The TBL Baseball Annual

A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

A Matter of Scale

2021 Edition

Walter H. Hunt

Robert Jordan

Mark H. Bloom

Darrell Skogen

**All 24 Teams Analyzed
Using the T.Q. System**

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A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

by

Walter H. Hunt
Robert Jordan
Mark H. Bloom
Darrell Skogen
with contributions from TBL's managers

and extra help from:
Paul Montague
Rich Meyer

Cover art by Aline V. Hunt.

the TBL baseball annual

Welcome to the 2021 *TBL Baseball Annual*. This is the twenty-seventh year of the *Annual* in the book format, and TBL's fortieth year – the thirty-eighth that we have on record. This year the editorial team welcomes Darrell Skogen as a regular contributor; some of our team articles will feature his expertise.

Our focus is on the way in which the altered state of the world has affected our league; naturally, it has had some impact on how we report – for example, the "arrived/departed" section has percentages based on players added, since we've temporarily increased rosters to 38 (so more people arrived than departed in most cases) and active rosters to 26. But what interests us this year is the way in which the limited 2020 season has "scaled up" to our 162-game format, just multiplying usage by 2.7 – while not changing the limited starter fatigue prevalent and extra bullpen needed throughout the league.

As always, we are pleased to bring this product to you.

Enjoy the *Annual* and enjoy the season.

<div align="right">

Walter, Robert, Mark, Darrell
May, 2020

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The T.Q. System

Shamelessly stolen from the Mazeroski 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).

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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 2022; above the middle line is excess, while below means something's missing.
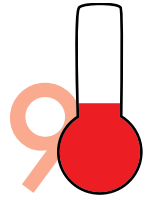
base

haves

WARRENTON. Three #1s (their own, Strong City, Midwest); two #2s, five #3s.

BROBDINGNAG. Their own #1, four #2s, two #3s.

MELROSE. Two #1s (their own and Las Vegas') and two #2s (theirs and Las Vegas').

MUNICH. Two #1s (their own and Rye's), two #2s and a #3.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN. Two #1s (their own and Maracaibo's), and their own #2 and #3.

GOTHAM CITY, **NEW WESTMINSTER**. Their own drafts with an extra #3.

balanced

RIVERWOOLF, **COLUMBUS**. Their own early drafts.

BLUE HILL, **GRAND CAYMAN**, **HOBOKEN**, **KANSAS**, **NORTHBORO**, **WHITMAN**. Their own drafts.

have nots

ZION. Their own #1 and #2.

CALUSA, **HUDSON**. Their own #1 and #3.
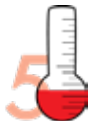
RYE. Their #2 and #3.

KNOXVILLE. Their #1.

MARACAIBO. Their #2; their next pick is their #8.

all in

STRONG CITY. First pick, their #6.
MIDWEST. They pick in other rounds
LAS VEGAS. First pick, their #5.

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

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Hoboken (Ruth)	7.0	3.5	15.0	2.0	32.0
Northboro (Williams)	10.0	4.5	13.0	3.5	31.0
Las Vegas (Aaron)	8.0	4.0	14.0	3.0	29.0
Midwest (Ruth)	7.5	3.5	15.0	2.0	28.0
Whitman (Clemente)	6.5	5.5	9.5	3.0	26.5
Maracaibo (Mays)	9.0	5.0	12.0	2.5	26.5
Blue Hill (Clemente)	8.5	4.0	11.5	2.0	26.0

The Solid Performers

| TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Hudson (Mantle)	7.0	3.5	10.5	3.5	24.5
Strong City (Clemente)	6.5	5.5	9.5	3.0	24.5
Kansas (Aaron)	7.0	3.5	11.0	2.5	24.0
Calusa (Aaron)	7.5	5.0	7.0	3.0	22.5

The Transitional Teams

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Grand Cayman (Williams)	8.0	4.0	6.5	2.5	21.0
Knoxville (Ruth)	7.0	4.5	7.5	2.0	21.0
Warrenton (Williams)	9.0	4.0	5.0	2.0	20.0
Brobdingnag (Ruth)	9.5	5.0	4.0	2.0	20.5
Columbus (Mantle)	6.0	4.0	6.5	2.5	19.0

The Rebuilders

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Zion (Williams)	6.0	3.0	6.0	2.0	17.0
Rye (Mays)	6.5	3.5	4.5	2.5	17.0
Rocky Mountain (Mantle)	4.0	4.0	5.5	2.0	15.5
Munich (Mantle)	3.0	4.0	5.5	2.0	14.5
Gotham City (Mays)	5.5	4.5	2.5	2.0	14.5
Melrose (Aaron)	5.5	3.5	3.5	2.0	14.5
New Westminster (Mays)	5.0	3.0	3.5	2.5	14.0
Riverwoolf (Clemente)	4.0	3.5	3.0	2.5	13.0

