K's. The next 3 batters, Grandal, Hechavarria, and Upton all hit RBI 2B's to get the score to 4-0. Anderson, Edwards, and Swarzak combined for the shutout to give the Statesmen 2-0 lead in the series.

Strong City 4 Gotham City 0
WP - Anderson LP - Rodriguez

Game 3 at Gotham City Godley vs. Duffy

Godley and Duffy squared off for Game 3 in Gotham City. The Batmen hoped that home cooking would nourish them well as they tried to work their way back into the series. The Statesmen scored a quick run in the 1st but Gotham took the lead in the 4th when Zimmerman hit a 2B into the RF corner to score 2 runs.

The Statesmen came back with a vengeance in their 6th with Kris Davis hitting a bases loaded double off the top of the CF wall that eluded Pham to give the visitors a lead they would not relinquish.



Davis

Strong City 9 Gotham City 4
WP - Godley LP - Duffy

Game 4 at Gotham City Carrasco vs. Wacha

Gotham City brought it in Game 4 vs TBL Leader in Wins, Carlos Carrasco, to secure their 1st win of the series and avoid a sweep. A 3-run 5th was more than enough to garner the victory. Escobar went 2-3 with a double and 2 RBIs while Carpenter delivered 2 hits in 4 at bats with an RBI of his own. Albers came in and struck out 3 of the 4 hitters he faced with nasty stuff to pick up the save.



Escobar

Gotham City 5 Strong City 2
WP - Betances LP - Carrasco S - Albers

Game 5 at Gotham City Strasburg vs. Montgomery

It appeared that the Statesmen were ready to celebrate but the Batmen had other plans. Holding a 2-run lead going into the bottom of the 9th, Statesmen closer Andrew Miller took the mound. Kinsler led off with a BB and that followed by a PH double by Chirinos. With no out and runners on 2nd and 3rd, Escobar came through with another 2 RBI double like he had in Game 4 to tie the game.



Kinsler

Miller was apparently rusty but Dauer sent him back out for the 10th. With two out, Kinsler hit a single that Upton booted allow-

ing Ian to reach 2nd. PH Gentry hit a game winning RBI 2B to send the Batmen fans home happy. No celebrating on the visitor's soil tonight.

Gotham City 6 Strong City 5
WP - Albers LP - Miller

Game 6 at Strong City Rodriguez vs. Anderson

Game 6 in Strong City started as a slugfest. Zimmerman mashed a 3-run HR in the 1st off Anderson to give Gotham City an early lead. Upton took a Rodriguez curve deep for a 2-run shot to get the game back to within one after one.

Gotham scored two more in their third inning, knocking Anderson out of the contest. This was the changing point in the game as for the next 6.3 IP, Statesmen relievers allowed only one base runner, a 2-out BB, to give their offense a chance to get back in the game.

That is exactly what the bats did. 9 hits (4 for extra bases) over 4 innings pushed 6 runs across for the Strong City club who brought Miller to the mound again in the 9th for the save. He converted this time with ease and the celebration began in Strong City.



Miller

Strong City 8 Gotham City 5
WP - Swarzak LP - Strickland S - Miller



All In



It's power-up time for the *Melrose Avengers*. **Mark Freedman** has been here frequently; he practically invented the Bounce, going from good to bad to good in the period of two or

three deep breaths. It's been two full seasons of poor performances this time, but the Avengers are back now, and should dominate the Aaron this year. Melrose has gone out and acquired pitching, filled in missing parts of the lineup, and bulked up the bench. It's likely to be a tough ride for the rest of the division – which now includes the Calusa club, and doesn't include champion Strong City.

There's a long stretch between Melrose and the remaining teams. Our choice for second place is the *Kansas Koyotes*, who won 102 games last year and still wound up looking up at the eventual champions. With the best starting pitcher in baseball – Max Scherzer – and the best relieving grade in the set in Jose LeClerc – it's hard to imagine they would not be in the mix. But spending a lot to keep in contention down the stretch has left the roster as pretty much what **Bill Schwartz** had at the end of last year, except a year older. They're going to have to work hard to keep up.



2018 Aaron Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Strong City*	112	50	.691	—
Kansas†	102	60	.630	10
Las Vegas	65	97	.401	47
Melrose	63	99	.389	49

* Won TBL World Series.

† Lost to Strong City in NC Finals



It's a new year and a new division for **Gordon Rodell's Calusa Indians**, who have left the Clemente for the Aaron. Pastures are not particularly green here, but this is a rebuilding year for the club – the draft brought some new talent, but the cupboard for 2020 is a little more bare, as it mostly belongs to others. Their only satisfaction this year might be to push Kansas for second place.

Meanwhile, it's going to be rough sledding for **Paul Harrington's Las Vegas Gamblers**. They have more of a 2020 draft than the other teams in the division, and they've been here before – indeed, they were here last year. We pose a question: if you don't completely divest, can you ever be bad enough to take the top pick, and thus good enough to take home the championship? Answers to follow.



- 
1. Melrose 34.5
2. Kansas 23.0
3. Calusa 21.5
4. Las Vegas 20.0

J. D. Martinez,
Melrose

Aaron Division

2018 melrose AVENGERS in review



The bitch is back.

by Mark Freedman

2018 in review Final Record: 63-99 (4th, Aaron)

Elton John – “The bitch is back!”

The Avengers morph and change. Maybe not as much as the Barbarians, where Vlad is ready to wheel and deal God himself. Gone are the last vestiges of the championship teams. Is this the new generation of Avengers? Only time will tell. We’ve mortgaged next year’s draft to push for a run at another title. Have we been smart enough in our choices to weather next year and sustain some success?

Whatever the future brings this team will do some damage in 2019, maybe to my alcohol consumption, maybe to others’. After several years struggling to approach 70 wins 2019 will be much more fun.

What went right?

63-99! About the only I can say went completely right during the season is we avoided 100 losses. In typical Avenger fashion we clubbed 253 homers, led by J. D. Martinez’ 47.

James Paxton made only 24 starts but pitched himself to a 17-4 record with 6 shutouts.

The draft was a boon. I never expected Ohtani to be available. Moronta and Hirano are not sexy but nabbing two competent relievers was a surprise.

What went wrong?

We scored 765 runs and gave up 770. In theory we should have had 70-75 wins. It just shows how an especially bad and understaffed bullpen can affect

the outcome. In retrospect that was a good thing for a non-contender. In reality, losing *sucks*.

As a team we batted .238 and struck out 1,316 times while only getting 545 free passes. I guess the new normal kicked in.

3 Things

1. *The pitching is strong.* Maybe not as strong as some, at least grade wise. The pen has three

Grades 18* or better and 16, 15, 14 to back them up. Except for Derek Holland, there is hope the staff is youthful enough and experienced enough to continue the success in 2020. With no upper round picks they’ll have to be good.

2. *Mixed results in the field.* Conforto got healthy, even if his BA is lower than expected. Mazara did not and showed no growth. Still only 24, he could still break out. J. D. Martinez is still here,

now the senior member of the team, along with Anthony Rendon. Joining them is Matt Olson. I still have faith he can improve contact and strike-out rate, a little bit will go a long way towards .260 BA, and he won a gold glove. The offense will be strong and has some foundational pieces.

3. *What will happen to Ian Happ and others?* My mini Rob Deer took a big step backwards. Perhaps he’ll learn to make more contact, he’ll need playing time first. Is Mondesi for real? Spring training seems to indicate he may have stepped his game up. Still needs to learn to take a walk. Alfaro is now a Marlin. Has he met a pitch he doesn’t like? Will Ohtani’s Tommy John surgery affect his hitting? Lots of questions about which youngsters will show improvement.



Martinez: Lead clubber

melrose AVENGERS



Mark Freedman (26th year)

With outstanding years from its stars and a strong supporting crew, the window of opportunity is open now. It's time to power up.

It's difficult to criticize Mark Freedman for, well, anything. Since taking over this iteration of the Avengers in 2004, he's won two World Series and lost one. He's lost as many 119 games and won as many as 123. There are no seasons in which his team won between 74 and 94 games under his watch. No .500 finishes or anything near it. *It's all or nothing, baby.*

This season, after two down years, the Avengers are back like a summer blockbuster. Most league prognosticators, including the *Annual*, think this version of the team could bring Mr. Freedman another World Series appearance. With outstanding years from its stars and a strong supporting crew, the window of opportunity is open now. It's time to power up.

Pitching: Ready for victory.

16.0

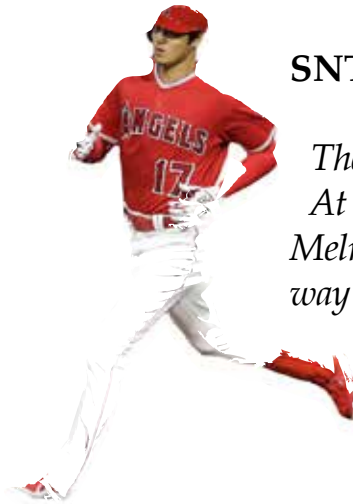
This is, obviously, a super-powered pitching staff with few weaknesses. There are 57 starts of Grade 13 and above and more than 215 innings of Grade 18* and above in the bullpen. That alone will win you a lot of ballgames. But curiously, it will play better in the regular season than in the playoffs because



Teheran: New

two of his top three starters, by grade at least, are limited to a single start in a post-season series. To be fair, he could still get by with a 4-man rotation because one pitcher can start three times.

This may be nitpicking, since the supporting staff more than makes up for this weakness. Only two



SNT: Shohei Ohtani.

*The next Babe Ruth?
At least for this year.
Melrose snags a two-way star as its consolation prize for a forgettable 2018 campaign.*

Turnover Rate: 46%

Arrived: Asdrubal Cabrera, Curt Casali, Jhoulys Chacin, Steve Cishek, Kyle Crick, Austin Gombert, Tayron Guerrero, Yoshihisa Hirano, Spencer Kieboom, Leonys Martin, Reyes Moronta, Shohei Ohtani, Corey Oswalt, Tanner Scott, Julio Teheran, Rowdy Tellez.

Departed: Tyler Anderson, Matt Andriese, Brandon Finnegan, Jarlin Garcia, Adrian Gonzalez, Alex Gordon, Yulieski Gurriel, Jeff Hoffman, Jose Iglesias, Brandon McCarthy, A.J. Ramos, Tyson Ross, Junichi Tazawa, Jake Thompson, Stephen Vogt, Chris B. Young.

pitchers that matter (and no relievers) have a negative HR rating. Plus, Mr. Freedman has proven time and again that he knows what it takes to win in the postseason. There's no reason to think these superheroes aren't ready for victory.

ROTATION. It's a deep, deep rotation, filled with Guys We Like. At the top of the pile are two aces who are limited in mound appearances: SNT Shohei Ohtani (Grade 15 C-34) and Wade Miley (Grade 13 HR+51). They provide just 26 starts. New acquisition Julio Teheran (Grade 14 C-43 HR-16) has a grade inflated by poor control and may struggle at times. But he adds 31 more starts.

The rest of the rotation is solid. Jhoulys Chacin (Grade 12 HR+22, with 35 starts), James Paxton (Grade 12 C+21), Reynaldo Lopez (Grade 11 C-22), and the resurgent Derek Holland (Grade 11) don't even use all of their starts, although they left one for Steve Brault (Grade 8 C-62). While not exactly top-heavy, this is a solid rotation that won't give away many games.

BULLPEN. Even if an opponent gets to one the starters, the bullpen is ready to swoop in and save the day. It's a talented group that will be difficult to homer against. The closer is super-powered Blake Treinen (Grade 27* C+24 HR+55), who has more than 80 innings to overpower the opposition. He's set up by wild Reyes Moronta (Grade 22* C-61 HR+35), who adds another 65 innings.



Treinen: Super-powered

But it's the middle relievers who'll make a big difference. Steve Cishek (Grade 18* HR+32), Yoshihisa Hirano (Grade 16*

HR+21), Kyle Crick (Grade 15* HR+43), and Matt Barnes (Grade 14* C-44 HR+33) offer more than 250 innings. Kevin McCarthy (Grade 10* C+22 HR+23) probably sweeps up when needed. The only knock is that Brault (Grade 10*) and some Holland innings are the only lefties available.

Offense: 11.0
Scary for opposing pitchers.

What a difference a year makes. Off-years became career years. Even the beast of last year's team, J.D. Martinez, got better, turning in a card (1-1-0-0, 12 hits, 3 walks+22, 7 SBA with 33

SSN) that ranks among the best in the set. And he's not lonely this year. Anthony Rendon (1-5-6-6, 11 hits, 3 walks+22) and SNT Ohtani (1-1-6-6, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, L-12 R+4, 14 SBA with 28 SSN) are both scary for opposing pitchers.



Martinez: Even better

That's a big middle of the order, but Melrose extends the lineup with three more four-power-number cards. Adalberto Mondesi (1-4-5-5, 10 hits, a walk, 39 SBA with 32 SSN) shares time with Ohtani at DH. Asdrubel Cabrera (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-6) and Matt Olson (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+22) play all the time.

Curt Casali (6-6-0, 11 hits, 3 walks+22, L+8 R-6) came back out of nowhere, and Michael Conforto (1-5-6, 9 hits, 5 walks) rebounded nicely. That leaves Nomar Mazara (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-5), Marcus Semien (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 20 SBA with 27 SSN), and Austin Hedges (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) to round out the offense in an almost disappointing way.

But besides the shifts noted, most of these players have little in the way of shift penalties. With several exceptions, the team also has speed up and down the lineup. When the best team is on the field, they'll hit and walk and cause havoc on the bases. The bottom third of the lineup is mediocre, though, especially against righties. The bench may have to rescue them at times like damsels in distress.

Defense: 4.0
Pockets of greatness.

There are pockets of greatness with the gloves on this team, such as the infield corners, where Rendon (3B5) and Olson (1B5) excel. Semien (SS9) will make a huge difference over the course of a season, and Hedges (C9, but Th-3)

does that one thing really well. But Casali (C7 with Th-2) and Cabrera (2B7, SS7, 3B4) are average at best, as is the entire outfield. Like the offense, the bench will help, but there are only so many roles you can fit on a 25-man roster.

Bench: 3.5
A few interesting choices.

Like all playoff-worthy teams, the Avengers have bench guys to help the regulars. Rowdy Tellez (1-1-6-6-6-6, 12 hits, L-15 R+10) will destroy righties for 73 pinch-hitting appearances — and five in a playoff series. Leonys Martin (1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11 R+2, OF3, 35 arm, 18 speed) does many things off the bench, but he can only cover one OF spot for defense. Logan Forsythe (2 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks+22) is the resident 2B8. Jorge Alfaro (3 0s, 10 hits, 1 walk+42+22, C6 with Th-0) is the third catcher, while Spencer Kieboom (2 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, C7 Th+4) could actually prevent late-game SBs. Ian Happ is waiting for better days (or seasons).



Tellez: He's rowdy

1st Welcome back, Mr. Freedman. We know the team had to retool for several seasons, but it's back and poised to make a beeline straight to the World Series. That's not to say it will be easy. It never is, and this is a team that isn't without weaknesses. But Mr. Freedman has been here before, and he obviously knows how to get the most out of each player, especially on a team where he has options.

A little history. This franchise dates back to 1985, at the very beginning of the league. After a number of incarnations, Mr. Freedman took over in 2004. In his first five seasons, the team lost 514 games. That's impressive even for a league like TBL. But the very next year, in 2009,

the Avengers won 112 and made it to the Conference Championship series.

And thus began the up and down rollercoaster that Mr. Freedman has been known for. He's even perfected "the bounce," that nearly mythical ability to win big, lose big, and then win big again. The ideal scenario is a World Series victory, followed by earning the first pick in the draft, followed by another World Series victory.

Mr. Freedman got close. After he lost the seven-game Conference Championship series in 2009, he dropped to 70 wins in 2010: not exactly the worst in the league. In fact, that team finished third in its division. But then he bounced right back, winning not just the 2011 World Series, but the 2012 Series as well. The Melrose Avengers are the last team to have won back-to-back TBL championships in an increasingly competitive league.

Melrose made its last World Series appearance in 2015 after two years of rebuilding. After a second-place finish, he's had two more rebuilding years entering the 2019 campaign. And he appears poised to go deep into the playoffs again. Welcome back, Mr. Freedman.



melrose AVENGERS

TQ: 34.5



2018 kansas KOYOTES in review



Would we do it again? Probably not . . .

by Bill Schwartz

2018 in review

Final Record: 102-60 (2nd, Aaron)

In 2018, Kansas rocketed out of the starting gate, got off to a 31-10 start, and led Strong City by four games at the halfway point. The Koyotes ended up winning 102 games, the most under current management, the most since 2004, and third most in franchise history. But Strong City's torrid 60-21 second half proved too much to withstand and Kansas, despite having the second-best record in TBL, finished 10 games

back in the Aaron. In September, in an attempt to upgrade their pitching staff for the stretch run, the Koyotes traded away their first two 2019 draft choices. Unfortunately, all attempts proved futile and the Koyotes ended up falling short of their World Series goal.

2019's version will have no such lofty expectations – a .500 season would be considered a success. But with an ever-optimistic attitude and never in the “tear down” mode, Koyote management will try to milk out as many wins as possible.



Smoak: Leader

What went right?

Power was on display all summer as the Koyotes blasted a franchise record 273 longballs, with 12 different hitters putting up double figures. Six of those registered 25+, led by Justin Smoak's 40 and Mike Moustakas' 36 (108 RBI), with both of them also driving in 100+. Smoak led the team in most offensive categories (40 HR, 39 doubles, 114 RBI, 83 BB, .530 SA, .355 OBA, .885 OPS). George Springer and Yasiel Puig chipped in with 29 and 28 HR respectively.

Jean Segura, limited to 125 games, led the team with a modest but consistent .280 BA that included a 23 game hitting streak, only once going more than two games without a hit.

The vaunted starting staff didn't disappoint, led by Max Scherzer (20-7, 2.95, 5 ShO & 292 K). He threw five 2-hitters and one 1-hitter. Add to that Dallas Keuchel (13-4, 2.52) and Luis Severino (19-5, 2.78). Adam Warren's 1.12 ERA and 24 saves paced the bullpen.

After bowing out in the wildcard series in their previous three postseasons, the Koyotes finally played deep into December with a 4-0 sweep of Hudson and a 4-2 win over Columbus before meeting up with the Strong City bunch and bowing out in 5 – a few lucky dice rolls away from their first World Series appearance since 2004.

What went wrong?

Not too much went wrong in a 102-win season. But the trade for Sabathia and Hand didn't accomplish the hoped for result. In hindsight, since neither accomplished the intended World Series goal, would we do it again? Probably not . . .

3 Things

1. *Paying the price.* C.C. Sabathia and Brad Hand will provide a little help in 2019, but they didn't take the Koyotes to the promised land. As a result, very little quality help for the new season was added in the 2019 draft.

2. *Bullpen: Quality closer, but then what?* Jose Leclerc should provide closer stuff and Hand supplies a reliable setup, but after that it will get pretty dicey (no pun intended). This will probably limit the number of opportunities for Leclerc and Hand and make for a fairly mediocre 2019.

3. *Back to the future...* After departing from traditional Koyote “buy and hold, shun the trade” mentality by recently trading away top draft picks, Koyote management will protect their 2020 draft. Time will tell – it will help if a future Aaron Judge would not be passed up in favor of a future Christian Friedrich, as happened in 2017!

kansas KOYOTES



Bill Schwartz (12th year)

Any team with Max Scherzer should always be in the conversation as a possible contender.

As long as this team has Max Scherzer, and as long as he continues to pitch like a perennial Cy Young contender, this team should always be in the conversation as a possible contender. Just last year, the Koyotes put it all together for a 102-win campaign that brought them all the way to the Conference Championship Series — and that was a long time coming.

In the aftermath, their prospects don't look as rosy, and we're not just talking about the take from the rookie draft. The team spent some of its capital for its run last year, but while many of the names are the same, the performances decidedly aren't. Still, there's good power, there's some depth and of course, there's Max Scherzer.