International	243.5 (20.3 average)
National	262.5 (21.9 average)

Division Totals

Aaron (NC)	100.0	Ruth (IC)	81.5
Clemente (IC)	90.0	Mantle (NC)	73.5
Williams (NC)	89.0	Mays (IC)	72.0

manager roll call

Munich Marauders	Mantle Division	*Paul Montague*	38th year
Hudson Generals	Mantle Division	*Clay Beard*	37th year
Elders of Zion	Williams Division	*Richard Meyer*	37th year
Gotham City Batmen	Mays Division	*Anton Greenwald*	36th year
Knoxville Outlaws	Ruth Division	Pat Martin	35th year
Maracaibo Rumrunners	Mays Division	*Walter Hunt*	35th year
Brobdingnag Barbarians	Ruth Division	*Joe Auletta*	33rd year
Hoboken Zephyrs	Ruth Division	Steve Powell	32nd year
Grand Cayman Havens	Williams Division	Mark Bloom	31st year
Melrose Avengers	Aaron Division	Mark Freedman	28th year
Blue Hill Mudslides	Clemente Division	Mark Ludwig	26th year
Whitman River Rats	Clemente Division	Brian Hanley	26th year
Las Vegas Gamblers	Aaron Division	Paul Harrington	25th year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Robert Jordan	22nd year
Midwest Mongrels	Ruth Division	Darrell Skogen	20th year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Steve Stein	19th year
Strong City Statesmen	Clemente Division	Eric Sheffler	18th year
Rye Herons	Mays Division	Craig Musselman	17th year
New West Whiskeyjacks	Mays Division	Jim Jeatt	17th year
Columbus Jets	Mantle Division	Vic Vaughn	15th year
Kansas Koyotes	Aaron Division	Bill Schwartz	14th year
Warrenton Giants	Williams Division	Jack Chapman	13th year
Detroit Dragons	Mantle Division	Dave Jaskot	10th year
Calusa Indians	Aaron Division	Gordon Rodell	7th year
Riverwoolf Sharks	Clemente Division	Daniel Dumont	5th year

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

Hall of Fame managers in *Bold Italic*.

2021 computer pre-play
by Clay Beard

But I thought the Pre-Play caught Covid! Apparently, the pre-existing schedule was causing the problem. I deleted the schedule, then changed the settings to 60 games, *then* added the schedule and full-time players became full-time players again. I usually input the actual TBL schedule. Such is not the case this year as there is some work I refuse to do twice. This is a Miller Bros. created schedule, but everyone plays each other the right amount of games.

Another year, another manager. I used Buck Miller '21, because he was specifically designed for this season. His bullpen usage is much better than the other managers, but there are still some very odd choices elsewhere. I think that still has to do with roles in the shortened season, because I tried out several managers and they all made the same odd choices. So Buck Miller it is.

Here's the setup for this thing. I checked *Fatigue Only* under Fatigue and Injury Rules. I also checked all four of the options at the bottom; *Automatic AIM Subs, Automatic AIM Sub Platoon, Enforce BFP*, and that *No PR > 930* thing, which provides some innocuous usage. 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. As always take this with a grain of salt. Even the good computer managers do some strange things.

The good news is that there appears to be a healthy middle for a change. There are seven teams which are a lock, which is a bit too many. But there's only six teams that aren't in the hunt for a wild card.

Easily the most interesting race is again the Clemente, where the Pre-Play predicts another Blue Hill/Whitman dead heat, with Strong City lurking. The Mudslides had the edge over 10 seasons 933 wins to 926. Maracaibo and Midwest will have no concerns until the playoffs.

Northboro looks to be a similar lock in the Williams, but the other three are all in the wild-card hunt. Hudson edges out Columbus in the Mantle. The "1" in the Columbus column actually represents two ties. Vegas gets a solid push from Calusa in the Aaron. This leaves a six team scramble for the wild-card slots.

International Conference
TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Clemente	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
BLUE HILL	93	69	--	104	86	4.5	5.5
WHITMAN	93	69	--	100	86	4.5	5.5
STRONG CITY	86	76	7	95	78	1	3
RIVERWOOLF	51	111	42	60	40	0	0

Mays	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
MARACAIBO	95	67	--	101	91	10	0
RYE	80	82	15	90	68	0	1
NEW WESTMINSTER	76	86	19	88	64	0	1.5
GOTHAM CITY	61	101	34	79	58	0	0

Ruth	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
MIDWEST	104	58	--	117	94	10	0
HOBOKEN	83	79	21	94	72	0	2.5
BROBDINGNAG	80	82	24	91	73	0	1
KNOXVILLE	70	92	34	93	79	0	0

National Conference
TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Aaron	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
LAS VEGAS	98	64	--	107	89	8	2
CALUSA	86	76	12	101	76	2	4
KANSAS	77	85	21	86	68	0	2
MELROSE	68	94	30	80	60	0	0

Mantle	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
HUDSON	89	73	--	95	84	9	1
COLUMBUS	82	80	7	88	72	*1*	3
ROCKY MOUNTAIN	67	95	22	73	57	0	0
MUNICH	64	98	25	74	55	0	0

Williams	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
NORTHBORO	100	62	--	104	92	10	0
GRAND CAYMAN	83	79	17	89	75	0	5
ZION	79	83	21	86	67	0	1.5
WARRENTON	79	83	21	93	67	0	1.5

fractions reflect ties. Also see the note above on the Columbus division result.

* Highest number of wins recorded ‡ Division Championships (in 10 seasons)
† Lowest number of wins recorded § Wild Card appearances (in 10 seasons)

hall of fame enshrinees 2021

David Ortiz, 1B/DH   *1998-2017*
Melrose, Brobdingnag, Melrose, Melrose/Northboro

One of the most fearsome power hitters in recent baseball history, "Big Papi" left at the top of his game, hitting .302-37-163 for the Barbarians. He had more than 30 HR ten times, and more than 100 RBI nine times. His 543 career gome runs ranks sixth overall; he is among all time leaders in BB (7th), 2B (5th), and RBI (6th).

Gary Sheffield, 3B-OF   *1996-2014*
East Anglia, Richmond, Northboro, New West, Whitman

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.

Anton Greenwald   *Manager, 1986-Present*
Gotham City (1 Championship, 5 World Series)

One of our most senior members, Anton has been a strong competitor, an insightful manager, and a regular contributor to this publication. A very worthy addition to our Hall of Fame managers' wing.

for your consideration

Left to Right: Joe Nathan, Andy Pettitte, Adrian Beltre, Ichiro Suzuki

Joe Nathan, RP   *2000-2014*
Richmond, New West, Hudson, Rye

For most of his career, he was an elite closer, recording five seasons of 30 or more saves and seven years with an ERA below 2.00. He is currently second overall in saves (238), one of the five pitchers with 200 or more.

This is his fifth year of eligibility. He appeared on 10 ballots in 2020.

Andy Pettitte, SP   *1990-2010*
Amherst/Melrose, Richmond, Northboro, Mahopac/ Kansas

A steady performer for eighteen years, he was the cornerstone of rotations for a decade and a half. He won 198 games in TBL, second among retired pitchers not already enshrined. He struck out 2,574 batters, currently 13th all-time. In 2006 he led the league in wins, going 20-10, 2.88 for Northboro.

This is his ninth year of eligibility. He appeared on 6 ballots in 2019.

Adrian Beltre, 3B   *2000-2019*
Zion

For twenty years, Adrian Beltre was one of the best third basemen in baseball. A serious power threat – he hit 460 homers, drove in 1,844, and had 2,968 hits (among lifetime leaders). He won two batting titles, but his best season was 2005, when he slugged .663 and recorded a .319-60-162 line.

This is his second year of eligibility. He appeared on 19 ballots in 2020.

Ichiro Suzuki, OF   *2002-2018*
Pensacola/Oregon, Maracaibo

A consummate hitter, Ichiro made his greatest mark with the Rumrunners. He only won one batting title in his rookie year, but was a consistent high average hitter. He had 200 or more hits eight times, including seven straight years, recording 2,922 hits for a lifetime .301 average. He stole 379 bases. He was also a superior fielder with a rifle arm.

This is his second year of eligibility. He appeared on 19 ballots in 2020.

Players with carryover votes: *Adrian Beltre 9, Ichiro Suzuki 9, Andy Pettitte 5; Joe Nathan 4; Tim Hudson, Dennis Eckersley, Trevor Hoffman, Don Mattingly, Roy Halladay, Jamie Moyer, Paul Molitor, Jake Peavy, Juan Gonzalez 2, twenty-one players with 1.*

a matter of scale

by Walter Hunt

Welcome to the 2021 *TBL Annual*, and to the new year, in which there are vaccines, there are baseball games, and there is a card set based on a sprint (scaled by 2.7 times). A little further on in this book you can read Paul Montague's thoughts on what happens when the season gets scaled, but I'd like to make a few observations as the editor of this fine book.

But before that, I'd like to take the opportunity to congratulate Hall of Famer Joe Auletta on winning his seventh TBL crown, and also to welcome Anton Greenwald to a well-deserved place in the TBL Hall of Fame.

I'd also like to take a moment to shout out to the *Annual* team: my long time wingman Robert Jordan, and particularly to Mark Bloom and Darrell Skogen, for their hard work in putting this thing together. I wind up with the hard part at the end: layout and production, which is nowhere as much fun as writing team analysis, but is a contributing factor to your enjoyment of our project. If you don't notice what goes into that, I've done my job.