Pitching: 8.0
Not a monster, but not a mess.

This team boasts some names any other TBL team would like to own. With a few notable exceptions, though, the grades don't quite match up. In the past, the Koyotes have lived and died by their pitching staff, and this year looks no different. That's no slight to the team's offense, but it seems that every year this team makes a run, its pitching staff is a monster. In the other years, it's a mess.

This year is a mix, as the top end of the rotation and the bullpen are impressive. What follows, however, is a lot of mediocrity. In all fairness,

Turnover Rate: 14%

Arrived: Brett Anderson, Pedro Araujo, Johnny Field, Neil Ramirez, Jose Rondon, Hector Velazquez.

Departed: Stephen Drew, Matt Garza, Liam Hendriks, Alex Meyer, Miguel Montero, Jason Motte.



Scherzer: The king still rules

there is a lot of it, so Mr. Schwartz makes up for quality with quantity. Will it help? At the *Annual*, we compare the rotation to the bullpen,

and in this case, there's not a whole lot the pen can do for the better starters unless they pitch seven innings every time out.

ROTATION. The king still rules in Kansas. Max Scherzer (Grade 16 C+26) returns for another outstanding season for the Koyotes. He's as close to a sure thing as any pitcher in baseball. Luis Severino (Grade 11 C+23 HR+22) and C.C. Sabathia (Grade 10) give the team a chance to win every time out. That's 94 solid starts.

Dallas Keuchel (Grade 8 C+16 HR+31) adds 34 starts as a very respectable #4 starter, but certainly off from his previous peak. The last 34 starts come from Sonny Gray (Grade 6 C-26 HR+23), who's seen better seasons, and Brett

SNT: Jose Rondon.

With its first draft pick late in the third round, Kansas plucked a gem: a young power-hitting middle infielder.





KANSAS KOYOTES

Anderson (Grade 5 C+36), who seems older than his 31 years. With a deep pen, these stand-ins will often get a short leash. Meanwhile, Matt Harvey can spend the year throwing batting practice and driving the team bus (he even looks like a bus driver).



Leclerc: Top grade

BULLPEN. The closer has the biggest grade in the set. Jose LeClerc (Grade 29* C-36 HR+61) actually improved his control on the way to a breakout season. He's set up by lefty Brad Hand (Grade 16*). They combine for almost 130 innings. They're also the only relievers who can steal 8s without help. Righty Joakim Soria (Grade 12* C+23 HR+36) will help. his grade is a bit low, but the excellent peripherals will keep him in the game.

As an example, the only player with a 7 on 44 is table-setter Jean Segura (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, 31 SBA with 25 SSN). He's the team's only player who hit over .267. That makes the hitters seem like carbon copies of each other, for the most part. Besides Segura, they all kind of do the same thing.

There are five regulars with four power numbers: Yasiel Puig (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-9 R+3, 20 SBA with 29 SSN), resurgent Yan Gomes (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, L+3 R-3), Mike Moustakas (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-4), Justin Smoak (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-7), and Chris Taylor (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, 15 SBA with 24 SSN). Besides the speed and the shifts, they're kind of interchangeable.

Kike Hernandez (1-4-5, 9 hits, 4 walks) and George Springer (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, 10 SBA with 24 SSN) are useful everyday players. Part-timers include Jose Osuna (1-6-6-6, 9 hits, a walk+22, L+7 R-11), Jonny Field (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, a walk+22, L+3 R-4), Mark Reynolds (1-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks+22), and Curtis Granderson (1-6-6, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-8). The less said about Jesus Sucre's card, the better.



Puig: Power and speed

The rest of the pen is mix and match, but with a good lefty-righty split. Adam Warren (Grade 12*), Neil Ramirez (Grade 11* C-24 HR-32), Chasen Shreve (Grade 10* C-45 HR-26), Luis Avilan (Grade 9* HR+36), Hector Velasquez (Grade 9* HR+33), and Matt Bush (Grade 9* C-62) bring the total of useable innings to about 460. But these guys don't help the top of the rotation. So unless C.C. can pitch into the sixth or seventh every time out, he may be in trouble.

Offense: 8.0
Kind of interchangeable

Defense: 5.0
Some strengths, no weaknesses.

This year's Koyotes still flashes good power, a byproduct of the New Normal (see last year's *Annual*). In general, though, there aren't really any cards that just plain scare you. There's nothing wrong with the names on this team, but a look down the lineup reveals most of the batters hit .250-.260. So they'll have good days and bad days, averaging out to, well, average.

Where are you, Dustin Pedroia? In his absence due to injury, Hernandez (2B7) fills in adequately. But coupled with Segura's downgrade to an SS8, this team is dead average up the middle. Moustakas (3B5) and Smoak (1B5) are both anchors at the corners, and even Reynolds (1B4) is above average there.

The outfield has high-light-reel potential in Springer and Puig (both OF3s), and Puig's cannon (38 arm) is a weapon. Taylor and Field (OF2s) are average, but Field's arm (28) makes him a liability. Behind the dish, Gomes and Sucre are identical defensively (C8 Th+1). There are some strengths, and there are no weaknesses (except if Taylor plays anywhere in the outfield).



Gomes: A strength

Bench: 2.5
They do the same things.

There are six hitters who play 140 or more games. The rest float in and out. The emergency instructions present four different lineups, in which hitters rarely appear in the same place twice. There are some extra guys to do things, like SNT Jose Rondon (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks L-5 R+3), but for the most part, they all do the same things.

2nd The power counts for something, and there's always Max Scherzer. That adds up to second place, albeit a distant second behind Melrose's juggernaut out of the ashes. The 2019 Koyotes are a consequence of a 2018 pennant run. They're not bad, but they just not ... complete. It's like a jigsaw puzzle where all the pieces are the same shape. Going forward, that will be Mr. Schwartz's puzzle to solve.

Looking back. Mr. Schwartz has been at the controls of this team since mid-2008. In the grand scheme of things, 11 years is too small a sample size to analyze for rebuilding trends. But there are some facts we can pull out, since our job here at the *Annual* is to do exactly that.

The Koyotes have won 102 games once, last year, and they've lost 102 games once, back in 2013. Mr. Schwartz's rebuilds tend to be deliberate and multi-year. For example, after the 102-loss season, the Koyotes won 77, 86, 95, 79 (a temporary step back), and 102. That's a steady rise.

The Koyotes are rarely stagnant. Although they've registered between 76 and 86 wins four times in the 11 years under the direction of Mr. Schwartz, it's not a sign of mediocrity. The team is usually passing through that range, on the way up or on the way down.

It stands to reason that, after the 102-win pinnacle last year, the team will regress a little. Given its historical record, it's unlikely that the team will bounce right back in 2020. It's more likely to take a few years. Then again, any team with Max Scherzer should always be in the conversation as a possible contender.

As seen below, there are not many very young players on the roster, but only a few are in the over-30 demographic. The core is in its prime, giving the Koyotes some running room with this edition of the team.

Players born in 1992 or after (7): Araujo, Field, LeClerc, J. Osuna, J. Rondon, L. Severino, Valaika.

Players born in 1987 or before (9): Bush, Gomes, Granderson, Reynolds, Sabathia, Scherzer, Smoak, J. Soria, Warren.

TQ: 23.0



2018 calusa INDIANS in review



The Indians lived to fight another day. Survival!

by Gordon Rodell

2018 in review

Final Record: 72-90 (4th, Clemente)

*"If it weren't for bad luck; We'd have no luck at all."
"Gloom, despair, and agony on me!" Hee Haw!*

On Opening Day, Gloria Gaynor announced the theme for the season was survival. Did the Indians survive? The season was pretty much a failure. The bullpen *failed* 29 times. The goal to win more than we lost; *failed*. The goal to win 75+; *failed*. The common theme here is, *Failure!* However, true to the history of Native People everywhere, the Indians lived to fight another day. Survival!

What went right?

Freddy Freeman. The Soul, and Heart's Inspiration of the team. Played an MVP season and slashed .340 / .431 / .635. He connected for 45 doubles and 24 homers which produced 75 RBI. Not bad for only 112 games. Austin Barnes played 102 games and slashed .286 / .391 / .468. Pretty good for a catcher.

Jesse Winker was limited to only 39 games, but made the most of his opportunity as he slashed .287 / .338 / .427. Raisel Iglesias saved 26 games in 71 innings and achieved a 3.03 ERA. Drew Steckenrider and Jose Jimenez turned in good rookie pitching performances. No pitcher lost 20 games and the team avoided 100 losses, that's good, right? *Right?* What else? Did I mention Freddy Freeman?

What went wrong?

Well for starters, the Indians didn't score enough runs. Runs *for*: 709. Runs *against*: 797. Didn't hit enough home runs. HR *for*: 161. HR *against*: 185.

Didn't hit enough. Hits *for*: 1427. Hits *against*: 1521. The starting pitchers were abysmal. The starters went 40-61 with a 5.14 ERA. Hit into too many double plays: 133. Committed too many errors: 111. Big off season trade acquisitions hit a collective .215. Mix all this together and voila, 92 losses!

3 Things

1. *Moving Day, Part Zwei!* For the second time in their short four year tenure in TBL, the Indians moved. Not only did they change divisions, but Conferences too. The long range goal is to eventually find a home where we can *win!* Who knows when we will be moving to *your* division.

2. *Winter has come!* And darkness covers Paradise. In other words, real baseball sucked! Injuries and poor performance doomed hopes for 2019. Fourteen Indians failed to play up to expectations.

Injuries struck down six more. 'Heap Big Trade' for Andujar creates hope that one day –

*Spring will come,
the sun will shine,
and the Fierce People
will return, will return.*

3. *The Gambler.* General Manager-In-Chief Hairii Karee has earned the moniker 'The Gambler'. Not afraid to take a chance on questionable talent, many of his roster acquisitions fall into the high risk/high reward category. So far, in this game of chance, Hairii is holding 'The Dead Man's Hand' of two black aces, and two black eights. Up to now, his high risk trade/draft acquisitions have missed, but probability dictates that half will eventually achieve greatness, well may be a third, a fourth? C'mon, at least *one*.



Freeman: Heart's inspiration

calusa INDIANS



Gordon Rodell (5th year)

The team is loaded with potential, but even though some of the pieces are in place, the greater potential hasn't yet delivered.

It's much easier to tear down than it is to build up. When you want your team to move in a positive direction you have to draft well, you have to make astute trades, and maybe most importantly, you have to be lucky. Plus, patience is a virtue, to coin a phrase, as the road back to competitiveness is often rocky and twisty.

This team is now a year removed from the phenomenal 109-win season of 2017. Last year's edition won only 72. This year, the drop is likely to continue. But the new pieces are starting to come together. This team still has a lot of potential. But for 2019, potential isn't worth the paper it's printed on. The *Annual* doesn't deal in potential in our team articles; we write about what's here, now. And the way we see it, they have a way to go.

Pitching: 7.0 **A trial by fire, for some.**

Baseball sage Casey Stengel once said of a prospect, "In five years, he has a chance to be 30." Such is the way of players with potential. Sometimes they turn into Noah Syndergaard

Turnover Rate: 49%

Arrived: Miguel Andujar, Jake Cave, Erick Fedde, Derek Fisher, Jack Flaherty, Robbie Grossman, Jose Iglesias, JaCoby Jones, Ariel Jurado, Luke Maile, Chris Martin, Matt Moore, Hector Rondon, Jonny Venters, Drew VerHagen, Jonathan Villar, Tyler White.

Departed: Tim Beckham, Asdrubal Cabrera, Brett Cecil, Daniel Coulombe, Rajai Davis, Miguel Diaz, Jerad Eickhoff, Jason Hammel, Cesar Hernandez, George Kontos, Jordan Lyles, Juan Nicasio, Chris Owings, Carlos Santana, Joe Smith, Matt Wieters.

and sometimes they turn into Jason Hammel. This year's Calusa pitching staff is loaded with potential. So there are few pitchers on the roster who'd be considered dead weight.

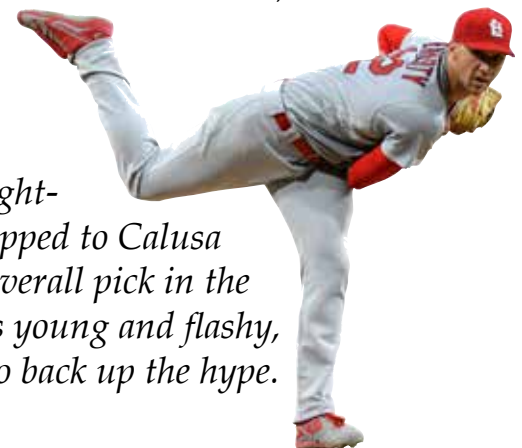
But for 2019, there are few stars and lots of mediocrity, which will likely translate into a long season around the lodges of the Calusa Indians. With several notable exceptions, these pitchers are going to be beaten up with regularity. And the cavalry won't be riding to rescue these Indians (or any Indians, for that matter).

ROTATION. The good news starts with SNT Jack Flaherty (Grade 15 C-21). He's the current ace for 28 starts. There's another ace on this staff, but Noah "Thor" Syndergaard (Grade 10 C+24 HR+36) has taken a temporary step backward. At least Mr. Rodell hopes it's only temporary. Along with veteran Rick Porcello (Grade 9 C+23), the top end of the rotation account for 86 starts.

Then things turn decidedly ugly. Sal Romano (Grade 4 HR-16), Luke Weaver (Grade 4), Erick Fedde (Grade 3 C-25 HR-21), and Ariel Jurado (Grade 1) fill out the remaining 76 starts. Each of these four is young enough to still capture his potential, but at the moment,

SNT: **Jack Flaherty.**

This highly sought-after starter dropped to Calusa as the seventh overall pick in the draft. Flaherty's young and flashy, with the skills to back up the hype.





they're little more than batting practice pitchers. No amount of bullpen can make up for these grades, so it's a trial by fire in true native American fashion.



Iglesias: Erstwhile. (3 straight years)

BULLPEN. Ever wonder what a team looks like without a true closer? It's a couple of set-up guys and a bunch of middle relievers. Welcome to Calusa's bullpen! Erstwhile closer Raisel Iglesias (Grade 17* HR-25) may get the job done this year, but it'll be scary. He's set up by Juan Minaya (Grade 14* C-56 HR+42) and others, but these two are the only ones capable of stealing 8s without help. That's about 119 innings — hardly enough.

The rest of the "middle relief" includes: Jonny "The Lefty" Venters (Grade 12* C-21 HR+54), Drew Steckenrider (Grade 11*), Hector Rondon (Grade 10* HR+36), Joe Jimenez (Grade 10* HR+33), and Drew VerHagen (Grade 10* HR+21). They add another 273 useful innings, and they're largely interchangeable. Waiver wire pick-up and appointed caddy Matt Moore (Grade 8* HR-21) is another lefty. Chris Martin (Grade 5* C+54) is around to clean up the messes the others leave.

Offense: 8.0
Good things, not all at the same time.

The slugger who has defined this franchise since 2012, Freddie Freeman (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 4 walks, 13 SBA with 30 SSN, 162 games and no shift) continues to mash. He's joined by rookies Tyler White (1-4-5-5, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, L+4 R-3), Miguel Andujar (1-0-0-0-0, 11 hits, 1 walk+22),



Andujar: Powerful

and Jake Cave (1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L-9). These four represent all the big power on the team.

There are, of course, other good hitters here. Joey Wendle (6-6-0, 11 hits, 2 walks+42, 20 SBA with 31 SSN) does a little of everything. Wilmer Flores (1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L-6) adds a little pop. Ender Inciarte (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, 42 SBA with 26 SSN) can run often. These are guys you need on a team.

Then there are the on-base machines. Jesse Winker (3 0s, 10 hits, 5 walks, L-9), Robbie Grossman (3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, L+6 R-5), and Luke Maile (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+22) find ways to get on base. None of them can run, though. The speedsters include Jonathan Villar (1-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, 40 SBA with 34 SSN) and Jose Iglesias (6-6-0, 10 hits, a walk+42, L+6 R-3, 21 SBA with 28 SSN).

Finally, there's Russ Martin (2 0s, 6 hits, 6 walks+42), Austin Barnes (2 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks+42, L+3 R-7), Jacoby Jones (4 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+22, 18 SBA with 28 SSN), who all get to play. In all, this team has some power and some speed. All still have the potential to get better. (There's that word again.) In the meantime, this offense has many good things, just not all at the same time. Except for Freddie Freeman.

Defense: 4.5
Some good news, some bad.

There's some good news, but also some bad news. Recent acquisition Iglesias — now Calusa has the whole Iglesias set — is an SS9 for two-thirds of the season. Superstar Freeman is a 1B5, Wendle is a 2B8, and Enciarte is an OF3 with a plus arm. Martin (C8, but Th-4) and Barnes (C8, but Th-2) are at least good defenders.

Maile (C7, Th-0), Jones (OF2), Cave (OF2 with a weak arm), and Villar, when he plays as a 2B7

are all adequate, but Villar also covers a third of the season as an SS7. Both third basemen are 3B3s, and two outfielders, Winker and Grossman, are OF1s with sub-par arms. There's a lot that could go wrong with this defense over the season.



Inciarte: Good defender, plus arm

He inherited a messy Greater Ohio team in 2015 that lost 103 games right off the bat, pun intended. But just two years later, as the Calusa Indians, Gordon Rodell led the team to a 109-win season. That's an amazing turnaround for any manager and especially sweet for one who's so new to the league. Those 109 victories, by the way, set a franchise record.



calusa INDIANS

The current roster, as noted over and over again in this report, is loaded with potential, but given that, not all the prospects work out. That's just the nature of potential. At the *Annual*, we predict this team won't bounce back quickly, as it did in 2017. Some of the rebuilding pieces are there; but it's overall lacking in terms of performance. In other words, the potential hasn't yet delivered.

That's not to say this team isn't heading in the right direction. It is. It remains to be seen how astute Mr. Rodell delivers on the promise of his current roster, especially since he's already traded away his first two picks in next year's draft. It may be a few more years before the team gels.

Bench: **Hard pressed.**

2.0

Apparently, there are some extra games for pinch-hitting and pinch-running, but most of the time, the best bats are already in the game.

Native Americans are sometimes known for creating something out of nothing, but these Indians will be hard pressed to create any kind of magic.

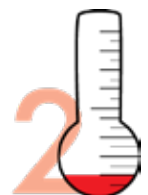
3rd If Melrose wins this division, as expected, the other three teams in the division will be grouped at the bottom. The *Annual* is picking Calusa to finish third, but it could easily finish second or fourth. There may not be much separating the three teams. Mr. Rodell has work ahead of him to bring in enough talent to the team to support Freeman, who turns 30 in September, before he ages out.

Rebuilding, Calusa style: Mr. Rodell has been a member of TBL for four seasons. That's hardly long enough to develop and analyze his rebuilding patterns. Four seasons is a drop in the bucket for this league, where more than half of the owner/GMs have been here for 20 years or longer. But we'll evaluate where this rebuild is going, based on what's here now and what we know about our esteemed Mr. Rodell.



Still potentially iconic

TQ: 21.5



2018 Las Vegas GAMBLERS in review



"Went wrong" is probably a poor choice of words.

by Craig Musselman

2018 in review

Final Record: 65-97 (3rd, Aaron)

Paul's "beloved Gamblers" (in real life, often an oxymoron) were in full rebuild mode in 2018 after valiant playoff runs in the two years prior. Las Vegas is following the boom-bust cycle which is inevitable for most TBL franchises.

The team's 65-97 record wasn't good, but five TBL teams were worse – two of them far worse. The offense wasn't half bad, scoring 746 runs, which is more than a couple playoff teams scored. But they gave up 899 runs, with a pitching staff ERA of 5.14, which is more than half bad. That kind of pitching performance will always yield a losing record. This wasn't a complete crash off the proverbial cliff, as the team has assets upon which to build.



Duvall: Home run leader

What went right?

Adam Duvall hit 41 home runs and had 123 RBI's, despite hitting only .218 and having struck out a prodigious 185 times. The team hit 181 homers, which is decent production. Jose Quintana went 11-9 with a 4.22 ERA. RA Dickey matched that 11-9 record, despite a 5.03 ERA.

What went wrong?

"Closer" Brad Hand had an ERA of 4.84. Despite that, he saved 25 games. Martin "Gas Can" Perez was atrocious, having a 7.20 ERA in 31 painful starts. Despite that, his record was 8-17 – it probably should have been far worse. CC Sabathia was not his old self, going 6-10 in 20 starts.

"Went wrong" is probably a poor choice of words as this rebuild was knowingly undertaken. Perhaps what went most wrong was not losing four additional games, as that would have yielded the third pick in the draft rather than #6.

3 Things

1. *An Interesting Mix of Players.* Despite a rebuild-year or two, Las Vegas has a roster with a mix of experienced ballplayers hoping for rejuvenation (Josh Donaldson, Homer Bailey, Robinson Cano) and younger players hoping to build on careers to date (Xander Bogaerts, Kris Bryant, Lucas Giolito). This is not a typical rebuilding roster. The guys hoping for rejuvenation are of more value to the Gamblers for the one or two year potential than they would be worth in trade. So, it is easy to see this team getting better or worse over the next several years as the rebuild continues.

2. *The Draft.* With five picks in the first two rounds, Las Vegas began the restocking, with three corner infielders and two starting pitchers. As luck would have it (gamblers experience bad luck) the top pick, slugger Miguel Andujar immediately went on the shelf along with all the rest of the Yankees.

3. *Whither the Pitching?* To get back into contention, the Gamblers will need to assemble a solid pitching staff. Early in the 2019 MLB season, the entire nearly-no-name pitching staff is off to a very fine start.

One thing is for certain. All TBL managers will be most pleased to welcome back the Gamblers braintrust in person at the 2020 TBL draft.

Las Vegas GAMBLERS

Paul Harrington (23rd year)

He can't finish with the worst record in 2019; his competition is literally too stiff.



At the *Annual*, we see patterns that emerge over time. It may seem to Mr. Harrington that he consistently misses out on the big prize, even when he does everything right. Consider:

- In 2017, his last go-for-broke team, the Gamblers made it to the Conference Championship, but fell short of a World Series yet again.
- In 2015, the team finished with the worst record in the league, but had traded its first-round pick the previous winter, so he didn't get to enjoy the "spoils" of his "achievement."
- In 2014, it was arguably even more disappointing, when the team lost 102 games ... and picked sixth in the draft.

Despite trying very hard, he's never quite been able to reach his goals. Is it bad luck? A twist of fate? For a team that has a rolling dice logo, every year must seem like exactly that. Mr. Harrington spent the recent winter remaking his team into an also-ran. But he retained his talented young offense, gutting his pitching staff instead. He may bounce back to contention in 2020, but he can't finish with the worst record in 2019; his competition is literally too stiff.

Pitching: **4.0**
Likely to get crushed.

Unlike last year, this staff has a pretty good lefty-righty balance. But the grades start at mediocre and then drop off rapidly. The peripherals, with several exceptions, tend toward the critical: highly negative. This is not a staff to strike fear in any batter. Just the opposite. But there are bits and pieces here.

Mostly pieces. Small pieces. The team has half a season of a double-digit starter. They've got a

SNT: Jake Bauers.

The Gamblers took this youngster to build around, and they're giving him time to mature.



Turnover Rate: 54%

Arrived: Homer Bailey, Tyler Bashlor, Jake Bauers, David Bote, Austin Brice, Lucas Giolito, Ronald Guzman, Elieser Hernandez, Rosell Herrera, Tim Hill, Tyler Mahle, Jose Martinez, Felix Pena, Michael Perez, Roman Quinn, Caleb Smith, Andrew Suarez, Carlos Tocci, Taylor Williams

Departed: R.A. Dickey, Jeurys Familia, Deolis Guerra, Gorkys Hernandez, Caleb Joseph, Juan Lagares, Deven

closer with solid peripherals. They've got some names other teams would like to be able to say. There will be days, mark our words, when this staff will live up to the franchise's storied past and perform like champions. But most of the time? They're more likely to get crushed.

ROTATION. This year's ace would feel at home as a #3 starter on most other clubs. And that's a compliment. Caleb Smith (Grade 11 C-24) is, of course, a lefty, but he'll likely deliver decent performances for most of his 16 starts. Behind him, or alongside him, serving as the second half of the "ace" is Felix Pena (Grade 9), a righty with minimally positive peripherals. That gives the Gamblers 33 starts of pitchers who can steal hits on their own.



Las Vegas GAMBLERS

The next four starters, all rookies, will learn on the job. Lucas Giolito's (Grade 6 C-44) name means "Tiny Strike Zone" in Sicilian, and he'll be looking for it all year. Andrew Suarez (Grade 6 C+16), Eliezer Hernandez (Grade 5 HR-23), and punching-bag Tyler Mahle (Grade 4 C-21 HR-31) contribute 89 more starts, and that may be the most important number here. Filling the final 40 starts are veterans Homer Bailey (Grade 1 C+32 HR-33) and Martin Perez (Grade 1 HR-21). Mmmm.

BULLPEN. This bullpen at least has some depth, offering up almost 600 innings, although to be fair, 286 of those innings are innocuous. Yes, this team has four innocuous pitchers and all will play. A lot. The closer this year is holdover Craig Stammen (Grade 12* C+34 HR+46). As Mr. Harrington's instructions lament, he'd be an excellent set-up man on a better club, but at least he has a chance at the rare save opportunities he'll get. And he has 79 innings to contribute.

The set-up and middle relief group actually have some strengths, and all will be used during the season. Adam Conley (Grade 12*) and Tim Mayza (Grade 11* HR+31) are the LH set-up guys. They bring 86 innings. The rest add depth. Tyler Bashlor (Grade 11* HR-31) and Tayler Williams (Grade 8 *C-21) add 85 more RH innings, but they may not be appetizing. Lefty Tim Hill (Grade 7* HR+31), who does have a purpose, is probably wondering why he's here.

The innocuous righties at the bottom of this pigpen are Eliezer Hernandez (Grade 5*), Oliver Drake (Grade 4* HR+32), Austin Brice (Grade 3* C+34 HR-46), and Luis Garcia (Grade 2* HR+25). They'll pitch when the game's out of hand, which may be often. But surprisingly,

most of the bullpen arms help the starters, so there's synergy at work here that may contribute to some wins.

Offense: 9.0
Still provides some fireworks.

This year's team is a couple of steps down from previous Gambler juggernauts, but they can still provide some fireworks. It all starts with three solid cards. Rejuvenated Robinson Cano (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks+22 L+2 R-3) starts against RH pitching. Newly acquired Jose Martinez (1-6-6, 11 hits, 3 walks, L-3) starts every day. Powerful Xander Bogaerts (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, no shift, 31 SSN for 10 SBAs) has become the player to build around.



Cano: Rejuvenated

There are four other solid on-base cards to show what the Gamblers offense used to do frequently. Francisco Cervelli (3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks+42, no shift), Kris Bryant (4 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+42 L+13 R-5), Travis Shaw (1-5-5, 8 hits, 5 walks+22 L-10), and rookie David Bote (1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42 L+5 R-4) can all get on a good clip and sometimes even mash the ball.

Corey Dickerson (4 0s, 11 hits, a walk+22, L-4, 28 SSN for 11 SBAs), Elias Diaz (1-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, L+4 R-4), and Roman Quinn (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, +22, 28 SSN for 14 SBAs, 19 speed) all contribute in one way or another. Even Ronald Guzman (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-8) will have his good days. Against righties.

The last two are all hit or miss — and mostly miss. Austin Jackson (6-0, 9 hits, 2 walks) and Adam Duvall (1-5-6, 7 hits, 3 walks+22) don't really help, even if they occasionally get lucky. Even without much team speed (again), it's still the second-best offense in the division, according to the *Annual's* ratings.

Defense: Mostly a strength.

In the half-season that Cano (2B8) starts, he compliments Shaw (3B5). But Bote (2B6) starts the other half of the season, and Bryant (3B4) cuts into Shaw's playing time. Bogaerts (SS8) and Martinez (1B3) are both average. Behind the dish, Cervelli (C8 Th+4) turned in a stellar season, and Diaz (C7 Th+1) is a fairly strong backup.

The outfield is mostly a strength, starting with part-timer Quinn, Duvall, and Dickerson (all OF3s). Jackson is average, but Bryant (OF1) is an opponent's base hit waiting to happen. Jackson and Quinn both have solid arms, but Dickerson's (28) is a marshmallow.

Bench: Enough roster flexibility.

Assuming they eventually get some playing time, Josh Donaldson (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks, L+3 R-3) and Michael Perez (3 0s, 11 hits a walk) could help this team. SNT Bauers (1-6-6, 7 hits, 5 walks+22, L-6) may have to wait until November. Rosell Herrera (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-6) and Carlos Tocci (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+22 L+3 R-4) at least bring down the team's average age. But there's enough roster flexibility to provide some in-game moves.

4th

This team is a shadow of its former self. It's as if it looked in the mirror and saw the wrinkles, the bandaged elbow, the bruised ego and said, "That's it! Time to reboot!" While the pitching staff has been slashed to ribbons, many of the young hitters (and Donaldson) are still here. That's where the promise remains. The pitching, though, will bring the team back down to reality with a thud. At least for 2019.

4.5



Cervelli: Stellar

Rebuilding, Las Vegas style: For the franchise's entire up-and-down history, it has won six division titles, finishing last only twice. That sounds impressive,

but it's also won 100+ games just twice, while losing 100+ six times. That's symmetry at least.

Las Vegas built a successful expansion franchise, winning a franchise-record 104 games in 2000, which is a pretty phenomenal achievement.

Its longest rebuild — and its longest stretch without making the playoffs — occurred from 2013 to 2015. The team lost 100+ games each of those years. But in 2016, the team gained 47 wins with 99 victories. Three big reasons for that turnaround highlight the Gamblers' modus operandi when it comes to building winners:

1. Josh Donaldson had a huge breakout year, smashing 43 homers.
2. Kris Bryant joined the team as a rookie and had an immediate impact.
3. A whole bunch of new relievers joined incumbent K-Rod, winning 34 games and saving 54.

Vegas contenders load up on big-game relievers. For the franchise-best 104-win team of 2000, the relievers won 29 games and saved 52. For years, Vlad Guerrero carried this team. When he moved on, Donaldson arrived. So there's always been a big bat. In the current rebuild, if the starting staff comes together, you can bet many relievers will join them, as the offense is already fairly strong. No matter which way the dice the roll for Mr. Harrington, you can bet he won't stop trying.

TQ: 20.0



Las Vegas GAMBLERS



Quite A Dogfight

The best pennant race in TBL once again resides in the Mantle Division. There are few places where teams are closer, but the Mantle – as usual – is a hotbed of competition between old friends and rivals.

We think the top of the heap is the *Hudson Generals*. The *Annual* has a long love-hate relationship with *Clay Beard's* club, with the implication that we have had the effect of a *Sports Illustrated* cover – we call them for a pennant, and the team disappoints, or we say bad things and they overperform. Hopefully our prediction and the team's success will align.



Down in *Columbus*, there's another competitive *Jets* club ready to contend. There are some issues with the team and the window of contention – based on the current roster – will not remain open much longer. Nonetheless, there's enough talent on the field and in management that Mr. Beard will find a hard race. *Vic Vaughn* isn't about to make it easier for the Hall of Famer to win the Mantle Division.



The *Munich Marauders* have been at this for as long as TBL has existed. *Paul Montague* is an aficionado, with a skilled hand and lots of experience (see his article on the business of bullpens earlier in this book). This year's Marauder team is probably treading water, in transition between the contenders of a few years ago and what is yet to come. Yet neither Hudson nor Columbus will be counting Monty's boys out.



The *Detroit Dragons* are in the midst of a rebuild, waiting for some off years and injuries to be left behind. *Dave Jaskot* has been around the block in TBL a few times now, and has experienced both great success and unpleasant failure. This year is likely to be difficult, but the team – sailing under a new, more assertive logo – has a bright future ahead.



Of course, you don't get to the future unless you play through the present – so here we go.

2018 Mantle Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Columbus*	97	65	.599	—
Hudson†	92	70	.568	5
Munich	80	82	.494	17
Detroit	61	101	.377	36

* Lost to Kansas in NC playoffs.

† Lost to Kansas in NC Wild Card.



Justin Turner,
Hudson

Mantle Division

- 1. Hudson 28.0
- 2. Columbus 26.5
- 3. Munich 23.5
- 4. Detroit 16.0

2018 hudson GENERALS in review



The key will be how the middlemen bridge the gaps.

by Clay Beard

2018 in review

Final Record: 92-70 (2nd, Mantle)

Hudson rolled into the playoffs for the first time in three years on the strength of a 9-2 road trip to end the season. The Generals had a rare month when they pitched and hit at the same time. Andrew McCutchen, who had a terrible season overall, had a huge November, belting 8 homers and knocking in 24. He went from McCutchen to McClutchen. Didi also knocked in 19 to pass the century mark with 105 RBI. But the club fell to Kansas in the Wild Card round.

What went right?

D.J. LeMahieu led the team in average at .313. The Generals had 6 players with 20 or more dingers with Wellington Castillo leading the way with 29, but only 7 doubles (Olson-like). Jed Lowrie more than made up for that by being a doubles machine with 53.

The starting staff was actually led by the #3 guy, Marcus Stroman (17-9, 3.78). Carlos Martinez was steady (14-10, 3.92). The bullpen was led by Josh Hader (2-4, 20 saves, 1.34.) Albuquerque proved to be a valuable pickup as he took up the slack when Hader was down (11 saves, 0.54 ERA).



LeMahieu: Leader

One statistical oddity was the success of General pinch hitters this year. Those numbers are rarely good since they tend to face late inning relievers. They slashed 266/345/461 with ten homers, four of them from Castillo.

What went wrong?

On the mound the story continued to be another disappointing season from Rich Hill 10-10 4.74 is not what you expect from a 15.

3 Things

1. *The Bridge.* Is there a better back end to a bullpen? I don't know. The key will be how the middlemen bridge the gaps to them or between them.
2. *Mad Max.* It was fortunate that Muncy dropped out of what appeared to be a major shelf.
3. *Relentless offense.* The offense should be relentless, though not spectacular - they'll pay for it as five of them have a 42. This will almost guarantee a team record for HBP.

HUDSON GENERALS



Clay Beard (35th year); Hall of Famer

"This team could be a disaster in a lesser manager's hands. With Mr. Beard at the helm, it may exceed expectations."

Mr. Beard has been competing in TBL for 34 years. And in all that time, his Hudson Generals have suffered only 14 losing seasons. That's a record to brag about, but not for Mr. Beard. He's a diplomat, in every sense of the word.

In 2019, the franchise is decidedly on the upswing, even following a 92-win campaign. SNT Max Muncy joins a powerful lineup that lacks only consistent speed. Favoring power over speed is a reversal of strategy for the Generals. They hold the TBL record for stolen bases in a season with 310 in 1989.

Their pitching is deep and talented, but with interesting issues of its own, both in the rotation and in the bullpen. This isn't a team every manager could push deep into the playoffs, but Mr. Beard is a Hall of Famer who has proven his skill with 20 winning seasons. So far.

Pitching: 10.5
May exceed expectations.

Nine pitchers have to contribute to fill the 162 starts, but the new recruits — brought in through the draft and trades — deliver immediate help to the team.

SNT: Max Muncy.

Selecting Max Muncy says "win now" — not because he's 28, but because he brings an impact bat that's just what the Generals ordered.



The rotation isn't without its quirks, though, as they may need five starters to pitch a seven-game series.

The bullpen has a strong ace, one of the best set-up relievers in the game and a lot of positive HR ratings. But as good as it is at the top, it's shallow goodness. And top of the pen features all lefties, too. It could be a disaster in a lesser manager's hands. With Mr. Beard at the helm, it may exceed expectations.

ROTATION. At the top is wild Freddy Peralta (Grade 15 C-53). He may dominate, but only for 14 starts. The real new ace is Mike Clevenger (Grade 14 HR+21), who offers 32 starts. Former ace Carlos Martinez (Grade 13 C-36 HR+46) is still effective, but only for 18 starts. That's 64 outstanding starts.



Clevenger: New ace

The last six starters are a mixed bag. Rich Hill (Grade 12 HR-21), rookie Brad Keller (Grade 11

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Xavier Cedenó, Mike Clevenger, J.D. Davis, Austin Dean, Grayson Greiner, Brad Keller, Pablo Lopez, Max Muncy, Freddy Peralta, Bryan Shaw, Robert Stock, Trey Wingenter.

Departed: Al Albuquerque, Ezequiel Carrera, Michael Feliz, Greg Garcia, Luke Gregerson, D.J. Lemahieu, Boone Logan, Tyler Naquin, Kevin Plawewski, Joe Ross, Marc Rzepczynski, Marcus Stroman.



HR+44), Kevin Gausman (Grade 8 C+22), and Pablo Lopez (Grade 8 C+26) can steal hits for another 85 starts. That leaves the final baker's dozen for Matt Shoemaker (Grade 7 HR+24) and Antonio Senzatela (Grade 6). The bottom of the rotation gives way to the bullpen early.



Doolittle: Monster

BULLPEN. The closer is a monster: Sean Doolittle (Grade 25* C+44 HR+31). He only pitches 45 innings. In fact, the whole pen is light on innings, especially for a contender. Josh Hader (Grade 25* C-25) sets up and backs up. He's also a strikeout machine. But that's only 126 closer-grade innings, well short of other contenders.

The middle relief is Xavier Cedeño (Grade 16* C-36 HR+54) and Trey Wingenter (Grade 15* C-62 HR-21). Just kidding; these contribute only 52 innings all year, combined. That leaves Robert Stock (Grade 12* HR+54), Mychal Givens (Grade 12* HR+44), and Cody Allen (Grade 11* C-36) as the real middle relief. Brad Brach (Grade 7* C-21 HR+34) mops up while Bryan Shaw drives the team bus for a year.

Offense: 11.0
A power party.

The perennial choice for starting this section is the ageless Justin Turner (1-6-6-6, 11 hits, 4 walks+42, L+5 R-4). Wilson Ramos (1-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks) is the only other player with 11 hits. But the power party is just getting started. How about the formidable SNT Max Muncy (1-1-5-5,



Turner: Ageless

9 hits, 6 walks+22, L-5) and his cohort C.J. Cron (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L+5 R-4).

Then there's the sublime Randal Grichuk (1-0-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42) and his five power numbers. A.J. Pollock (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L-5, 13 SBA with 33 SSN) and Didi Gregorius (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L-4, 15 SBA with 25 SSN). No other players have four or more power numbers, but there are still plenty of first-column 1s.

Lead-off hitter extraordinaire Andrew McCutchen (1-6-6, 9 hits, 5 walks+22, 23 SBA with 24 SSN) and Brian Anderson (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks+42) do their best to get on base. Johan Camargo (1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22) and Welington Castillo (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+22) extend the lineup.

Jed Lowrie (1-6-6, 9 hits, 4 walks, L-5) plays every day. That leaves part-timers Lucas Duda (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L-13 R+3) and Grayson Greiner (6-6, 8 hits, 5 walks, L+8 R-5). This team gets on base and swings for the fences. Stolen bases take a backseat to the occasional hit-and-run and the three-run bomb.

Defense: 4.0
Will make most of the plays.

The defensive gems will likely come from Turner (3B5), Lowrie (2B8), and Pollock (OF3, with a 33 arm). All the other outfielders are average, although McCutchen's arm is equal to Pollock's. Gregorius and Camargo (SS8, 3B4) are average fielders, as are all the first basemen.

Behind the dish, Castillo (C8, with a 0 Th) and Ramos (C7, with a 0 Th) will make most of the plays, but won't help with baserunners. Greiner (C7, but with a Th-4) is not there for his arm.

Bench: Enough extra usage.