Finally, I'm grateful for the wonderful community TBL has been and continues to be. Sixteen of our twenty-six participants have been with TBL for twenty or more years, which is more than half for more than half of the league's history. In a volatile world this has been an oasis of stability, through wars and pandemics and baseball strikes and our own personal journeys as we become more, ahem, *mature*. Baseball, and APBA, and particularly TBL, bring us together.

The Crisis

Last summer, as we all waited for baseball to begin in some form, there was an extended debate about what TBL would do in the face of the then-current situation. For a couple of months there was nothing: spring training was halted, the regular season was put on hold, everything shut down. A spreading pandemic and the lockdown that went with it, compounded by political and social unrest, made many of us wonder what we would do given the interruption of our steady cycle. If there was no season would we replay the previous one? (Only fun for a few, so no.) Would we use the projected card set based on something made up by APBA? (No, and that appears to have been a sagacious choice.) Would we pick a season from the past and have a one-off draft? Seasons from the 1960s and 1980s were floated, and the idea was seriously considered, but before we made a decision we got the promising news that there would be baseball after all – a 60-game season with some structural changes to speed things up and make things safer.

Supersize Me

So baseball got underway. Travel was restricted, the Blue Jays played in Buffalo, doubleheaders got shortened, and the runner-on-second-in-extra-innings thing was added. (Cue peasants with pitchforks: I hate that, and statistical purists do too.) There were games, though no fans in person; there was pitching, but shortened starts and lots of bullpen innings. Some people had a great 60 games, some stars never got on track while others 'opted out', some major league cups of coffee that in normal times would never have been drunk got served with refills. Pennant races and extended playoffs and a World Series all got in the books.

Meanwhile in TBL, we watched and laughed and cried somewhat as our world was upended by all of this. It affected trades and the draft, both during and after the shortened season, and

created opportunities and bedeviled long term plans. In short, there were teams for which this weird year and weirder card set was good, and others for which it was bad. The rest of us were somewhere in the middle.

As it turns out, 162 divided by 60 is 2.7 right on the nose, so the consensus decision was just to supersize what was there, scaling everyone up by that multiple. 12 starts became 32, 25 innings became 67, 60 games became 162, 10 steal attempts became 27, and so forth. To make sure there was enough usage (which it turns out there was), we went to 38-man rosters for a year, and 26-man rosters from April to October. XCs already in the league were carded for the first time ever, which turned out to be less of a deal than everyone originally thought.

We had trades and a lively draft. Teams went all in, like Las Vegas and Maracaibo, while others took the opportunity to restock and rebuild, like Zion and Riverwoolf. (Saying those two team names in the same sentence is a little weird, isn't it?) There are rookies and veterans who won't be playing much of a role in the current season, like Jo Adell and J. D. Martinez, while others will have an unexpectedly large impact based on a narrow data set, like Dominic Smith and Anthony Santander. I have never seen so many cards with so many 1s; four power numbers seem the norm rather than any mark of distinction; and a whole lot of relievers only the Sensei (and Mr. Murphy) has ever heard of have closer grades. Will all of these guys – Jose Fuentes and Andre Scrubb and the others – ever do this again, or is this a 1981-style (or, possibly more to the point, a 1944-like) fluke, and everything will return to normal? Who knows? It sure makes it hard for your favorite hard-talkin' soda-chuggin' prognosticators here at the *Annual*.

Supersizing the stats has its good and bad points. But it affects everyone, from Jose Iglesias and

his .370+ hitting card to Justin Verlander going from ace to essentially uncarded, and everyone in between. There is no time to lament, merely to move on and make do. They did it in 1981 (see Monty's article later on); we did it in 1994; we will do it again, and hopefully the next card set will look more like we expect it to be. Early returns give cause for mild optimism.

Our Role

The book you now read is the result of a normal process in an abnormal year. For a time I toyed with the idea of bailing out on the *Annual* for this year; the disheartening thought of the weird card set, the loss of an in-person draft, and all of the other disappointments that led to where we might be in March of 2021 put me off. But any number of side conversations with my close friends in the league made me realize that it would be a disappointment to many, and no *Annual* this year might mean no *Annual* ever again. So with the help of Mr. Skogen – without which this book could never have been finished: truly, I am very grateful – we are doing what we've always done: looking at the cards, whatever they may be; considering the upcoming drafts and the upcoming season; and hoping that we knock it out of the park.

Nicknames abound; clichés prevail. The chief of the Calusans is still photogenic; we have our Magic 8-Ball for Hudson; the Sensei is lauded, the Prince of Darkness puts in his oar. We are nostalgic, competitive, and generally good-tempered. We have pennant races and a good story line for the season to come.