2.5

Hudson has assembled a roster with enough extra usage, even though a few key players (Castillo, Turner, and Pollock to name a few) are game-limited. And while there are distinct rules for using players off the bench, the Generals will do whatever they can to win a close game. There isn't a big pinch-hitting card, but there are shift advantages available. Pinch-running is rarely an option.

1st

Yes, the *Annual* is going all-in to again predict a first-place finish for the always-difficult-to-pin-down Hudson Generals. It's still liable to be a tight race, as the gentleman from Columbus has a team within the margin of error by the *Annual's* ratings. And that means the Jets are within striking distance. Mr. Beard knows how to play this team to get the maximum out of every player, and that may make the difference.

Rebuilding, Hudson style: Compact discs debuted the same year as the Hudson Generals: 1985. In the years since, Mr. Beard has seen and done almost everything in TBL. He's even been honored as a Hall of Fame manager. Yet, despite winning 90+ games twelve times, he has never won a TBL Championship, although he made it to the Series twice.



Our sources say yes.

He's found many ways to compete. The Generals won 96 games in just their second season. In their sixth season, the team won 104 and went to the seventh game of the World Series.



HUDSON GENERALS

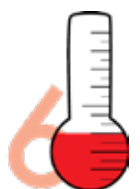
With a few exceptions, Mr. Beard has kept his team competitive. He's lost 100 or more games only three times, and two of those came during the longest losing streak in Generals history: from 1995 to 1999. Otherwise, he's not had two consecutive losing seasons, as improbable as that is to report.

The closest he got to a classic Bounce came in 2010 to 2012. In 2010, the team won 96 games and made it into the Series after a fierce and memorable series against Zion. The following year, they dropped to 63 wins, but came right back to win 101 in 2012. Unfortunately, that team didn't fare well in the playoffs.

The Generals are currently on an upward trajectory that began in 2015, the team's last 100-loss season. Since then, they've won 83, 85, and 92 games. They're poised to win more this year, if luck and skill hold. A slow builder who prefers draft picks to cardboard, Mr. Beard has built another winner.

There is a long tradition of the *Annual* making bad predictions about the Hudson outcome; our Magic 8-Ball has been unreliable in the past. But though it's going to be a dogfight in the Mantle, our sources say that the Generals will win the pennant this year. We'll see whether the device is working this time.

TQ: **28.0**



2018 columbus JETS in review



The season was a lot of fun to play.

by Vic Vaughn

2018 in review

Final Record: 97-65 (1st, Mantle)

When we read the 2018 *Annual* and saw that Clay's pre-play exercise had us winning 98 games and taking the Mantle Division crown, we were concerned that some diabolical virus had taken over his computer and destroyed its logic circuits. With only 52 starts greater than a grade 7, such a lofty win total seemed out of reach. We were wrong. Somehow, we managed to win 97 games and took the Mantle division by 5 games over Hudson.

Unfortunately, we couldn't carry that success into the playoffs, falling to a superior Kansas team in six games. Even though the season ended in disappointment, the season was a lot of fun to play as the team exceeded our pre-season expectations.

What went right?

The offense was terrific scoring 848 runs (second in the league) and putting up a league best .342 on base percentage. Fan favorite Joey Votto anchored the offense with a .276 / .403 / .499 line and leading the team with 118 runs scored, 34 home runs, 100 RBI, 124 walks, and 304 total bases. Jay Bruce (.251 / .381 / .489) wasn't far behind, contributing 33 home runs and driving in 98. Domingo Santana led the team with 45 doubles and 14 stolen bases. 2018 first round draft choice Rhys Hoskins added 16 long balls and slugged .593 in only 50 games.

On the mound, Masahiro Tanaka led the team with 13 wins and 202 strikeouts. Aaron Nola contributed another 12 wins and had the best ERA among the starters at 3.89. Closer David

Robertson's grade 25*K was good for 44 saves, a 1.49 ERA, and 79 strikeouts in 66 innings.

What went wrong?

Well, in the regular season. not a lot. We're nit-picking here, but Johnny Cueto (5-8, 6.37 ERA) and Mike Leake (7-8, 5.34 ERA) had sub-par seasons for grade 7's pitching for a division winning team. Third baseman Eugenio Suarez underperformed with a .228 batting average and committing 21 errors as a 3B-4.

The playoff series against Kansas was a different story. The offense that was so good throughout the season just didn't show up against the strong Koyote pitching staff only managing a .156 batting average, two home runs, and scoring just nine runs in the six game series.



Votto: Anchor

3 Things

1. *Divisional success.* The 2018 division title was built on our success against the other Mantle teams. We went a combined 31-11 against Detroit, Hudson, and Munich. We're unlikely to repeat that performance in 2019.
2. *Gurriel's problems.* We were hoping to bolster our middle infield with first round pick Lourdes Gurriel, but since he's contracted Steve Sax Syndrome and can't throw the ball to first base, that pick may not work out as we'd hoped.
3. *Injuries, always.* We had traded away some of our pitching depth for other pieces, but injuries to Sean Manaea and Michael Fulmer will likely render them uncarded and make us scramble to assemble a decent pitching rotation in 2020.

columbus JETS

Vic Vaughn (13th year)

[It's] a team that's in the same place it was a year ago. But this year, it'll be a challenge."



Coming off a 97-win season, Mr. Vaughn's best campaign since he entered the league in 2006, the Columbus Jets have achieved critical mass. Last year, the team hit for its highest average, on base percentage, and slugging percentage since the team moved to Columbus. But the pitching staff held them back, with no pitcher winning more than 13 games.

In the current season, the Jets have added some young talent, as well as SNT Aaron Hicks, and other players have matured. The pitching is better, even if the offense has declined a bit from a year ago. What it all adds up to, in the short term at least, is a team that's in the same place as it was a year ago. But they won 97 games last year, so what's wrong with that?

Pitching: 10.0 **Solid arms, with some challenges.**

The rotation has come a long way in a year, mostly from the team's internal resources. Although they added a full-time starter, they already had a bona fide ace. The rest of the rotation has developed as well, with one notable exception. As a result, the whole staff has improved and there'll be fewer games left to the bullpen to win or lose.



Nova: Blossomed

Columbus drafted a powerful closer, but he's limited in innings. While the pen has 236 solid set-up and closer innings, the middle relief has less than 100. Managing the bullpen will be one of the biggest challenges for the team this sea-

son. It will also be a challenge to manage in the post-season, if they manage to get there.

ROTATION. The ace of the staff is Aaron Nola (Grade 16 C+16 HR+24). He finally blossomed into the star Mr. Vaughn was waiting for. After Nola come a matched pair who'll give the team a fighting chance every time out. Righty Masahiro Tanaka (Grade 11 C+25 HR-16) and lefty Sean Manaea (Grade 11 C+33) join Nola to provide 87 quality starts.

A couple reliable lefties follow. Soft-tossing Wade LeBlanc (Grade 10 C+23) and second-year rookie Matt Boyd (Grade 10) supply another 58 starts. Former ace Michael Fulmer (Grade 8) didn't get the memo and regressed. But he makes the final 17 starts, which ain't so bad. All the lefty starts

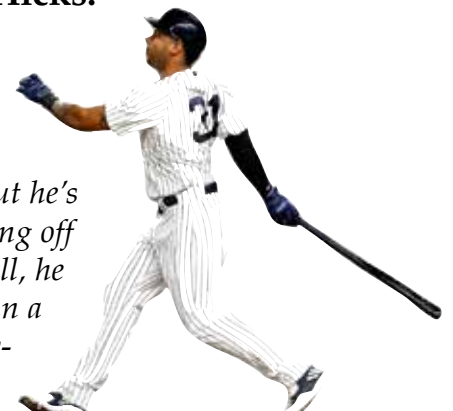
Turnover Rate: 31%

Arrived: Ryan Brasier, Lourdes Gurriel, Aaron Hicks, Daniel Hudson, Ketel Marte, Jake McGee, Cedric Mullins, J. B. Shuck, Mac Williamson, Austin Wynn.

Departed: Michael Brantley, Jason Castro, Johnny Cueto, Nick Delmonico, Greg Infante, JaCoby Jones, Peter Moylan, Daniel Nava, Bryan Shaw, Eric Sogard, Mac Williamson.

SNT: Aaron Hicks.

Adding Hicks is a curious case. He's obviously a talent, but he's not exactly coming off a career year. Still, he gives Mr. Vaughn a legitimate power-speed threat.





columbus JETS



Brasier: Kid gloves

aside, Columbus now has the horses to go deeper in the playoffs, assuming they get there.

BULLPEN. The closer is 31-year-old rookie Ryan Brasier (Grade 23* C+25 HR+36), and he's a good one. But he has only 34 innings, so he'll be used with kid gloves. His set-up is strong and deep. David Robertson (Grade 16* C-16 HR+22) and David Hernandez (C+22 HR+16) are the righties. Lefty Taylor Rogers (Grade 15* C+31 HR+45) has the peripherals to close occasionally.

The problem lies with a thin middle relief corps. John Brebbia (Grade 12* C+16 HR+16) and Daniel Hudson (Grade 11*) are all that's available, and it's not enough. Erstwhile starter Mike Leake (Grade 5 C+36) joins Brandon Kintzler (Grade 4* C+21 HR+26), Aaron Loup (Grade 4* HR+25), and waiver pick-up Jake McGee (Grade 1* HR-31) as the long men. They may have to write off games when they're behind in the sixth inning.

Offense: 9.0 **Big bats, but significant shifts.**

The offense features some big bats, but no one puts it all together like Eugenio Suarez (1-1-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, L+5 R-4). His shift may hurt him a little, but he has the kind of card that can overcome the shift. Following him in the lineup are Rhys Hoskins (1-5-5-6, 9 hits, 5 walks+22, L-7) and SNT Aaron Hicks (1-5-5, 8 hits, 6

walks, L-4, 13 SBA with 32 SSN, and 2 31s!).

Joey Votto (3 0s, 10 hits, 6 walks, L-6) may have lost some power, but he is still an on-base machine. He bats second in most lineups. The lead-off hitter is Ketel Marte (3-5-5, 10 hits, 3 walks, L+8 R-6). Tucker Barnhart (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks), who hits well for a catcher, plays as much as he can.



Suarez: All together

Filling out the lineup are part-timers Domingo Santana (6-6-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-10 R+2), Jorge Soler (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, L+9 R-5), rookie Lourdes Gurriel (1-0-0, 11 hits, a walk+22, L+2 R-3), Jason Kipnis (1-6-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L-4), and Elvis Andrus (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22). They'll get lucky some days, but not every day.

Given all the significant shifts on this team, we expect to see a lot of mix-and-match lineups. Like the bullpen, the offense will take some finesse to coax the maximum effectiveness out of each player. While many players on the team are game-limited, there are still a few moves that can be made, but lack of flexibility will be exploited.

Defense: 5.5 **Mostly average.**

The new defensive star on this team is SNT Hicks (OF3, with a 38 arm). He can run down anything and keep runners honest. Votto (1B5) and Barnhart (C9, but with a Th-2 arm) are part of the upper echelon at their positions.

The rest of the infield is just average: Suarez (3B4), Marte and Andrus (SS8), Gurriel and Kipnis (2B7). Marte is also a 2B8, but there are no calls for him to play there. Santana (OF2) has an above-average arm (33), but Soler (OF1) is a double waiting to happen. It's mostly average, but with three standouts.

Bench:
All can contribute.

3.0

In addition to the listed starters, other guys have to start sometimes because of the limitations. Rookie Ryan O’Hearn (1-1-4-5-6, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, L-19, R+6) is a prize hitting toy, as is Howie Kendrick (5 0s, 12 hits, 1 walk+22, L-6).

Austin Wynns (1-5, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-10 R+6) is the second catcher (C7, Th+2). Even Cedric Mullins (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-9, OF3), Jay Bruce in a down year (3 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks, OF2 with 36 arm), and Kevin Kiermaier (3-5-5, 8 hits, 2 walks+22, L-6, OF3 with a 37 arm) all can contribute.

2nd This team could potentially repeat the 97-win season it enjoyed last year, but it won’t be easy. The challenges are obvious: an innings-limited closer, missing middle relief, many game-limited hitters, and all those extreme batting shifts.

This team, as configured, will have to overcome each of these obstacles and maybe even dip into next year’s draft to pick up a pitcher or player or two during the midseason trading period to challenge for a playoff spot or a division crown. It’ll be interesting and fun to watch Mr. Vaughn work some magic this year.

Rebuilding, Columbus style: Mr. Vaughn took over a storied Rochester franchise in 2006. It took some time for him to put his own mark on the team, although he enjoyed a winning season in just his second year. Since then, he’s had a few more losing seasons than winning ones. But the 97 wins from last year is the high-water mark for his team to date.

He’s been slowly collecting a critical mass of talent. He’s not afraid to trade, although it’s interesting to note that his entire pitching staff all arrived through the rookie draft or waiver wire. He’s an astute trader, as anyone can see

by reviewing his roster. Some of his biggest hitting stars came via trade, including Eugenio Suarez, Joey Votto, and Tucker Barnhart.



After bottoming out with 108 losses in 2008, Mr. Vaughn slowly rebuilt over the next five years, culminating in a 90-win campaign. That proved premature, and the team dropped slowly down to 64 wins in 2016. Since then, the team is on the upswing.

Patience seems to be the virtue Mr. Vaughn brings to his rebuilding efforts. In general, each year brings a little change from the year before, with several exceptions. From 2007 to 2008, the team went from 86 wins to 54. And then from 2017 to 2018, the team went from 77 wins to 97.

But patience has its limits. As shown in the box below, only 9 of the 35 players on the roster were born in 1992 or after; and a number of key players are in the 30-and-older demographic. The window for contention is certainly still open but it may not remain so much longer.

Players born in 1992 or after (9):
L. Gurriel, Fulmer, Hoskins, Manaea, K. Marte, Mullins, Nola, O’Hearn, D. Santana, Soler.

Players born in 1987 or before (14):
Brasier, Bruce, D. Hernandez, D. Hudson, Kendrick, Kintzler, Kipnis, Leake, LeBlanc, Loup, McGee, D. Robertson, Shuck, Votto.

columbus JETS

TQ: 26.5



2018 munich MARAUDERS in review



Will the balanced approach be productive in the long haul?

by Paul Montague

2018 in review

Final Record: 80-82 (3rd, Mantle)

For Munich, 2018 was a 'year of the swoon'. As late as September, the Marauders had a record 8 games above .500 and were within shooting distance of a wild card berth. October saw them lose four games against the even mark, followed by a 7-13 November that took them to an 80-82 finish, well into the "also ran" category and 12 games below their 2017 wild card finish.

What went right?

With a middling team performance, we have to look at individual performances to find things that went "right". (Although, be it noted, the record was actually a full 10 wins higher than the Pythagorean method would have predicted, so that's an indicator of some luck going right.)

Jose Altuve finally lived up to his card, after seemingly perennially under-performing the 'expected' results. He led the team in all three triple-slash categories, at .333 (2nd in the NC)/.394 (4th in the NC)/.493, and reached the 200-hit mark, with 84 runs, 83 RBIs, 39 stolen bases, and 20 home runs. Anthony Rizzo led the team with 30 homers and 88 RBIs. Andrelton Simmons started adding some offense to his already-stellar glove work, leading the team with 42 doubles and finishing second to Altuve with 157 hits.

On the mound, Jake deGrom recorded 271 strikeouts (second to Max Scherzer), and two other starters had at least 200. Jake Arrieta and deGrom finished 9th and 10th in-conference in ERA at 3.56 and 3.58 respectively. Newcomer Arodys Vizcaino took over the closer role and rang up 30 saves. Francisco Liriano had five starts with at least 10 strikeouts.

What went wrong?

The offense dropped off a cliff. From a capable if not stellar 2017 team slash line of .251/.327/.417 and 785

runs scored, the Marauders batters fell to a woeful 2018, with a .227/.308/.381 slash and only 642 runs scored. As a team that was 'good' for fourth-worst in TBL.

But the bullpen was the true culprit. Vizcaino and Darren O'Day contributed a combined 117.2 IP of 3.14 and 2.89 ERA respectively, and Hector Rondon was respectable with a 3.97 ERA. But their innings were almost gone by the time fall rolled around, and that left the bullpen mainly in the hands of Trevor Cahill (75.1 IP, 5.02 ERA), Amir Garrett (43.1, 9.35), and Francisco Liriano (64, 6.05) for the final two months. The outcome was predictable.



Altuve: Lived up

3 Things

- 1. Fix the pen.* Team management moved aggressively to correct that issue, acquiring Jesse Chavez in trade as well as spending five draft picks on relievers. There is no 'TBL closer' grade, but the depth and quality should (in theory) assure that another 'swoon' doesn't happen in 2019.
- 2. A contending experiment.* TBL Tradition has it that to contend you need power bats and closers. This year's edition of the Marauders has neither. The offense may lead TBL in on-base chances, while the bullpen has extreme depth and the rotation is hard to argue with. Can this combination produce a play-off spot? Can it win the Mantle Division? If yes, can it go deep into the playoffs? Tune in again next winter to see how this experiment turns out.
- 3. Long term.* Tradition also has it that a team has to either build down in an extreme way to contend in the future, or build up seriously to contend now. Munich again chose to avoid either extreme. The result is a roster that should be able to be in the division race and/or contend for a wild card. Munich has a little extra in the draft as well as a reasonable "now". Will the balanced approach be productive in the long haul? Time will tell on that front as well.

munich MARAUDERS



Paul Montague (36th year); Hall of Famer

After our thorough review of the Marauders, it appears that the team is treading water.

The Munich Marauders date back to the very beginning of the league. The current version of the team has been sliding backward since winning 100-plus games two years in a row in 2015 and 2016, which culminated in a World Series triumph over Whitman. Since then, the team has won 92 and 80 games.

So is 2019 the beginning of a new climb, further decline, or stabilization? At the *Annual*, we scour historical records for trends. We analyze every carded player on the team, as well as how they fit together. We examine pitchers' grades and peripherals. After our thorough review of the Marauders, it appears that the team is treading water. Expect another so-so finish.

Pitching: 8.5 **Alas, the closer is missing.**

This year's pitching staff has one huge weakness: no closer. It does feature one of the best starting pitchers in the set, and the rest of the rotation is generally solid from the top to the bottom. In fact, every starter has at least one positive peripheral. But a capable starting rotation can take a team only so far. It needs adequate support.

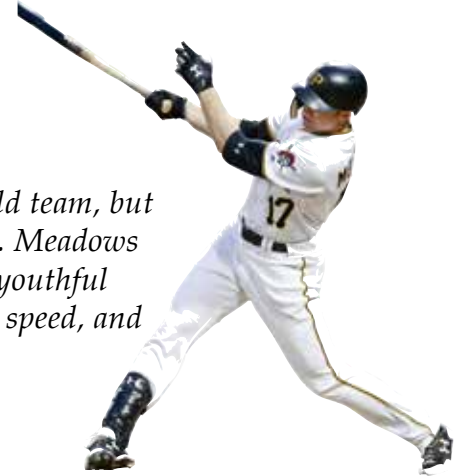


DeGrom: All World

Which brings this analysis to the bullpen. It features several strong set-up guys, although they are woefully short of innings. Then come a plethora of middle relievers. A plethora. You could say that they have too many middle relievers. Some don't really help the starters. If they could add

SNT: Austin Meadows.

Munich isn't an old team, but it is an older team. Meadows provides a shot of youthful talent with power, speed, and batting average.



Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Victor Caratini, Jose G. Castillo, Jesse Chavez, Sam Dyson, Buck Farmer, John Gant, Kyle Hendricks, Dilson Herrera, Austin Meadows, Wily Peralta, Patrick Wisdom, Matt Wisler.

Departed: Norichika Aoki, Jake Arrieta, Zach Duke, Marco Estrada, Francisco Liriano, Brandon Maurer, Darren O'Day, Martin Prado, Drew Robinson, Hector Rondon, Blake Swihart, Edinson Volquez.

two together, they'd have a closer. But alas, the closer is missing.