We have survived 2020 and look forward to 2021. Enough talk. Play ball.

uncle sensei's pitching analysis: who's got the goods

by Richard Meyer

Master Game APBA is a tough game to analyze on a purely statistical basis, as the shades of the individual grades from 1 to 20 (above 20 is just gravy, but lots of folks love gravy, particularly at Thanksgiving) do not represent even steps as Grades 8, 13, and 18 all represent a bigger boost than the grades on either side. What is presented here won't solve that, sadly. But this is still an attempt at a measured look at the pitching staffs of the 24 TBL teams for the coming season.

Methodology

The methodology of the analysis is fairly straightforward. In theory, we all need something on the order of 1,458 innings of pitching to make it through the season. I've attempted to assemble every club's best 1,458 inning combination. First we assemble the most sensible 162 game rotation. Where full time starters are involved, they are assumed to pitch to their actual innings limit. Obviously, starters with big grades may be able to exceed those limits as they can survive one or more grade reductions and still be better than some bullpen alternatives (more on that later), but the baseline data does not assume any such overage. Where split starters and relievers must be added to fill the 162 games most reasonably, I assume they pitch a 'five and fly' start. And if your team has a bunch of guys who got one or two emergency opener starts (which turns into 3 or 6 when expanded to a 162 game year), I mostly just keep those innings in the bullpen until your ballclub can't make 162 without them – because moving a few of those innings into the SP side of the equation just weakens the bullpen at the other end, and doesn't really change the value of your pitching staff.

The team by team starter summaries appear in the table below, organized by division.

TBL STARTER GRADES - 2021																	
Team	Starter Innings	Innings/ Start	18+ Innings	13+ Innings	AVG Grade	NET CTL Rating	NET HR Rating	Rank	Team	Starter Innings	Innings/ Start	18+ Innings	13+ Innings	AVG Grade	NET CTL Rating	NET HR Rating	Rank
BRO	857	5.32		462	8.75	-14	-32		GC	794	4.90			5.62	+24	0	
HOB	928	5.76	607	170	16.21	+12	0	1	MAR	923	5.70	192	121	12.32	11	+22	6
KNX	933	5.80		444	9.91	+16	-22		NW	871	5.38		177	8.81	+24	-16	
MID	963	5.98	167	468	14.22	+15	+22	3	RYE	901	5.56		185	8.79	+12	+12	
CAY	858	5.33		248	8.81	+11	+21		BH	931	5.75	119		11.48	+14	+25	10
NBO	870	5.40	272	128	13.39	-21	+16	4	RIV	865	5.34			6.13	0	-11	
WAR	819	5.09		102	8.15	-16	-22		STM	886	5.47		332	10.26	+13	+21	
ZIO	956	5.94		181	9.06	+15	+21		WHT	956	5.90		660	13.10	+13	-16	5
IND	854	5.30	46	276	12.02	0	-12	8	COL	886	5.47		295	8.89	;+24	+12	
KAN	899	5.58		485	12.19	+14	+23	7	HUD	939	5.80		268	11.56	+16	+26	9
LVG	860	5.34		714	15.02	-16	"+16	2	MUN	988	6.10		404	10.85	+33	+26	
MEL	777	4.83		48	5.96	-13	-16		RCK	894	5.52		349	8.36	-12	-12	

Starters Across TBL

I'm guessing we all knew Hoboken was going to top this list. The rest of the top five (Las Vegas, Midwest, Northboro, and Whitman) are also no surprise. What maybe you didn't know (or maybe knew in the back of your head, but didn't think all the way through) is how few innings most team's starters are going to last. Only one team – Munich – has a rotation that can average 6 innings a start. Midwest falls just short of that mark at 5.98 innings (ironically stalwart given the frothing horde of relievers in their pen), followed by Whitman (5.90 with a lot of Grade 13 innings), and Zion (not good, just sturdy). Six other teams (Knoxville, Maracaibo, Hudson, Hoboken, Blue Hill, and Rye) clear 900 starter innings. And at the other end, Gotham and Melrose don't even average five innings per start, with Warrenton dangerously close to the same fate.

Now obviously, as previously noted, some teams will be able to stretch their starting resources beyond the suggested limits. A 13+ starter operating past his fatigue can survive one grade reduction and still steal 9s. If the game's not a 1-run squeaker, they might convince the pitching coach to let it ride. If they can steal a couple of extra outs in most outings, they can save some other arms.

Meanwhile, a total of six teams have at least one starting arm rated at 18 or higher. Those guys can survive two or even three grade reductions and still be stealing hit numbers. Good news for Hoboken, whose 607 18+ innings (over 40% of the league total) essentially give them an extra 13+ reliever for the year.