ROTATION. The rotation is a strength of this team. It starts with All World Jacob deGrom (Grade 18 C+31 HR+43), who will pitch as much as possible in the coming year. He's backed up by rookie John Gant (Grade 13 C-42 HR+31). Together, they make 51 starts. Other teams may go deeper at the top end, but few get as high as deGrom.

The rest of the rotation is solid, too. Trevor Cahill (Grade 12 C-21 HR+34), Zack Greinke (Grade 11 C+33), Kyle Hendricks (Grade 10 C+32), and the lone lefty Andrew Heaney (Grade 9 C+23) pitch all but one game. Waiver wire pickup Matt Wisler (Grade 6 C+35 HR-34) makes that last



MUNICH MARAUDERS

start. This is an enviable rotation with no real weaknesses, except for that one Wisler start.

BULLPEN. At the top, where the closer normally sits, this edition of the Marauders has only a couple short-inning set-up relievers. The righty is Arodys Vizcaino (Grade 16*); the lefty is Jose Castillo (Grade 16* HR+25). Each pitches exactly 38 1/3 innings. They're "assisted" by Sam Dyson (Grade 14* HR+31), Jesse Chavez (Grade 13* C+35), and Wily Peralta (Grade 13* C-62). That's 277 innings.

The middle relievers include Buck Farmer (Grade 10* C-62 HR+32), lefty Amir Garrett (Grade 9*), and Brad Ziegler (Grade 8* C+22). They add another 204 innings. The instructions call for a closer by committee, so everyone may get his shot. Matt Wisler and Tyler Thornburg (Grade 4*

C-23 HR-41) are there to mop up when needed. The innings can't make up for the lack of a closer.

Offense: 6.0
Where's the beef?

The first thing that pops up when looking at this offense is what appears on result number 22. There are many 7s, which is good, but there are no power numbers. None. This team has no player with four power numbers. That's especially egregious in this era of launch angles and exit velocities. It'll hurt their ability to scoring runs in bunches.

Let's start with what power there is. SNT Austin Meadows (1-4-6, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, L+4 R-4) will shine in his abbreviated rookie season. Veteran Anthony Rizzo (1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, L-9) can still bring it. Miguel Cabrera (6-6-0, 10 hits, 5 walks) is limited by injury.

Chad Pinder (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L+2 R-4) and Kyle Schwarber (1-5-5, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-7) help fill in.

The many table-setters are the real strength of this team. Welcome back Adam Eaton (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks+42, L-12, 11 SBA with 34 SSN), who is a prototypical lead-off hitter. Veteran Ben Zobrist (3 0s, 11 hits, 4 walks) and Jose Altuve (3 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks+22, L-4, 24 SBA with 31 SSN) will get on base, too.

Willson Contreras (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+4 R-3) hits well for a catcher, and Jose Bautista (1-0-0, 7 hits, 6 walks+22) has finally morphed into a bearded lady. That leaves bottom-of-the-order hitters Andrelton Simmons (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, 14 SBA with 32 SSN) and Jason Heyward (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks), who are stronger than most teams' eighth and ninth hitters. Still, where's the beef?

Defense: 6.5
Strength up the middle.

It starts with strength up the middle with Simmons (SS10) and Altuve (2B8). Eaton and Heyward (OF3s) share CF. Contreras (C7, Th0) is perfectly average, but Martin Maldonado (C9, Th+6) is a secret weapon for games Munich leads. Rizzo (1B5) scoops up everything in sight, but he'll be put to the test with Pinder (3B3) at the hot corner. In fact, no one on the team is better than a 3B3.



Simmons: Strength



Rizzo: Can bring it

Meadows and Zobrist are OF2, although with decent arms, but Jon Jay and Carlos Gomez (OF3s) may be helpful.

Bench: Good and bad news.

2.5

With many starters limited by games, this bench will likely see a lot of action, which is good and bad news for the Marauders. The hitting toy is Patrick Wisdom (1-1-5, 9 hits, 4 walks+42). Jay (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, L-4) should get plenty of playing time in addition to playing defense.

Besides Maldonado (3 0s, 8 hits, a walk+42), there's rookie Victor Caratini (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L-8). The less said about Gomez and Dilson Herrera, the better.

3rd

With good dice, they could possibly overtake Columbus if that team falters, but it's doubtful the Marauders can catch Hudson.

The solid rotation, including deGrom, can't overcome a lack of power and the missing closer. Mr. Montague added some key pieces that may pay dividends in the future, but for now, meh.

Rebuilding, Munich style: Build for the long haul: that appears to be Mr. Montague's motto. His teams have won back-to-back 100+ games four separate times. From 1996 to 1998, the team won 315 games (but no World Series), including seasons of 115, 102, and 98 wins. But preparing for those winning runs sometimes requires losing big.

This franchise has won 100+ games 11 times, but it's also lost 100+ games nine times, including one stretch from 2001 to 2004. That's 20 seasons in Munich's 35-year history, which is impressive. Also impressive is the fact that he's won between 76 and 86 games, the proverbial middle of the standings, exactly six times. Needless to say, Mr. Montague prefers the extremes.

The longest stretch between 100-win seasons came in 1998 to 2005. 2001 to 2005 was also the

team's longest losing-season streak. The Marauders of course then put together two straight 100-win seasons. While they haven't completed the Bounce, the team won 113 games and the World Series in 2006. The next year, they fell to 64 wins, before rebounding to 109 wins. But that team didn't make it to the Series.

A consummate, but discerning trader, Mr. Montague pounces on opportunities while acquiring key players through the draft. He currently has six #1 draft picks on his team, as well as 16 players acquired by trade. It's an even balance, which is a desirable approach if you're building a team for the long haul and not just run-and-gun for a year.



MUNICH MARAUDERS

Players born in 1992 or after (10): Caratini, J. Castillo, Contreras, Gant, Garrett, D. Herrera, Meadows, Pinder, Schwarber, Wisler.

Players born in 1987 or before (9): Bautista, M. Cabrera, Chavez, C. Gomez, Greinke, Jay, Maldonado, Ziegler, Zobrist.

TQ: 23.5



2018 detroit STARS in review

We see the ball, we swing the bat, we feel the breeze.



by Dave Jaskot

2018 in review

Final Record: 61-101 (4th, Mantle)

Detroit finished the season in a downfall, and strikeouts were a main reason for their failure – not enough from the Stars staff (1,364) and too many from Detroit batters (1,616). “We see the ball, we swing the bat, we feel the breeze” was an explanation heard throughout the clubhouse as their poor excuse for a season. Management was not happy and the team hoped to remain in Detroit for the future but. . .

What went right?

Very little went well in 2018 but in a heavy rebuilding year, just being able to field a team felt like an accomplishment. The Stars finished with a weak 61-101 record. Only two teams finished with a worse record in the TBL. Newly drafted overseas transfer Ariel Miranda headlined the pitching staff with 9 of the teams 61 wins while eating up almost 190 innings. Tanner Roark was second in wins with only 7. However those starters also lost 14 and 12 respectively.

None of the starting staff finished with a record over .500. Reliever Carlos Torres had the best record with 4 wins and only 1 loss in 72 innings of relief. Mike Minor led the team in ERA with a 2.93 over 67 innings of relief. Minor also led the staff with 17 saves followed by Shane Greene with 8. The offense produced just over 700 runs which was quite low based the 226 HR, led by rising star Joey Gallo with 35. However Gallo also struck out 204 times over 585 plate appearances. Nine other batters hit home runs in the double digits. The team finished with a .223/.293/.401 line. The team MVP and batting

average leader was Yoenes Cespedes at .288 and centerfielder Micheal Taylor was next at only a .262 average. Cespedes, who was traded late in the season, lead the team in slugging at .626.

What went wrong?

Although 2018 was a poor season for the Stars, it was foreseen, and nothing really went worse than expected in the Motor City. Age and youth contributed equally to the season of rebuilding.

Statistically Detroit’s poor infield defense led to 127 errors and 86 unearned runs. The team also hit into 72 double plays. The Stars also struck out 1,616 times compared to drawing only 501 base on balls. The Detroit starters combined for a 36–75 won-loss record for the year. The team batting average was a poor .223 and their OB% came in at a low .293.



Cespedes: Team MVP

Some Things

2019 should only be a slightly better year for Detroit, but there are some new players on the way. The draft concentrated on youth and future potential. The new management team has renamed the club as the Dragons with hope of breathing new fire into the franchise. Newly acquired potential sluggers Hunter Dozier, Franml Reyes and Gleyber Torres will join with Gary Sanchez, Joey Gallo, Wil Myers and Ryon Healy to build upon in future seasons. Starting pitchers will be key: holdovers Tanner Roark, Anthony DeSclefani and Mike Minor will be joined by Tyler Skaggs, Eric Lauer in 2019 and injury comeback starters Julio Urias and Dinelson Lamet for 2020. Relievers Greene and Robles look for comeback seasons to bolster the relief staff.

detroit DRAGONS



Dave Jaskot (8th year)

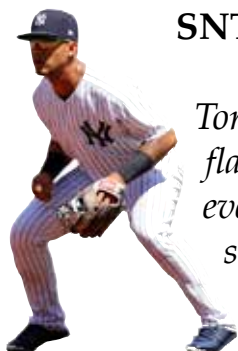
The Dragons are headed in the right direction with lots of youth. In the meantime, it will be a bumpy ride through 2019.

One of the newer managers in TBL, Mr. Jaskot has seen his share of ups and downs even within his seven years in the league. His team won 93 games in 2017, capturing the Mantle Division crown. But then they plummeted like falling Stars to 61 wins last year. It may take some time to get back to the lofty heights of 93 wins again, but the team has already added some promising talent.

SNT Gleyber Torres is the prize catch, a reward for that 61-win campaign, but others came later in the draft. Whether they'll all work out or not is still to be determined, but the newly christened Dragons are heading in the right direction with lots of youth. Only seven players on the roster were born before 1990. In the meantime, it will be a bumpy ride through 2019 with all the team's present deficiencies.

Pitching: **4.5** **A long way to go.**

Yes, this staff is that bad. It's not the worst we've ever seen at the *Annual*. It may not even be the worst in the league this year. But make no mistake, it will not win many games on its own. The pitching staff does have an ace of sorts, and its second and third starters are guys who may improve, but the rotation has a long way to go



SNT: Gleyber Torres.

Torres burst onto the scene, flashing power, speed, and even patience during his rookie season. He'll be a star in the middle of Detroit's infield.



Minor: Coveted

before you could call it a team strength.

The bullpen has a closer, albeit not one with a typical TBL closer grade. He's also a lefty, which may cause some in-season turbulence. The rest of the pen is full of young hopefuls and starting pitching castoffs. Aside

from the closer, the peripherals are mostly negative. You could say these guys throw gas: gasoline, that is. This isn't the kind of fiery effects you want from a team calling themselves the Dragons.

ROTATION. The ace of the staff is a guy other teams covet, although not as an ace: Mike Minor (Grade 10 C+24). He's enjoying a post-injury resurgence, and he'll help the Dragons be respectable for 28 starts. Tyler Skaggs (Grade 8) and Tanner Roark (Grade 7 C+22) add 54 more starts. They can be effective, most likely against lesser lineups. At least they don't shoot up red flares like the rest of this rotation.

Jordan Zimmermann (Grade 6 C+33 HR-32) is a shadow of his former self. Let's just say

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Hunter Dozier, Robbie Erlin, David Hess, Nick Kingham, Eric Lauer, Mike Mayers, Billy McKinney, Bryan Mitchell, Thomas Pannone, Franmil Reyes, Gleyber Torres.

Departed: Gregor Blanco, Matt Davidson, Miguel Gonzalez, Ketel Marte, Ariel Miranda, Andrew Moore, Adam Ottavino, Cliff Pennington, J.C. Ramirez, Lucas Sims, Carlos Torres, Blake Wood.



detroit DRAGONS

he hasn't aged well. Anthony DeSclafani (Grade 5 C+24 HR-35) and Nick Kingham (Grade 5 HR-42) will be battered and fried like dragon meat most nights out. And then there's Bryan Mitchell (Grade 3 C-55) who gets to start 20 times, thanks to the innocuous rule. Other teams will feast on this part of the rotation.

BULLPEN. Yes, they have a closer in Robbie Erlin (Grade 16* C+46). He has 53 innings; the question is: how often will he get to use them? The set-up guys are reliever Hansel Robles (Grade 11* C-31) and starter Thomas Pannone (Grade 11). They pitch with a lead and try to hold it. But together, they add just 99 innings, well short of what's needed here.

The rest of the bullpen provides depth. But beware! It's like a dragon's den or a pit of despair. David Hess (Grade 7 HR-31), Shane Green (Grade 5* C+21 HR-23), Eric Lauer (Grade 5), Mike Mayers (Grade 4* C+22), and Joe Biagini (Grade 1* HR-22) don't exactly inspire confidence. They may offer lots of innings, but they aren't the kind of innings you'll want to watch. Unless you're the opposition.

Offense: 6.5
Lots of outs.

This team has some power. The two biggest cards on the team belong to rookies Franmil Reyes (1-1-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, L+8 R-6) and SNT Gleyber Torres (1-5-5, 10 hits, 3 walks+22). As much power as they have, the team has more powerful bats, including



Myers: Powerful



Gallo: Always entertaining

Wil Myers (1-6-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, 14 SBA with 35 SSN) and Billy McKinney (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-9).

Two other power bats resemble bearded ladies: Daniel Descalso (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks) and the always entertaining Joey Gallo (1-1-5-6, 7 hits, 5 walks, 11 strikeouts). Scott Schebler (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42) had an off-year, but he still delivers some power and on-base ability.

The rest of the power on the team comes with a caveat: few on-base numbers. Hunter Dozier (1-4-6, 9 hits, 2 walks), Ryon Healy (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-3), Gary Sanchez (1-5-5, 7 hits, 4 walks+22, L+6 R-4), and Devon Travis (1-0-0, 9 hits, a walk+22) may get lucky once in a while. But there are lots of outs on these cards.

Excellent table-setter Ben Gamel (3 0s with one second-column 1, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, L-5, 10 SBA with 27 SSN) leads off against righties. Neil Walker (1-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L-10) and Brian McCann (1-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, L-3) both get to play, for better or worse, and speedster Michael Taylor (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-3, 30 SBA with 31 SSN) gets to play ... a lot.

Defense: 3.0
It won't help ... at all.

Highlights? Well, there's Taylor (OF3, with a 34 arm) in centerfield. That's it for highlights. All the other outfielders are OF2s, except for Gallo when he subs for Taylor. (Let that sink in.) Gallo and Healy (1B3s) are average at first, as are Descalso and Travis (2B7) at second.

Walker (2B8, SS7) is potentially available, but spends his time at short, along with Torres (SS6). That won't help ... at all. Dozier and Descalso (3B3) are gaping holes at third. McCann (C7, TH0) and Sanchez (C6, Th+2) platoon with barely enough playing time.

Bench: 2.0
Not very comforting.

Given the game limitations on most batters — only four players have as many as 130 games to play — there isn't much left over for bench usage. Given the cards these players have for the coming season, they may not make much of a difference even if you could use them. Walker and Healy are the only players mentioned in the instructions in bench use. That's not very comforting.

4th

Even Mr. Jaskot acknowledges that this year's version of the Dragons is going to be forgettable, even painful. Some of the cards on the roster represent down years from players from whom much more was expected — Gary Sanchez, Joey Gallo, Brian McCann come to mind.

But even with that knowledge, he still wrote his instructions with a straight face. That means either he still really wants to win or he has no sense of humor. We'll opt for the former, which will drive him forward in the coming rebuilding years.

Rebuilding, Detroit style: the Detroit Stars, as this franchise was called until this year, burst out of the gate by going the wrong direction: 58-104. It wasn't Detroit's last 100-loss season. But Mr. Jaskot quickly righted the ship and reeled off two consecutive 90-plus-win campaigns, showing his mettle and his managing skills.

But the Stars ended their tenure in the Ruth Division with two more down years, includ-

ing a bottoming-out year of 110 losses. So far, the Stars under Mr. Jaskot had tended to rebuild in two-year increments: two years down, followed by two years up. Unfortunately, it wouldn't last.

Over the past three years, from 2016 to 2018, the Stars achieved almost a reverse Bounce. Instead of two winning years sandwiching a really bad losing year, they had two bad losing years surrounding a very good winning year. True, they didn't win the World Series in that good year, but it was an interesting development nonetheless.

The final observation point regarding the Stars/Dragons is that, in the seven years to date, they've not had a middle-of-the-road season. They've won 91 or more games three times. They've lost 98 or more games four times. That seems to be the strategy. And 2019 looks to be no different.



detroit DRAGONS



Sanchez: Comeback

TQ: 16.0



Shadow Boxing

It's time once again for the *Annual* to predict a pennant for the boys from *Northboro*. We've done this before: indeed, we did it last year, and *this year* we're giving the *Phoenix* the same review. The club is good enough; it hasn't added quite enough pitching, though there should be sufficient to get through the Williams Division.

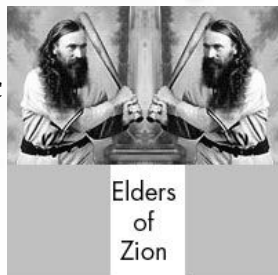


Last year, we thought that *Robert Jordan* and *Steve Stein* had the secret sauce to get through the regular

season, and maybe even get a ways into the playoffs. The conference, and the division, isn't quite as dangerous as it was in 2018 – so we're a little more confident here at the *Annual*.

The *Annual* never underestimates the Sensei. *Rich Meyer* does not conceal his methods, his insights or his intentions: read his article in this issue, which explains the unbuilding process.

This version of the *Elders of Zion* has its problems. The starting rotation is okay down to the waist, and then it's not so great. The bullpen is deep, but lacks a lot of strong grades. The offense, like the pitching, is halfway solid; but there will have to be a lot of fast dancing to fill out the lineup. This is not an overpowering Zion team (and some more of its iconic members heading into the sunset only emphasizes that.) But – never count out one of TBL's best managers.



2018 Williams Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Zion*	87	75	.537	—
Northboro	86	76	.531	1
Grand Cayman	77	85	.475	10
Warrenton	44	118	.272	43

* Lost to Strong City in the NC playoffs.