And the bad teams can stretch themselves at the other end of the spectrum. The worst staffs will have starters who reduce to 1s and 2s and – be down by enough runs to possibly not care, and leave that pitcher in to take one for the team.

But ignoring these occasional events, the continuing decline in leaguewide starter fatigue ratings means that although TBL rules *require* us to have 400 bullpen innings on roster, what most of us really need is 500 or 550 or maybe even almost 600 innings of actual graded guys. And very few of us got that memo. As a result, the last 100 innings of most TBL full season soufflés are the dregs guys you kept around for their 'turn around' potential for 2022. Many teams have one or more 'in case of emergency, break glass' bozos on their roster. Several of them have probably already realized one month plus into the year that these clowns are going to see a lot more game action than most of us intended.

So as we turn our attention to the relief stats, if your bullpen looks worse than you thought it was, chances are you weren't counting to 1,458 and noticing how getting there requires your 1s and 2s and 4s getting pushed into action.

Call to the Pen

The bullpen race is much closer, with four pens clustered at Grade 16* (Midwest, Hudson, Hoboken and Whitman), two more at Grade 15* (Maracaibo, Northboro), and five at Grade 14* (Strong City, Blue Hill, Columbus, Las Vegas, and Zion outside the top ten). Hoboken is unique among the leaders in that their high grade is the product of having two enormous grades (27* and 22*), and their depth is much thinner than the other top dogs. See the chart at right.

Three teams can throw more than 200 innings of Grade 18* relief (Hudson, Northboro, and Maracaibo), with the former controlling four different closers and the other two teams three each. Hudson also has just over 500 innings of Grades 13*+, followed closely by Northboro (484), and then a few lengths back to Midwest (432), Whitman (425), Kansas (416, but only one closer) and Knoxville (400 with the same single closer).

Meanwhile, the few have-nots are preparing to watch a whole lot of games slip away in the late innings. Gotham leads the bullpens that time forgot by barely clearing the Grade 8* average with a limited core of four Grade 13*+s for 254 innings. The bottom three are Riverwoolf (one closer, one setup man, 6.71 average grade), Munich (one closer, one setup man, 6.40 average grade), and Brobdingnag (no light at the end of the, just tunnel, average grade 6.22).

Interesting albeit completely unsurprising side note, given the cavalcade of -62s in the draft – 19 of the 24 teams have bullpens with negative control, with Grand Cayman the wildest of the bunch at -31. Conversely, 20 of the 24 teams have bullpens with positive HR ratings, with Hoboken standing alone at +43, but five others at +31 or above in New Westminster, Maracaibo, Hudson, Warrenton, and Zion.

Putting It Together

Finally, in putting the two halves of the pitching staffs together, the cream of the overall crop comes down to five teams: Hoboken, Midwest, Whitman, Northboro and Maracaibo.

Hoboken

>Starters: 16.21 (rank 1)
>Relievers: 16.23 (rank 3)
>Combined rank: 4

Midwest

>Starters: 14.22 (rank 3)
>Relievers: 16.99 (rank 1)
>Combined rank: 4

Whitman

>Starters: 13.10 (rank 5)
>Relievers: 16.03 (rank 4)
>Combined rank: 9

TBL RELIEVER GRADES - 2021

Team	Relief Innings	Shortfall or Overage	18+ Innings	13+ Innings	AVG Grade	NET CTL Rating	NET HR Rating	Rank
BRO	601				6.22	-21	21	
HOB	514	-16	147	101	16.23	+12	+43	3
KNX	525	146	56	344	13.97	-22	+25	
MID	495	65	146	286	16.99	+14	+23	1
CAY	577	-23	121	168	11.17	-31	+15	
NBO	588		217	267	15.01	-15	+24	6
WAR	639		112	255	13.16	-22	+31	
ZIO	502	56	68	305	14.19	-12	+32	
IND	604		55	244	11.85	-16	+25	
KAN	559		59	357	12.93	+16	+25	
LVG	598	45	179	208	14.29	-12	+25	10
MEL	681		58	261	10.06	-23	+24	

Team	Relief Innings	Shortfall or Overage	18+ Innings	13+ Innings	AVG Grade	NET CTL Rating	NET HR Rating	Rank
GC	654			254	8.06	-21	12	
MAR	535	89	202	179	15.41	-13	+34	5
NW	587			188	9.13	-13	+35	
RYE	557		64	171	9.44	-12	-13	
BH	527		198	155	14.53	-15	+24	8
RIV	593		58	49	6.71	-15	-23	
STM	530	-42	182	165	14.45	-21	+25	7
WHT	502		176	249	16.03	-21	+23	4
COL	572		141	145	14.36	-13	+23	9
HUD	519		238	267	16.84	-23	+34	2
MUN	470		53	46	6.40	+11	-15	
RCK	564		119	208	13.55	+14	+21	

Northboro

    Starters: 13.39 (rank 4)
    Relievers: 15.01 (rank 6)
        Combined rank: 10

Maracaibo

    Starters: 12.32 (rank 6)
    Relievers: 15.41 (rank 5)
        Combined rank: 11

Right behind the first group are two teams, Hudson and Las Vegas, whose overall ranks are comparable to teams 3-5, but who have one element much better than the other –

Hudson

    Starters: 11.56 (rank 9)
    Relievers: 16.84 (rank 2)
        Combined rank: 11

Las Vegas

    Starters: 15.02 (rank 2)
    Relievers: 14.29 (rank 10)
        Combined rank: 12

Blue Hill is the final team with top 10 ranks in both starting and relieving (Starters 10, Relievers 8) for a combined 18. The best of the rest include the Statesmen (10.26 and 14.45), Knoxville (9.91 and 13.97), Kansas (12.19 and 12.93), Zion (9.06 and 14.19), Columbus (8.89 and 14.36), and Calusa (12.02 and 11.85).

Ultimately the outcome is based on the games we play, so as with the results of other predictions in the *Annual*, we'll have to wait and see.

the short season principles   by Paul Montague

TBL celebrates its 40th season this year. Take a moment to reflect on that. Okay, that's enough nostalgia – we've got serious business to consider.

Namely, MLB has once again saddled us with a short season on which to base APBA cards. (This is the fourth time in TBL history that has happened.) What effect does this have? Let's look briefly at the previous seasons where TBL had to use cards based on less than 162 MLB games, and see if we can tease out any conclusions. Call these the "Short Season Principles" or SSPs. Then we'll see if we can take a guess at how these SSPs may affect the 2021 TBL season.

Chapter 1 – 1981

As it happens, TBL saw a short-season effect in year one of its existence. The first year of TBL was based on the 1981 season. In that infamous '[first] strike year', MLB teams played only between 103 and 111 games. Statistical oddities abounded due to the small sample size effect. APBA's cards reflected this.

Among other things, it's the last APBA set with multiple 3B6s, one of which belonged to Mike Schmidt. Schmidt also happened to have the best offensive performance among qualifying batters in 1981 with a triple-slash of .316/.435/.644 and 31 homers in 434 at bats. He was the only qualifying batter to top a 1.000 OPS (with 1.080), and beat the second-place hitter (Dwight Evans) by a whopping 143 points! He coasted to his second consecutive MVP award. It was easily the best season in Schmidt's Hall of Fame career.

In TBL, Schmidt was the cornerstone of a Munich team that went to the World Series.

APBA gave him a monster card, needless to say – 11 hit numbers with 1-1-5-6 power, plus 6 walks (ever see a "14" on 26 on any other cards?)

The point is not that Schmidt had a super card; after all, he had a long and excellent career, with plenty of good cards. The point is that Schmidt had *this* good a card, in part because the season was shorter than usual. Schmidt chose the perfect year to have a hot four months – because they were the only four months of this season. There was no chance for him to have a cold streak that would have brought his statistics back toward his norm.

But Schmidt was not the only example of a hitter who rode a hot streak to a noteworthy season. The next several top offensive players were also established stars and full-timers – Dwight Evans, Bobby Grich, Andre Dawson, Bill Madlock, Eddie Murray, and George Foster. All of them had OPSs above .890, not necessarily a huge surprise for any of them. But the next guy on the list is hardly a household name – Tom Paciorek, at age 34, maintained a .326 batting average and .509 slugging percentage in his 452 PA. These figures were well above Paciorek's career .282 average and .415 slugging.

General observation: The shorter the season, the more chance there is for a player to play well above his established level, without as much time for his performance to revert to the mean. Thus, the more likely a star is to have a card above even his star standards. And if there is more chance for each individual player to exceed his level in a short season, then a logical corollary is that the number of players who *do* exceed their levels should be greater than usual.

*SSP #1: No Schmidt, Sherlock; or, the shorter the season, the higher the **number** of monster cards it will have.*

If a short season magnifies the effect of streakiness for hitters, it does it even more for pitchers, who already have fewer events to base their statistics on. In 1981, on the pitching side, no less than 26 qualifying pitchers recorded ERAs of 3.00 or below, with correspondingly high grades from APBA (this is before TBL was calculating its own grades). None of the 26 had to pitch at that level for over 200 innings; remember, this was back when starting pitchers were expected to exceed 200 innings in a full season, by a *lot*; so there were fewer chances for their sterling ERAs to be damaged by a few poor starts. League leader Nolan Ryan pitched only 146 innings, to a 1.69 ERA (that gained him a Grade 21 XG from APBA).