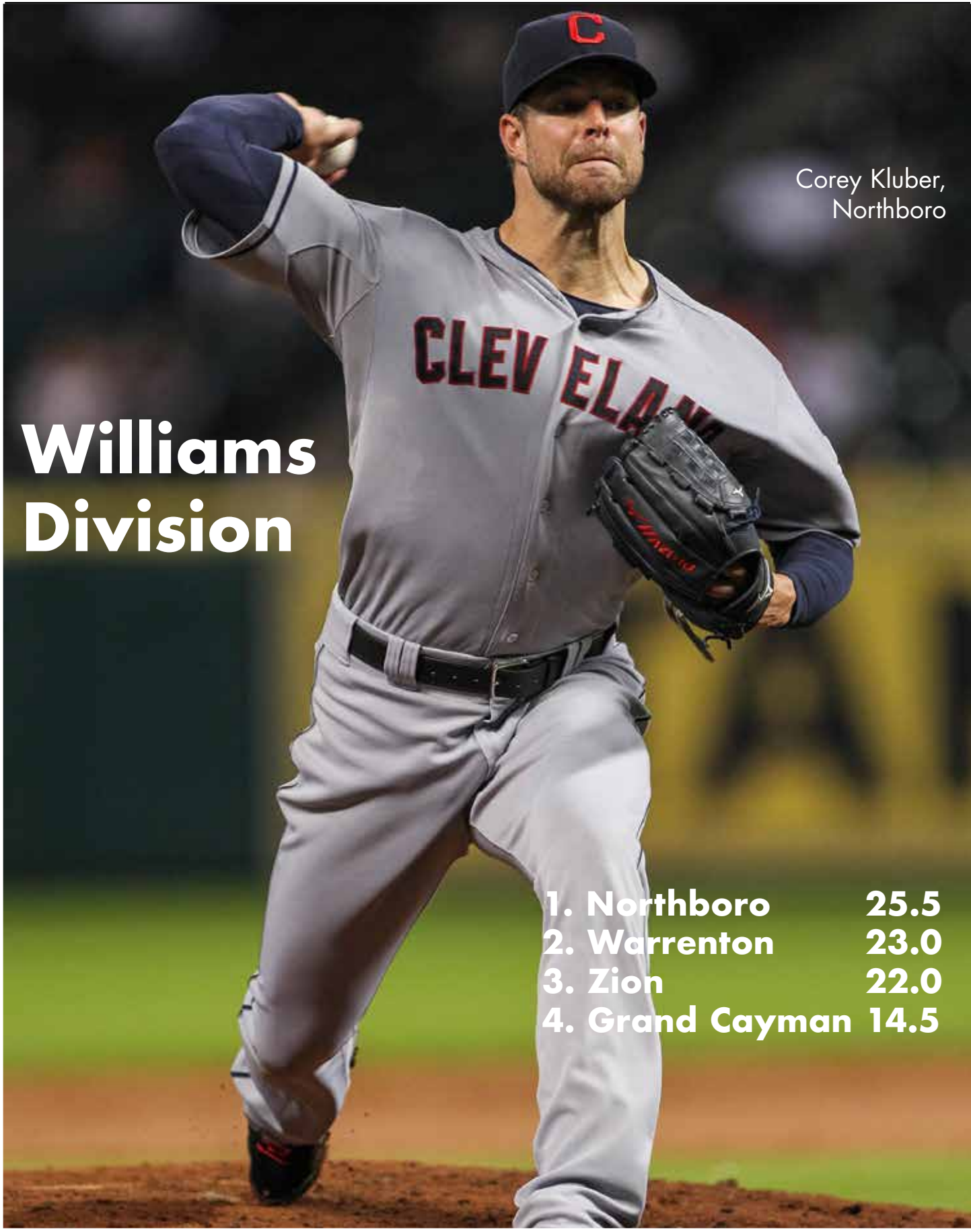
Jack Chapman has certainly earned his sobriquet; Trader Jack went out and added Mike Trout to the roster, at the price of many draft picks that have settled into the pocket of the Prince of Darkness. Only Daniel

Dumont turns over his roster more thoroughly, and that's not necessarily a recommendation. The question is whether all this thrashing has made the *Warrenton Giants* better. In particular, it's unclear if they're good enough to win the Williams, or even finish second: but we bet against the DH-less boys a couple of years ago, and they proved the *Annual* wrong.

As noted, 2017 was a long time ago down in *Grand Cayman*. The *Havens* struggled to an 85 loss season last year after going to Game 7 of the World Series the year before; and this season is going to be a long, painful slog.



Mark Bloom has been through rebuilds before; when he first came into the league with another franchise in another era, he started with nothing and built it into a solid team. This club is better than that, but the competition is even more fierce than it was back then.



Corey Kluber,
Northboro

Williams Division

- | | |
|-----------------|------|
| 1. Northboro | 25.5 |
| 2. Warrenton | 23.0 |
| 3. Zion | 22.0 |
| 4. Grand Cayman | 14.5 |

2018 northboro PHOENIX in review



by Steve Stein

Hope, hope, and more hope.

2018 in review

Final Record: 86-76 (2nd, Williams)

The plan started in 2013, after the last rebuild fell far short. We unloaded lots of value, and got young talent (Richards, Zunino, Addison Reed, Calhoun, Profar) in return. We suffered through more than 200 losses in 2 seasons waiting for the talent to mature. After peaking at 93 wins in 2017, 86 last year was a step back. Moreover, we expect to be in a holding pattern this year.

Last April was one of Northboro's hottest months ever at 15-5, jumping out to a 5-game lead on Zion. We slowly fell to earth, and Zion caught us by the All-Star break. Northboro won only 2 of the last 7 games between them, and dropped the division by a game.

What went right?

Almost everything but the hot early dice went wrong. Bright spots were few: Zunino's 38 HR, Alvarado's stunning 1.27 ERA and 35 saves as closer. Corey Kluber was 21-7. Mike Montgomery was stellar at 13-2 in a limited starting role.

What went wrong?

End of good news. Marwin Gonzalez was a major disappointment - his 11-hit 3-walk 1-5-5-6 card managed a pedestrian .260 / .302 / .435 slash line. Jesus Aguilar's 1-5-5-6 only slugged .422. Even though we had decent power, our .307 OBP was the lowest since our 115-loss season - there were simply not enough men on base. On the pitching front, Odorizzi (5-12, 6.20 ERA),

Chatwood (7-12, 5.03), and Pomeranz (11-16, 4.41 from a Grade 13) were walking disasters.

2018 also saw the final seasons of J. J. Hardy and Seth Smith - the only 2 players remaining from the 2012 team. Hardy was our second selection of the 2006 draft with the 26th pick. He provided decent power and stellar defensive ratings through 1475 games over 13 seasons. Smith joined the Phoenix as the 67th pick in 2009. Not a standout, but a steady presence, who played 1178 games over 10 seasons. We've spent over a decade writing these guy's names in our lineups - we'll miss that.



Zunino: Bright spot

3 Things

1. *Hope, hope, and more hope.* We've spent many years searching for the replacements for Kinsler, Hardy and Rolen. Up until last year, we've used part-timers, waiting for breakthroughs (and for Profar). The situation is settling out as Swanson and Profar mature.

2. *Need that power.* We need good performances out of our power guys (Zunino, Aguilar, Pederson) and a healthy Brandon Belt to be effective. The addition of Laureano brings a spark of excitement to the lineup, but other than that, we spent the draft on pitching.

3. *Pitching. Healthy pitching.* We're carrying 20 pitchers this year - I hope some of them can manage healthy, quality seasons. Early returns aren't hopeful - Richards and Knebel are already gone, others are injured to start the 2019 MLB season.

northboro PHOENIX



Bob Jordan (20th year) / Steve Stein (17th year)

If this feels like a repeat of last year's analysis, it's because it largely is.

The *Annual* thought they'd win last year, with the usual caveat stating that we had been wrong before. The ingredients were there (and they're all present this year too: not as much bullpen, a somewhat more effective offense) and the division wasn't very challenging (and it's not very challenging in 2019).

If this feels like a repeat of last year's analysis, it's because it largely *is*: Northboro has a good team in a division that is mediocre at best. What does it take for them to get to the finish line? We're not sure. They draft intelligently and trade conservatively, they manage skillfully and have a good knowledge of the game, both MLB and APBA. Two years ago they won 93 games and lost in the playoffs; last year they won 86 and were just nosed out by Zion.

We pick them to win the division. But as we are fond of saying, *we've been wrong before*.

Pitching: 7.5 **Backing and filling.**

There is nothing wrong with having an ace like Corey Kluber to lead off; and having a young closer is certainly helpful as well. There are some nice new pieces on the staff, but overall there's less than last year. Most of the team's new acquisitions are pitchers – almost all of them, in fact – but the backing and filling was intended to build enough to get the team to the post-season.

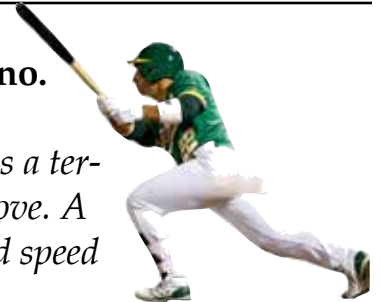
ROTATION. Corey Kluber has what you want as an ace (Grade 13 C+36 HR+12, 33 starts). He will pitch deep into games. His support staff is not



Alvarado: Closer

SNT: Ramon Laureano.

The rookie outfielder has a terrific arm and superb glove. A full season of power and speed to go with it awaits.



as solid as Northboro management would like: Tyson Ross (Grade 10 C-22, 23 starts) was added at the last minute to go with half a decent season of Garrett Richards (Grade 13 C-34, 16 starts) and a full pedestrian season of Jake Odorizzi (Grade 9 C-24 HR+14). New acquisition Nick Tropeano (Grade 10 C-23 HR-33) fills in 14 times leaving the rest of the starts to Ian Kennedy (Grade 7 C+13 HR-15), Mike Montgomery (Grade 7 C+16 HR+26) and a handful of "opener" learning experiences from Gabriel Moya (Grade 7 HR-15).

BULLPEN. There is a lot of relief available, and it's led by 24-year-old hard thrower Jose Alvarado (Grade 18* C-25 HR+62, 64 innings). He throws hard but is lefthanded, which can sometimes be a problem in TBL. His best wingmen are Corey Knebel (Grade 15* C-26) and newly arrived journeyman Joe Smith (Grade

Turnover Rate: 31%

Arrived: Adam Cimber, Jace Fry, Koda Glover, Javy Guerra, Ramon Laureano, Nick Martini, Gabriel Moya, Noe Ramirez, Tyson Ross, Joe Smith, Nick Tropeano.

Departed: Lane Adams, Chris Carter, Danny Espinosa, Ryan Hanigan, J.J. Hardy, Tommy La Stella, Wandy Peralta, Drew Pomeranz, Erasmo J. Ramirez, Seth Smith, Cory Spangenberg.

13* C+16 HR-15). There are a few innings of Koda Glover (Grade 14* C-61 HR+36), who might be a future closer. Their 117 innings goes with about 250 innings of rookie Jace Fry (Grade 12* lefty C-23 HR+33), Chris Devenski (Grade 10* righty C+22 HR-25), Noe Ramirez (Grade 10* righty HR-23) and peripherals guy Adam Cimber (Grade 8* C+45 HR+32). There are a pile of bulk relievers to finish up.

The staff will require careful management to succeed, but there are enough parts to make it possible to get through nine innings.

Offense: 8.5
Some power.

Somewhere Northboro found some power to put into the lineup. The most dangerous card belongs to He of the Three True Outcomes: Joc Peterson (1-1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-15). He was last year's New Normal poster boy, and this year he turned in this card, which will be helpful at certain times. The breakout performer who will be helpful at just about all times is Jesus Aguilar (1-1-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks). Rookie Ramon Laureano turned in a nice card for a third of a season (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, E34); and Teoscar Hernandez (1-4-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks) can drive the ball too, as can – at last – Jurickson Profar (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, F35) and Aledmys Diaz (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+22).

Things get a little thin after that. Mike Zunino can hit it out but there's not much if he doesn't get good wood (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks+22, 11 13s); Chris Iannetta has



Peterson: Three true outcomes



Aguilar: Breakout

less power but can get on base (3 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks+42). Marwin Gonzalez can play everywhere but had a somewhat down year (1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks); Dansby Swanson will get some shortstop reps but will be better on defense (1-4-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, E28); and Brandon Belt (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, L-7 R+2) and Derek Dietrich (1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+42) will be helpful at times.

This is a good power offense, with the possibility of four or more power numbers at six spots in the batting order; but there may be some swing or miss innings.

Defense: 6.5
Seven-eighths very solid.

In the field, the Phoenix mostly excel. First base is either Brandon Belt (1B5), Jesus Aguilar (1B4) or Marwin Gonzalez (1B4), though he'll more likely get into the lineup as a 2B8. Dansby Swanson turned in an SS9; behind the plate, Mike Zunino is a C9 Th+1, while Chris Iannetta is a C8 (though with an inferior Th-4). Aledmys Diaz is an SS8 when he plays.

Note that we said nothing about third base. Unless the SS9 is moved to third, there'll be nothing but 3B3s over there this year – but there are lots of choices: Dietrich, Profar, Aguilar, Diaz, and Gonzalez. Dietrich and Profar are 2B7s, so they're not totally useless in the field; but during the regular draft and the waivers Northboro decided to go commando at the position.

In the outfield there's better news. There are three OF3s: Calhoun and Gardner have 31 arms, while rookie Laureano has a cannon (37 arm). Hernandez, Pederson, Martini and Marwin Gonzalez all have decent to good arms.

The *Annual* is a little surprised at the neglect of one position, especially when the rest of the on-field defense is so good. This usually leads to having the ball bounce almost magnetically toward the weakest spot – but we assign fewer points to defense than to offense, because That’s Not What Wins Ballgames.

We will wait and see if seven-eighths of a solid defense is indeed a solid defense.

**Bench:
Versatile.**

3.0

Other than the third base defense problem, this is a very versatile bench that does a lot of things: it has a variety of shifts, there are hits and walks and power, and there are plenty of games and at-bats to go around. Profar, Calhoun and Laureano are all good runners, though there are not a lot of steals (but that’s not really a Northboro problem; only a handful of teams in TBL, just as in the major leagues, have any sort of running game.)

What the club could really use is either a good defensive replacement for 3B or to catch along with Zunino, or an 11-hit guy for late inning use. There’s no lack of power on the team, but the on base percentage is not outstanding, and sometimes only a single is needed to create or extend a big inning.

1st We think they’ll win the division. The pitching is there, especially when compared to the other teams in the Williams; there’s no Trout here, but there is a great deal of power, and a decent amount of hits and walks. The defense will help to keep the team in games and will prevent accidental big innings by visiting opponents. That’s worth at least a few wins over a long season.



Laureano: Cannon arm

Traditionally, the Northboro boys have not been very sanguine about being picked to win a division (or anything beyond that). This might be a matter of psychology, or reverse psychology, or reverse-reverse

psychology, or some double secret thing about which we have no real idea. But the fact is that there’s a good deal of talent on this edition of the club and it should take the team a long way, perhaps even beyond the Williams Division pennant.

The team is at an interesting cross-roads. There are ten players entering or already in their year-27 season, and only eight that are 32 or more; the other half of the team is in between. They’re in their prime, and could get a couple of years of success out of this crew. We’ll be watching.

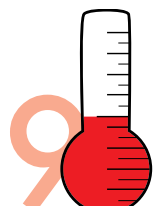
Players born 1992 and after (10): Alvarado, Fry, Glover, Hernandez, Laureano, Moya, Pederson, Profar, C. Reed, Swanson.

Players born 1987 and before (8): Calhoun, Gardner, Guerra, Iannetta, Kennedy, Kluber, T. Ross, J. Smith.

TQ: 25.5



northboro PHOENIX



2018 warrenton GIANTS in review



The fishing captain's grand plan worked.

by Craig Musselman

2018 in review

Final Record: 44-118 (4th, Williams)

In 2018, it seemed as if the Warrenton Giants went trout fishing. Their 44-118 record was tied for the fifth worst season in the history of TBL. That is hard to do: it takes effort and planning. And the planning in this case was unique. Most teams that are this bad can't hit and can't pitch; but that was not the case with Warrenton. Of the 24 teams in the TBL, Warrenton scored the fourth most runs – 827. And all of that offense was without a designated hitter! In the 34 year history of the Warrenton franchise, they have scored more runs than this only three times. This was a fine offense by any measure.

So how could this team possibly have been this bad? Simple – the pitching was truly atrocious. The team ERA of 6.59 was nearly a run worse than the next worst pitching staff in the league. That wasn't the worst in TBL history, but you do have to go back about 15 years to find anything worse. That is what took planning and effort. Assembling a pitching staff this bad took some doing.

Warrenton thus acquired the top 2019 draft pick which, with some other substantial assets, was sufficient to catch a real Trout. There was no Acuna/Soto decision for Captain Jack. He was seeking bigger fish. From that perspective, the fishing captain's grand plan worked.

What went right?

Here's the worst team in the TBL, with Buster Posey as the National Conference (and TBL)



Posey: Fireworks

batting champion. He led the conference in OBP as well. And he's a catcher to boot. Eric Thames hit 35 home runs and had 102 RBI. With a half decent pitching staff, this team would have been fully competitive. And it was fun to manage. Fireworks galore.

What went wrong?

The pitching staff went very wrong. Clayton Richard, in 32 starts, went 4-18 with a 6.37 ERA. He even had 11 complete games in which he did *not* get pounded out. He led the league in runs allowed and home runs, yielding 40. You have to give the guy credit. He hung in there.

3 Things

1. *Trout*. He is unarguably the best hitter and most valuable player in major league baseball and has been consistently so for a good number of years. Warrenton had to pay Vlad's ransom, but this elite level of talent doesn't grow on trees.
2. *Compete Quickly*. Many TBL franchises that break down, or break themselves down, rebuild slowly over a couple of years, with high, young draft picks returning the team to contention. The 2019 roster is intended to compete immediately. An offense built around Posey and Trout will score runs. Last year's pitching staff is gone – replaced by veterans such as Lester, Happ, Quintana, and Ryu.
3. *Short Boom-Bust Cycles*. This appears to be the plan. Crash, re-load and contend quickly. Captain Jack is doing what he wants, with aplomb.

warrenton GIANTS



Jack Chapman (11th year)

The opportunity to acquire the BPIB is worth considering whether or not the team is in a playoff hunt.

Another campaign begins in Warrenton, home of National League rules and roster turnover. Jack Chapman has earned the nickname “Trader Jack” – though he’s got some serious competition from Daniel Dumont. Where Trader Jack and Trader Dan part company is the affection held by this team’s management for Bay Area players, particularly Giants. *(Full disclosure: during Jack’s first run through TBL 25 years ago, the Annual’s editor was offered an obscene amount of stuff in exchange for Matt Williams. The offer was declined.)*

Still, whatever the number of trades executed in Riverwoolf, and whatever the size of roster turnover up north of the border – even greater than the 74% figure achieved by Warrenton in this off-season – there has been no bigger deal in recent years than the one that sent two #1s and two #2s to Brobdingnag in exchange for the Best Player in Baseball, Mike Trout. One big splash outweighs a lot of pebbles skipped across the surface. The question remains whether the addition of this excellent card is enough to make Warrenton a true contender: but it’s clear that the opportunity to acquire the BPIB is worth considering whether or not the team is in a playoff hunt. Still, if that’s what Trader

Jack is trying to do – get to the post-season and go deep – it’s unclear whether the price paid for said BPIB is enough to keep the team from being good enough in other areas.

But rolling for Mike Trout is going to be fun. No doubt about it. And assuming there isn’t another trade that sends him away in a year or two, he should be fun to roll for some time to come.

In the meanwhile, this team is at the edge of contention. There might be enough, even with no DH (and thus eight hitters instead of nine). That made no difference when the Giants went all the way a few years ago, so it does not enter into our calculations this time either.

Just as in MLB, there is a team surrounding the Best Player in Baseball – but in order to acquire and retain him, there are things *not* here that one would want to *have* here. That might be felt even more acutely next year, when Brobdingnag uses the 2020 #1 and #2 instead of Warrenton.

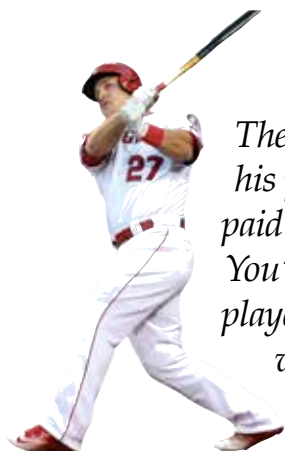
Turnover Rate: 74%

Arrived: Matt Adams, Francisco Arcia, Tony Barnette, Cam Bedrosian, Shane Carle, Louis Coleman, Brandon Crawford, Matt Davidson, Adam Engel, Jeurys Familia, Avisail Garcia, Adrian Gonzalez, Erik Gonzalez, J.A. Happ, Gorkys Hernandez, Erik Kratz, Jon Lester, Francisco Liriano, Dixon Machado, Jeff Mathis, Justin Miller, Jose Quintana, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Mike Trout, Zack Wheeler, Mason Williams.

Departed: Erick Aybar, Austin Brice, Jaycob Brugman, Aaron Bummer, Matt Cain, Jharel Cotton, Luke Jackson, Ubaldo Jimenez, Ryder Jones, Luke Maile, Max Moroff, Josh Osich, Oliver Perez, Boog Powell, Clayton Richard, Joey Rickard, J. T. Riddle, Tyler Saladino, Warwick Saupold, Drew Storen, Eric Thames, Luis Torrens, Giovanny Urshela, Vince Velasquez, Randall Wojciechowski.

SNT: Mike Trout.

The best player in baseball is in his prime, and the Giants have paid a great deal to acquire him. You’d think he’d be a franchise player for quite a while. But with Trader Jack you never know. . .





Pitching: 8.0
Lefty starters, short pen.

The previous year's staff needed turning over, and it's been completely reworked. There's a rotation that leans heavily to the left, and a bullpen that has many innings (which they'll need in the absence of a DH).



Happ: Leads the lefties

ROTATION. The half season of Hyun-Jin Ryu (Grade 15 lefty C+35, 15 starts) has arrived by trade; he is the best rated of four lefthanders in the rotation: there are also J. A. Happ (Grade 12 C+15 HR-14), Jon Lester (Grade 10) and Francisco Liriano (Grade 10 C-55). Along with Ryu, that's 104 lefty starts. It's also the most elderly part of the rotation: Ryu is 32, Lester and Liriano 35, and

Happ 36 – if the team is going to win with this rotation, they'd best do it soon. By comparison, the righties are younger; Zack Wheeler (Grade 12 HR+26) is 29, and Jose Quintana (Grade 9 C-15 HR+14) is 30. Needless to say, all six starters were acquired by trade. It's a very solid rotation, better away from the boards where L+ shifts won't come into play.

BULLPEN. The relievers are numerous, but there's an obvious flaw. Tony Barnette (Grade 16* C+32 HR+32) is solid, but has only 26 innings. It means that the late innings will largely be in the hands of three righty Grade 13*s: Jeurys Familia (C-16 HR+46), Shane Carle (HR+52), and Louis Coleman (C-33 HR+24), who have 186 innings between them. These are guys you'd like to use in innings 5-7.

Instead, the guys in the middle are far less imposing. Heath Hembree (Grade 11* C-31

HR-15), Cam Bedrosian (Grade 10* C-24 HR+21), and Justin Miller (Grade 12* HR-33) provide 176 unreliable innings. Backstopping them are Ty Blach (Grade 9* HR+34) and lefty Dan Jennings (Grade 9* C-11 HR+22) for 118 innings more.

The rotation is solid, but they'll have to go deep, as the bullpen is not going to help often or well enough.

Offense: 8.0
Mike Trout and his friends.

We've talked enough about him: time to talk about the card. It's great. Mike Trout (1-1-5-6, 10 hits, 6 walks+42, 26 SBA with 35 SSN, L-4) is an offense all on his own, and will light up any inning in which he bats.

He has a few friends, though the two best cards have lefty trouble. David Peralta (1-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks, L-10 R+3) and Matt Adams (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-8) will be better when a righty is on the mound. Buster Posey (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, L+3 R-3) turned in a capable card; to a slightly lesser extent, so did Evan Longoria (1-4-6, 10 hits) and Denard Span (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+3 R-2).

After that it's somewhat hit or miss. Middle infielders Brandon Crawford (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+22) and Joe Panik (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+22) are not automatic outs, and Gorkys Hernandez (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+22), Avisail Garcia (1-5-5, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+4 R-3) have a little power. Erik Gonzalez (0-6-6, 10 hits, L-6 R+2) has a good half season, and Pablo Sandoval (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-14 R+3) will have use in spots.



Adams: Lefty power

Any lineup with Trout in it will hit some. Still, in order to get mileage out of the offense, it'll have to be managed carefully. It's likely that they'll do better at home, where usage can be properly monitored.

Defense: **4.5**
Sometimes very strong.

The San Francisco Giants can field; as a result, the Warrenton Giants can field. There's a top glove all the time at shortstop (Brandon Crawford is an SS9), and more than half the time at second base (Joe Panik and waiver pickup Dixon Machado are 2B8s). Buster Posey continues to be capable behind the plate (C8 Th-1), with Jeff Mathis (C9 Th+3) and rookie Francisco Arcia (C6 Th+2) backing him up. Erik Gonzalez and Evan Longoria are both Fielding Two at third base (3B4), though the Kung Fu Panda is a 3B3; across the diamond, Matt Adams and Matt Davidson are both 1B3s.

In the outfield, Trout (OF3, 33 arm) is the best defender; David Peralta and Gorkys Hernandez (OF2s, 32 arm). Denard Span is a tick behind (OF2, 31 arm). Avisail Garcia is only an OF1; but Adam Engel (OF3, 30 arm) is available to substitute.

This is a defense that is sometimes very strong, but without a DH there's no way to keep bad gloves off the field.

Bench: **2.5**
Various pieces.

There are various pieces available to the Giants on the bench. Francisco Arcia has a strange card (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 0 walks); Jeff Mathis is a defensive replacement only (2 0s, 8 hits); Erik Kratz (1-6, 9 hits, 1 walk+42) is another catcher.

Adrian Gonzalez (1B5, 1-6, 9 hits, 3 walks) is here for some reason; there's a lot of Matt Davidson (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+6 R-4) who might be useful against opposing lefties, though Matt Adams, even with his lefty shift, might be more palatable. Adam Engel (9 hits, 1 walk+42, 26 SSN for 24 SBA, OF3) can pinch-run and carry someone's glove, which is about what Dixon Machado (3 0s, 8 hits, 2B8) is good for. Mason Williams (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks, L-8 R+1), the top waiver pick, is actually a useful addition to the bench.



Crawford: Top glove

Taken together, this collection will help offset some of the deficiencies in the starting lineup.

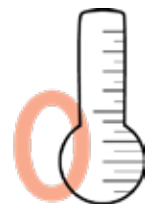
2nd

The capable starting rotation, the decent defense and Mike Trout makes this team a going concern in a relatively weak division. Zion might be better overall, and the Sensei will get as much out of his boys as anyone in TBL. As it's unclear whether this is a holding action or a serious play for contention, the Giants could easily drop to third instead of second. We're not convinced that this is a Warrenton rope-a-dope: the team is getting older, the cupboard is relatively bare, and Mike Trout would make any team want to take its shot. The question is whether 83-85 wins – just about as far as we (and Mr. Beard's preplay) think they can go – will be good enough for a post-season appearance.

TQ: 23.0



WARRENTON GIANTS



2018 ELDERS of zion in review

We picked the right division to be in.

by Rich Meyer



2018 in review

Final Record: 87-75 (1st, Williams)

[Mr. Meyer has attacked the review of last year by bringing us three things for right and wrong. It's not quite our format, but it's informative. –Ed.]

What went right?

Three things that went right:

1. Some of the middling members of the starting rotation performed well all year long. Alex Cobb led the rotation with five CG and a 16-8, 3.36 mark. Trevor Bauer stayed right on his heels at 16-9, 3.77 with 205 Ks. Kenley Jansen took care of the 8th and 9th inning leads, going 4-1, 1.20 with 34 saves with an 81/15 K-BB ratio.



Blackmon: Led in every category

2. Charlie Blackmon led the offense in also every major category -- .312 BA, 112 runs scored, 41 2B, 30 HRs, 95 RBIs. He got part time help from Beltre (73 RBIs in only 94 games despite only 12 dingers; HR support from Scooter Gennett (29 HR, but 138 Ks and only 26 walks); and good but not great years from Cory Seager, rookie Trey Mancini, and walking man Andrew Benintendi.

3. We picked the right division to be in, as 87 wins was *just enough* to get a division title done. The Elders reversed the tight finish of a year ago, edging the Phoenix by a game in 2018 after falling one short of the Williams crown in 2017. Our playoff stay was brief (facing the eventual world's champs will do that to you), but we took 'em to six games before bowing out.

What went wrong?

Three things that went wrong:

1. The right side of the infield – Mancini and Gennett -- were a sieve, making 35 errors between them. Ronald Torreyes helped at second when he could play, but in general a whole lot of e-rolls went awry.

2. The rotation gaveth but also tooketh away. Jimmy Nelson was a hot mess (6-16, 5.31) with Dylan Bundy (8-14, 4.30) not much better.

3. The Elders were just as dull on the basepaths as they figured to me, stealing a whopping 32 bases in 2018. They might break 50 this year, thanks to the addition of Greg Allen to the OF bench mix.

4. Bonus negative note – Ancient and ageless 3B Adrian Beltre elected to hang up his cleats at the end of the major league season. He could have been dealt, but instead will spend a nice low intensity farewell tour year without too much on-field pressure, for the only team he's ever played for. We'll be welcoming him to the TBL Hall not too many years from now.

Curiosity of the stat year – set up man and discount doctor visit coupon saver Brandon Morrow appears from the statistical record to have logged 8 IP under his porno name Brandon Morrrow (don't say it, just purr it).

ELDERS of zion

Rich Meyer (35th year); Hall of Famer

The Zion brain trust has moved slowly and deliberately.



In the analysis of last year given at left, the Sensei made a cogent observation regarding the decision to be in the Williams Division, and how by being there the team had a better chance to be competitive. 87 wins is substantially more than the lowest number for a division winner, but it's still not a particularly large one; indeed, it was only one more win than needed, as the team edged out Northboro and was, consequently, the only club from the Williams to reach the post season. But what was true last year continues to be true this year – there are no dominant teams in 2019 either. True, Warrenton is better, a task accomplished by swapping out three-quarters of the 2018 roster for a new bunch of Guys; and true, Northboro – like Zion – is largely the same names as were present a year ago.

Does that make it possible for Zion to slip through the competition and win the Williams again? Here at the *Annual* we don't think so. But as always, we are not sure; unless the club is in definitive rebuild, we underestimate Zion and its manager at our peril. As the old (like Beltre) fade away, the new (like Benintendi) rise to replace them. The Seager injury, and the underperformance of portions of the staff, make it unlikely. But still.

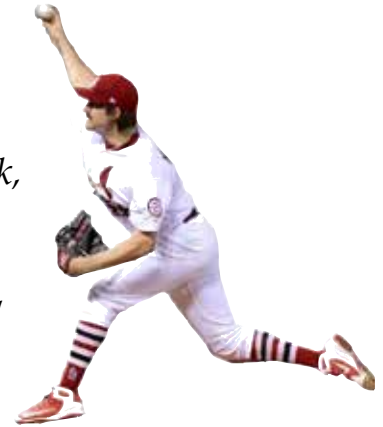
We think they won't overcome the patched-together Warrenton club, or the well-balanced Northboro one. But we're as always hesitant to rule them out of anything. Reputation matters, as usual.

Pitching: 7.0
Half good, half non-dairy creamer.

The Zion instructions acknowledge the strengths and obvious weaknesses of the pitching staff. The sudden transformation of 90 starts' worth of

SNT:
Miles Mikolas.

A solid contender pick, Mikolas burst back into the majors last year and will be a key part of the Zion staff for at least a few years to come.



Turnover Rate: 26%

Arrived: Greg Allen, Steven Duggar, Dylan Floro, Brian Johnson, Adam Kolarek, Miles Mikolas, Yairo Munoz, John Ryan Murphy, Josh Phegley.

Departed: Alec Asher, Paul Blackburn, Randall Delgado, Yunel Escobar, Bruce Maxwell, Alex Presley, T. J. Rivera, A.J. Schugel, Yasmany Tomas.

the rotation into Grade 4s, and the propensity of the dominant closer to give up home runs, gives one pause. But there are some good parts too.

ROTATION. The Zion starters are led by the dominant Trevor Bauer (Grade 16 HR+44), who had a breakthrough season. (Maybe he stole all the talent from a couple of his colleagues). His fine season has good companions in Miles Mikolas (Grade 10 C+44 HR+25) and Steven Matz (Grade 11 lefty C-14 HR-22), giving the Elders 89 very decent starts at the top of the rotation.



Bauer: Breakthrough

If the season was only 89 games long, that would



ELDERS of zion

be great; unfortunately, there are 73 more, and they'll be covered by less stellar performers. Lefty Brian Johnson (Grade 8 C-15 HR-14) can go 13 times, and Michael Lorenzen (Grade 11 C-22 HR+32, and 1-1-5-5, 10 hits, good when not using the DH) can start 3, leaving the rest to Grade 4s: Jon Gray (C+15 HR-16) and Alex Cobb (C+24 HR-14). Those roughly 60 afternoons will be long ones, either with the pitcher being stapled to the mound, or be quickly removed in favor of a low-grade caddy to eat up innings with better peripherals. It's a very hit-or-miss starting staff, but the hits are at least pretty good.

BULLPEN. For years we've talked about the sure-thing closer Kenley Jansen; this year he turned in a very hard to use card (Grade 14* C+25 HR-32). You can't close with that. Instead, the final three outs belong to Brandon Morrow (Grade 19* C+13 HR+34, but only 31 innings).

The middlemen will have to work very hard. Lefty Tony Watson (Grade 13* C+35 HR+35) and righty Dylan Floro (Grade 13* C+21 HR+44) provide reliable 130 innings along with Jansen's 72 somewhat flammable ones, and righties Kelvin Herrera (Grade 12* C+25) and Michael Lorenzen (Grade 11* C-22 HR+32) and lefty Jorge de la Rosa (Grade 11* C-24 HR+15) have another 180. The 39 innings of Brian Johnson as a Grade 9* and caddies Adam Kolarek (Grade 5* C+45 HR+62) and Dominic Leone (Grade 4* C+32) fill out the roster. This crew's level of success will determine much of the team's overall outcome.

Offense: 8.5
Five (and a half) good spots.

For years, the offense was built around Adrian Beltre, a future TBL Hall of Famer. He turned in a pretty good card for his swan song (1-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22), but once again the best card on

the table belongs to Charlie Blackmon (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 16 SBA). Andrew Benintendi (4 Os, 10 hits, 4 walks, 34 SSN for 23 SBA, L-8 R+1) had a pretty solid year as well, as did Scooter Gennett, with slightly less power (1-5-6, 12 hits, 2 walks+22), and Mitch Haniger (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks) provides a great every day card with no platoon shift. That's five solid lineup spots, plus Beltre two-thirds of the time.



Blackmon: Again

The rest of the guys are much more pedestrian. Jeimer Candelario, the heir apparent at third base, still needs some work (1-6-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+22); Nick Hundley (1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+4 R-5) and Josh Phegley (4 Os, 8 hits, 2 walks+22) will flail about behind the plate, while Yairo Munoz (3 Os, 10 hits, 3 walks+22) and Ehire Adrianza (3 Os, 9 hits, 2 walks) share at bats at shortstop. Trey Mancini (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks) is the regular first baseman. When Zion employs the DH, the majority of the time it'll be Shin-Soo Choo (1-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks+22, L-9 R+2), who can at least get on base fairly well.

It's an interesting lineup, though it will have to rely on some subpar parts, without a whole lot of relief. It seems somewhat patched together after the five and a half good spots.

Defense: 3.0
Not a priority.

The outfield defense is strong. Andrew Benintendi scored an OF3 with a 33 arm, and Mitch Haniger is also an OF3 (30 arm). Charlie Blackmon plays every day as an OF2 with a 29 arm, and there are some OF2s (Allen, Duggar) on the bench with decent arms.

The infield is more problematic. Mancini is an everyday 1B3, Gennett is an everyday 2B7; at

third, Beltre gets one last 3B5, and Candelario is a 3B4 when he plays, but the regular shortstops – Munoz and Adrianza – are both SS7s. When available, Ronald Torreyes is a 2B8 and SS8, but he can't fill in at both positions at once. Behind the plate, Hundley (Th-3) and Phegley (Th+2) are both C7s, with defense-only Roberto Perez available as a C8 (Th-0) for late inning defense.

Defense is not a particular priority over in Zion.

Bench: 2.5
Some pieces.

In addition to the shared positions in the starting lineup, there are some useful bits on the bench. Greg Allen (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L-9, 32 SSN for 25 attempts, OF2 with 33 arm) is a key pinch-runner and defensive specialist. Steven Duggar (4 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+5 R-4, 32 SSN) has limited use but can offset some of the lefty shifts in late innings; Ronald Torreyes (3 0s, 11 hits) would probably be a regular if he had more than 102 plate appearances. Roberto Perez (6 hits, 4 walks) is here because he is a C8; and waiver pickup John Ryan Murphy (1-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks) is, well, just here.

The bench will get some use, and the Sensei knows well how to make the best of it.

3rd Over the course of the season, we think that Zion and Warrenton will wind up being fairly close. There's no Mike Trout here, of course, but there's Charlie Blackmon; Warrenton has a solid, if unimpressive, rotation, while Zion has a Grade 16 at the top and some good guys to support him (but sixty starts of Grade 4).

The difference is the bullpen. Like Warrenton, Zion has no big closer – both teams have one short inning guy, though Zion's is better. As noted in the pitching notes at left, the six middlemen in the Zion bullpen, Grades 11* to 13*,

seems like a side issue, but it really makes a substantial difference; and no one is a greater aficionado of that part of management than Mr. Meyer. The question is whether that's enough to make the difference, and whether it really *makes* a difference.

Can this team get to the postseason, and if it does, can it succeed? Our answer is – we don't think so, and if they make it, it had better include some sort of September trade. This is much more likely another year of the Zion slow rebuild.

Rebuilding, Zion style: Since the last really superior Zion club in 2014, there has been surprisingly little turnover. The box below shows that there are nine players still on the roster from that club, and there are eight players who played a key role in that 110-win team that have left. Only a few moved away by trade. Instead, the Zion brain trust has moved slowly and deliberately, waiting for things to come together.

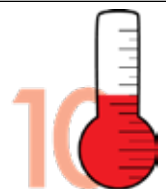


ELDERS of zion

Players on the 2014 roster (which went 110-52 and lost in the semifinal round), still with the club in 2019 (9): Adrian Beltre, Charlie Blackmon, Shin-Soo Choo, Alex Cobb, Scooter Gennett, Kelvin Herrera, Nick Hundley, Kenley Jansen, Tony Watson

Key players on the 2014 team, no longer here (8): Allen Craig, Yunel Escobar, Garrett Jones, Matt Latos, Jarrod Parker, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Anibal Sanchez, Koji Uehara

TQ: 22.0



2018 grand cayman HAVENS in review



This team won't just lose; they'll lose big.

by Mark Bloom

2018 in review

Final Record: 77-85 (3rd, Williams)

The holes in the starting rotation were so big that no amount of relief innings could fill them — and we tried, believe me. As a result, the few bright spots weren't enough to lift the team past mediocrity. The defending conference champions stumbled to a disappointing sub-500 finish.

What went right?

The team again hit more than 200 homers, led by Edwin Encarnacion's 47. Alex Avila enjoyed his best TBL season, hitting 17 HRs and walking 94 times in 112 games. Two players swiped more than 20 bases. Jon Lester hit a homer, and Chris Archer hit .300. On the pitching side, Wade Davis returned to form with 37 saves and a 1.38 ERA. The bullpen contributed 535 innings with a 3.31 ERA, recording 37 of the team's 77 wins.



Encarnacion: Led the team again

What went wrong?

We expected more from Archer than a 11-13, 5.45 season. No starter had a sub-4.00 ERA. Lester (12-11) was the only starter with a winning record. Despite the HRs, the batting averages plummeted. Encarnacion hit .209, although he somehow managed to record 105 RBI with only 122 hits. Cam Maybin hit .215 from the leadoff spot. Only three players who were even semi-regulars topped .250.

3 Things

- 1. Deciding to Rebuild.* At the beginning of the offseason, the 2019 team looked grim. Almost all the core players were over 30, and some had career-worst seasons. With no first-round pick, we could have plugged holes to try to be competitive, but it would have kicked the can down the road, perhaps leading to an uglier situation in a year. There were several valuable assets left, so the decision was made to sell off and rebuild.
- 2. The Draft Strategy.* After all the trading was completed, we ended up with a bevy of picks in the draft, although still no first-rounder. We focused on prospects instead of trying to fill games. As a consequence, every player we drafted (and didn't trade) has made the team, including 10th-round pick Brandon Guyer. The result is a team so thin that it's X-rated: barely legal.
- 3. Excelling at Losing Big.* Avila, Noel Cuevas, Jordan Luplow, Logan Morrison, and Chance Sisco all hit under .200, and all will play regularly for the Havens. The only usable players off the bench are Alex Blandino, Cuevas, and Guyer. The bullpen, featuring two innocuous long men, is nearly non-existent. The starting rotation is universally mediocre, and has to pitch five full every time out. This team won't just lose; they'll lose big.

grand cayman HAVENS

Mark Bloom (29th year)

This team might finish fifth in this four-team division.



As noted in the Grand Cayman instructions, the 2017 National Conference championship seems like a long time ago. Indeed it is: what is on the roster – after the departure of the majority of the core talent of the club – is a mess, fully capable of doing what the Year in Review says it will do: losing, and losing big.

One thing is true. The team is younger, or at least what's still here is overall younger. This is no sovereign remedy; it's a good characteristic, obviously, because rebuilds take time to mature, and if the surviving talent is young at the outset at least some of it will be still in its prime when the team gets better.

In the meanwhile, there's a healthy 2020 draft: two #1s including possibly the top one; four #2s; two #3s; one #4; three #5s. That's twelve roster spots that will replace some of what's here. Stay tuned for the next version of the team – it'll be lots more interesting than the one currently on the field.

Pitching: 3.0
The cards say "Grade" on them.

ROTATION. The young pitching staff has a relatively young senior citizen: Chris Archer (Grade 7 C+13, 27 starts), who remains on the roster after the purge.



Archer: Senior

He's joined by lefties Tyler Anderson (Grade 8 HR-24) and Marco Gonzalez (Grade 7 C+33 HR+22), rookies Nick Pivetta (Grade 6 C+13 HR-15) and Yefry Ramirez (Grade 6 C-52 HR-14). The last few starts will go to waiver pickup Jimmy Yacabonis



SNT: Danny Jansen.

He won't get much use in 2019, but he's the catcher of the future in Toronto and here in Grand Cayman. He's a building block of the next Grand Cayman contender.

Turnover Rate: 60%

Arrived: Tyler Anderson, Tyler Austin, Danny Barnes, Alex Blandino, Keon Broxton, Tim Collins, Franchy Cordero, Noel Cuevas, Clint Frazier, Phil Hughes, Danny Jansen, Brandon Lowe, Jordan Luplow, A.J. Minter, Logan Morrison, Tyler Naquin, Yefry Ramirez, Joe Ross, Chance Sisco, Hunter Wood, Jimmy Yacabonis.

Departed: Harrison Bader, Melky Cabrera, Tony Cingrani, Brandon Crawford, Wade Davis, Edwin Encarnacion, Evan Gattis, Donnie Hart, Matt Holliday, James Hoyt, Phil Hughes, Andrew Knapp, Jon Lester, Francis Martes, Leonys Martin, Collin McHugh, Bud Norris, Jose Reyes, Hector Santiago, Julio Teheran, Andrew Toles.

(Grade 7 C-25 HR-25) and Hunter Wood (Grade 3 C-26 HR+25).

This is hardly the worst collection the *Annual* has ever seen in a rotation, and would even be able to hang in there if there was a competent bullpen to rescue it.

BULLPEN. But of course there isn't. The best guy out there is Kyle Barraclough (Grade 14* C-61 HR-14), who has 51 innings, all the innings there are that steal 8s without help. That helping thing



won't happen very often. His setup crew consists of Hunter Wood as a Grade 12*, 116 innings of Daniel Mengden in the bullpen as a Grade 10 C+25 HR-15, and from the left side Alex Minter (Grade 10* HR+44) and Tim Collins (Grade 9* C-52 HR-36) for 112 more.

Then it's down to Hector Neris (Grade 6* HR-43, and lots and lots of Danny Barnes (Grade 4* C-42) and Dan Otero (Grade 2* C+62 HR-31). Even with innocuous usage, this may well not be enough. It seems possible that Alex Blandino may get some slop innings as a Grade 1* in blowouts.

This is a pitching staff that qualifies as such because the cards say "Grade" on them. They're going to give up a lot of runs.

Offense: 6.0
Likely to be a long season.

The lineup has some high points, though it's severely diminished from earlier teams. There's good power with Gregory Polanco (1-4-5-6, 9 hits, 4 walks, 33 SSN for 13 SBA) and rookies Tyler O'Neill (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, 61 games) and Tyler Austin (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+22). Amed Rosario (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 27 SSN for 30 SBA) also has a nice card. Kyle Seager has power, but the card otherwise leaves something to be desired (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks+22).

Then there is a collection of cards that will get altogether too much playing time. Cameron Maybin (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, 26 SSN for 13 SBA) becomes the default leadoff hitter; Brian Dozier (1-6-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, 31 SSN for 14 SBA) is the regular



Polanco: Powerful

second baseman and very much deflated from his last few years of big power; Logan Morrison (1-5-6, 7 hits, 3 walks+22) has to pick up the first base slack; Alex Avila (1-6, 6 hits, 6 walks) and Chance Sisco (2 0s, 6 hits, 2 walks+42) make most of the outs behind the plate; and waiver pickup Noel Cuevas (2 0s, 9 hits) and Alex Blandino (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+42) will be in some lineups.

A team with two or three hitting positions is unlikely to score a lot of runs overall. As noted in the instructions (and the Year in Review), this is more or less part of the plan; this is likely to be a very long season in Grand Cayman, and many of these folks will be elsewhere at the end of this campaign.

Defense: 4.0
A few serious gloves.

The most serious glove on defense for Grand Cayman continues to be Brian Dozier (2B8), who, despite his offensive decline, can still catch the ball. Mr. Bloom worked hard to try and move him in the offseason, but he's still here; he's in the majors and playing, and isn't even that old (he's just turned 32). If he can find his stroke, he may be on the next good team.



Dozier: Serious glove

In the outfield, there are guys who can go get it. Cameron Maybin (OF3, 33 arm) and Gregory Polanco (OF2, 37 arm) are the best; Noel Cuevas and Tyler O'Neill are OF2s. Alex Avila (C8 Th+2) and Chance Sisco (C7 Th+2) are good behind the plate. The corners are Fielding Two: 1B3s and Kyle Seager as a 3B4. Amed Rosario is a problem; he's an SS7, and there is no SS8 on the roster to rescue him. That will be a magnet for ground balls – it always seems to happen.

Bench:

1.5

Not much help here.

Grand Cayman has followed the Brobdingnag playbook; there aren't a lot of spare at-bats, and there aren't really too many players to make effective substitutions. Rookie Dominic Smith (1-5-6-6, 9 hits, L-6) might be able to do some pinch-hitting; Franchy Cordero (1-4-5, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-9 R+2, OF2 with a 33 arm) may see some use later in the year; and Brandon Lowe (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+22), Danny Jansen (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42), and Tomas Nido (2 0s, 7 hits) are attractive possibilities for the future. One or more of this handful will break right, and the rest will be breadcrumbs for TBL seagulls.

4th

Oh, yes indeed. This team might finish fifth in this four-team division. What there is to recommend them is the large 2020 draft and the relative youth of the roster.

To be fair, this comes as no surprise to Havens management. This is rebuilding Grand Cayman style: paring the team back to what is needed to get through the season, acquisition of young talent and hoping for the best.

Still, it's a bit of a shock to see who's gone, and how quickly: Melky Cabrera, Brandon Crawford, Edwin Encarnacion, Leonys Martin, Evan Gattis, Harrison Bader from the position players; Wade Davis, Phil Hughes, Jon Lester, Collin McHugh and Julio Teheran from the pitching staff. The cupboard isn't completely bare, but it's at the very least threadbare. Gregory Polanco, Brian Dozier and Chris Archer must be wondering what the hell happened, and who all these preschoolers are.

We think they'll be more comfortable in a year. But entropy is powerful. This might take longer than just one draft.

Youth on the Grand Cayman Roster



Age as of July 1, 2019:

34: Dan Otero

32: Alex Avila, Brian Dozier, Cameron Maybin

31: Logan Morrison, Kyle Seager

30: Chris Archer, Hector Neris

29: Tyler Anderson, Danny Barnes, Kyle Barraclough, Tim Collins

27: Tyler Austin, Noel Cuevas, Marco Gonzales, Gregory Polanco, Jimmy Yacabonis

26: Alex Blandino, Daniel Mengden, Nick Pivetta

25: Alex Minter, Tomas Nido, Yefry Ramirez, Hunter Wood

24: Franchy Cordero, Danny Jansen, Brandon Lowe, Tyler O'Neill, Chance Sisco, Dominic Smith

23: Amed Rosario

TQ: **14.5**



grand cayman HAVENS

breakthrough

There are fringe players on TBL rosters right now who might be important players on rosters in 2018. Some of those names appear in the list below. Some won't make it, but last year's list was Ozzie Albies, Rafael Devers, Matt Olson, Jeimer Candelario, and Marco Gonzales, a pretty good list: and a good sized handful of other players in our honorable mentions.



1 Zach Eflin, P, Blue Hill.

This hard thrower has dropped his strikeout rate and has become a better pitcher. He's helping power a surge for the Phillies.



6 Hunter Dozier, IF, Detroit.

On a floundering Royals roster, Dozier has had a great surge. He's waited a while to make the majors, but everything is clicking right now.



2 Domingo German, P, New West.

Injuries have given German a great opportunity to shine for the Yankees. He could be a key part of the resurgence up in the Pacific Northwest.



7 Ryan McMahon, IF, New West.

McMahon has forced his way into the lineup on a crowded roster, playing both first and second base. He's a nice part for a rebuilding team in TBL.



3 Ramon Laureano, OF, Northboro.

Northboro's SNT has a pretty good bat, but is dynamite in the outfield, with a great glove and an outstanding arm.



8 Frankie Montas, P, Strong City.

Montas has taken his game to another level in 2019, breaking out for a young A's club. He'll be a welcome addition for the 2018 champs.



4 Austin Meadows, OF, Munich.

A five-tool player, Meadows may be a real steal for the Marauders. He has already made his impact in MLB.



9 Luke Voit, 1B, Blue Hill.

Voit has continued his surge from last year. The Mudslides can't hope for another three 1s card, but Voit could be a big help next year.



5 Dan Vogelbach, 1B, Gotham City.

The power hitter has shown great power early on, and might be a real nice find for a retooling Gotham City club.



10 Richard Urena, 2B, Whitman.

Richard Urena enters a crowded field in Toronto, but youth and raw talent should push him to the front of the line. It could be a nice pickup for the River Rats.

Honorable mention: Willians Astudillo, C, Brobdingnag; Shane Bieber, P, Hoboken; David Bote, 3B, Las Vegas; Lewis Brinson, OF, New West; Willie Calhoun, OF, New West; Franchy Cordero, OF, Grand Cayman; Austin Dean, OF, Hudson; Nick Delmonico, OF, Rye; Steven Duggar, OF, Zion; Erick Fedde, P, Calusa; Cam Gallagher, C, Riverwoolf; Amir Garrett, P, Munich; Tayron Guerrero, P, Melrose; Dilson Herrera, IF, Munich; Rosell Herrera, OF, Las Vegas; Danny Jansen, C, Grand Cayman; Ariel Jurado, P, Calusa; Spencer Kieboom, C, Melrose; Nick Kingham, P, Detroit; Pablo Lopez, P, Hudson; Brandon Lowe, IF, Grand Cayman; Tyler Mahle, P, Las Vegas; Tim Mayza, P, Las Vegas; Billy McKinney, OF, Detroit; Jose Osuna, IF, Kansas; Jefry Rodriguez, P, New West; Fernando Romero, P, Knoxville; Jose Rondon, IF, Kansas; Dominic Smith, 1B, Grand Cayman; Kevan Smith, C, Midwest; Rowdy Tellez, 1B, Melrose; Sam Tuivalaila, P, Maracaibo; Hunter Wood, P, Grand Cayman.

future

Every year we look forward to see who might be the big names in the next draft. Sometimes these predictions are prophetic, and sometimes they fall short. Seven of our top ten were top 2018 choices, including all of the top five. Three of our honorable mentions made it to round 1 as well, including that missing top five guy. You be the judge. Thanks to Ray Murphy for his help.



1 Vladimir Guerrero Jr., OF, Toronto.

A 20-year-old, he's got the power of his namesake father and is one of the top prospects in Major League Baseball. He's arrived with a bang.



2 Fernando Tatis, Jr., SS, San Diego.

At 20, Tatis has one of the highest offensive ceilings of upcoming prospects. He has plenty of room to grow in rebuilding San Diego.



3 Chris Paddack, P, San Diego.

This big righthanded pitcher has made a major splash early in 2019. In the minors he dominated at each level, and is ready for major league hitters.



4 Peter Alonso, 1B, New York (N).

Alonso has progressed steadily through the Mets' system, and his early performance suggests that the 1B problem in New York is now solved.



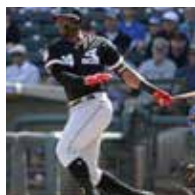
5 Nick Senzel, IF-OF, Cincinnati.

This top amateur pick has arrived in the majors. He has been an infielder in the minors, but the Reds have debuted him in center field.



6 Austin Riley, OF, Atlanta.

He's a power hitter who just turned 22. He slugged his way through the minors as a corner infielder, and is getting playing time in the outfield.



7 Eloy Jimenez, OF, Chicago (A).

A big-time power prospect, he's rocketed through the minors and has arrived with great expectations.



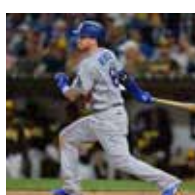
8 Victor Robles, OF, Washington.

A real five-tool player, Robles is learning to make better contact. He's a future force to be reckoned with.



9 Keston Hiura, 2B, Milwaukee.

A top pure hitter, he has taken over the second base position in a high-flying young Brewers club.



10 Alex Verdugo, OF, Los Angeles (N).

After a cup of coffee at the end of 2018, Verdugo has become a Dodger regular early in 2019. He has all the tools.

Honorable mention: Bo Bichette, IF, Toronto; Dylan Cease, P, Chicago (A); Michael Chavis, IF, Boston; Ty France, 3B, San Diego; Wander Franco, SS, Tampa Bay; Kelvin Gutierrez, 3B, Detroit; Garrett Hampson, IF, Colorado; Ke'Bryan Hayes, 3B, Pittsburgh; Carson Kelly, C, Arizona; Carter Kieboom, IF, Washington; Yusei Kikuchi, P, Seattle; Jonathan Loaisiga, P, New York (A); Nicky Lopez, 2B, Kansas City; Nick Margevicius, P, San Diego; Ryan Mountcastle, 1B, Baltimore; Daniel Ponce de Leon, P, St. Louis; A. J. Puk, P, Oakland; Brendan Rodgers, IF, Colorado; Justus Sheffield, P, Seattle; Mike Soroka, P, Atlanta; Touki Toussaint, P, Atlanta; Taylor Trammell, IF, Cincinnati; Marcus Walden, P, Boston; Forrest Whitley, P, Houston; Kyle Wright, P, Atlanta.

This edition of the *Annual* is more of a cooperative effort than some of our previous issues. We like to include as many of our managers as possible – either to write analytical articles or short reviews of their team’s past year.

Not everyone wants to take on a feature article. That being said, we’ve had expository work from a majority of the managers in TBL – not always picking through statistical data: we’ve had all kinds of insights into people’s TBL and APBA experiences.

But we *do* like hearing from managers about what they did, and what happened to them, during the previous season. We have a format (devised by the estimable Mr. Jordan): a short introduction, a “What Went Right” section, a “What Went Wrong” section, and “3 Things”: three insights into the past or, more often, the future. This has been in place for several years.

The best part about the “Year In Review” is that it gives us one last look at the season just past, and allows the manager to give his own insight into his team, before we bring down the mighty snarkhammer of analysis for which the *Annual* is renowned. It’s not exactly equal time: we talk for three pages, while the “Year In Review” is just one, with a picture in the middle. Still, it seems like an easy hurdle.

And, somehow, it’s not. Around half of the managers in TBL obliged our request for the Year in Review this year, giving us something to work with. Some were essentially ready to go: only some formatting was required. Others were a little more rough and ready, needing to be trimmed or padded (but that’s all right: we get the manager’s insights, which is the main thing.) We start asking for it in March, and most are in before the season gets underway.

On the other hand, there were a group of reviews that had to be written, along with everything else the *Annual* provides. Every such article takes time and effort – coming up with a theme, looking at the stats, and determining what we think the manager thinks is happening with his team. That takes time away from the rest of the book development.

Every year, I wind up being late in April (and often late in May) putting this book together. A lot of the work is formatting and layout, but there’s a great deal of writing involved. The work of Mr. Jordan and Mr. Bloom is essential and insufficiently heralded: I can’t possibly write 24 team articles and 6 division articles and a lead article between roster freeze and mid May, so the efforts of these two worthies is crucial. Ideally, you can’t tell whether Robert, or Mark, or I wrote up any given team. (Full disclosure – I write all the division introductions).

I had ten days without my laptop this year, which punched a hole in the schedule. This could have been a royal mess, but two TBLers came to the rescue. We are very grateful to Craig Musselman and Joe Auletta for stepping into the breach and writing a number of Year in Review articles. We – I – am most grateful for the help.

That being said, it shouldn’t have been necessary. The Year in Review is a very modest request, and we’re happy to work with anyone who needs help with them. It doesn’t seem as important as other stuff in the book – but we think it’s critical. This is your book, gentlemen – we want you all to be a part of it.

Have a great season.

f. robby

by Walter Hunt

Six years before TBL came into existence, Frank Robinson retired as a player. He was already a manager – the first African-American one in the major leagues. He was the only player to win an MVP in both the American and National Leagues – in 1961 with the pennant-winning Cincinnati Reds, and in 1966 with the pennant-winning Baltimore Orioles.

When the bar conversations turn to the greatest players of all time, all sorts of names come up: Ruth, Aaron, Cobb, Mantle, Ripken – every era has its own candidates; but few players built a fierce and powerful reputation in one league, and after a trade did the very same in the other.

Who was he? He was a juggernaut – a hitter who was the sort that pitchers never wanted to face with the game on the line. He crushed 586 home runs in his 20-year career, including the only one ever hit completely out of Memorial Stadium (estimated at 541 feet) – he would have been the darling of the analysts who prize launch angles and departure speed.

But he was more than a power hitter. He was a great all-around hitter; he was an All-Star 14 times, including his Rookie of the Year season of 1956 at age 21. In 1962 he compiled a terrific line of .342-39-136 with 51 doubles (good for a card with 1-1-6-6-6: a sublime APBA performer). In 1965, he piled up a .296-33-113 line; but at age 29, Reds management decided that he was “not a young 30” and dealt him to Baltimore for pitching. In response he led a young Orioles team to the World Series, recording a season of .316-49-122, a Triple Crown performance that won him his second MVP. From 1966 to 1971, he was a big part of the dominant Orioles team that had it all: bats, arms and gloves.



After 1971, Frank Robinson was dealt to the Dodgers; in 1973 and 1974 he played for the Angels; and in Cleveland in 1974 through 1976, finishing his playing career as a player-manager. At the close of his playing days he had tallied 586 homers (at his retirement it was fourth all time: now he sits at #10); he notched 1,812 RBI, with 2,943 hits and a .294 average.

The impact of Frank Robinson goes beyond those statistics – though those were plenty good enough to elect him to the Baseball Hall of Fame. He was an advocate for African-American players; he arrived in the major leagues when there were still Jim Crow laws in place, and played his most productive years in a contentious time in America. He was intense both on and off the field, speaking out against injustice, participating with the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP.

Players of today stand on the shoulders of giants, and Frank Robinson was certainly one of those. His death this February is a milestone of a generation of giants that are slowly passing away.

TBL

The Transcontinental Baseball League is a 24-team, continuous ownership APBA Baseball League that plays a 162 game season using the Master Board Game and the Computer Game. We play roughly twenty games a month from April through November. TBL uses an innovative, realistic pitching system and restricts players to real-life usage.

Our members are loyal, fun-loving and astute, and we have a high rate of retention. Now in our thirty-seventh season, our pennant races are always competitive and exciting.

TBL is always interested in adding backup managers to its roster. To get involved, send e-mail to our Commissioner, Ray Murphy, at

rmurph3@comcast.net

or TBL's unofficial recruiter and analyst, Walter Hunt, at

hotc@walterhunt.com.