*SSP #1A: No harm in Ryan; or, SSP #1 applies even more so to **pitchers***

TBL glossary: "Cardboard" – a player who is normally average or below (or is an unheralded rookie) who has an unexpected season where his APBA card is worthy to lead a TBL contending lineup or rotation, with little or no expectation of ever doing so again.

The prime example of pure "cardboard" in the 1981 season cards – and perhaps in all of TBL history - was Mickey Klutts (who???), who was a dominant force. In MLB, Klutts tallied five homers and 17 total hits in 48 at bats (a .370 batting average and 1.091 OPS). He got an enormous, non-adjusted card from APBA, including three 1's and 7's to 25. Our player limits in that first year allowed a J4 to start 3 games a week (TBL's schedule was set up by weeks rather than months that season, normally with six games per week per team). So, in that TBL season, Klutts got to play in 18 or 19 games (out of 40 in the schedule), and four games in the World Series. He batted cleanup for Paris, and led them to the first TBL crown, over Schmidt's Munich Marauders (who also had Nolan Ryan in their rotation, be it noted). That was Klutts' one and only star turn (in MLB or in TBL: he hit below the Mendoza line in 1982, and was out of major league baseball after the 1983 season.)

Klutts was not the only piece of cardboard in the deck by any means. Among non-regulars, Rick Monday (at age 35) recorded a 1.031 OPS in his 156 PA. Joel Youngblood, in 161 PA, had a .929 OPS. And so on. Several of these non-regulars played prominent roles in TBL's 1981, again in part due to looser usage rules.

*SSP #2: Be a Klutts; or, the shorter the season, the more **cardboard** there is and the more that cardboard matters*

Fewer MLB at bats (or innings) also meant more players had anomalously bad performances. As the total outcomes for a player decreased, the greater the influence a bad streak would have on the player's rate statistics (batting average, OBP, ERA, etc.) for the entire season. In other words, the performance curve that exists in any season got "flattened". Thus, there were more terrible APBA cards and grades in the card set.

Well-established players were not immune to this effect. For example, batters with OPS's below .600 (yeesh) included Steve Yeager, Dave Henderson, Ellis Valentine, Joe Rudi, Willie Upshaw, Don Money, Bob Boone, and even eventual Hall-of-Famer Ozzie Smith (albeit Smith did not reach Cooperstown mainly for his hitting, and this was before the 'Ozzie Got Offense, Too' portion of this career).

SSP #3: Get a PhD; or, the shorter the season, the greater the chance your star player or regular is **crappy**

However … TBL does not have to use all the cards APBA publishes. In its first year, TBL had only 12 teams. As noted above, it also had much looser usage restrictions than it does now. Combined, this meant that the anomalously *bad* cards/grades did not have to be used in TBL play. In fact, the season had very much of an "all All-Stars" feel, a bit like playing the Original Franchise All-Stars cards (which, as it happens, was the warm-up before we decided to do the TBL startup draft). Since then, TBL has (rightly) regulated usage more, and has expanded to its current 24 teams, so we can't dodge the crappy cards *as much*. But the crappy cards still tend to wind up in the "unowned" pile or on somebody's season-long minor leagues – not 100% of them, but most . . . notably, they may even play regular roles on rebuilding teams, of course.

SSP #3A: Not all crap sticks to the wall; or, usage limits may (or may not) **mitigate** *the number of crappy cards that have to be used in TBL play*

At the same time, a TBL team can be negatively affected by the short season even if it doesn't have to use 'crappy cards' actively. Namely, if several stars have a bad streak in that short season, they'll get bad cards/grades – and their TBL team will have to find someone to replace them for at least that year if it wants to contend. That, in turn, costs trade chips or draft picks that the team might not have had to spend had the season been normal length. Thus the team has to sacrifice current season depth and/or long-term building blocks to deal with the crap.

SSP #3B: Crappers gonna crap; or, there is always a cost to short-season-induced crappy cards

Chapter 2 – 1994 and 1995

In 1994, MLB went through its second strike, resulting in a season comparable to 1981 in

length as teams played between 113 and 115 games. The leader boards were populated mainly by the usual suspects. There were nine qualifying hitters with an OPS of at least 1.000, led by Frank Thomas and Jeff Bagwell – both of whom were over 1.200, a mark generally not seen in full seasons. Albert Belle was next at 1.152.
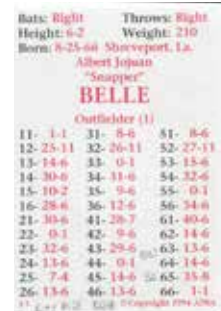
There was some cardboard, led by Rico Brogna and his 1.006 OPS in 138 AB, and Eddie Williams' .986 with 11 HR in 196 AB. (Brogna and Williams each had one more good year in '95, but that was about it.) On the pitching side, Greg Maddux was in a universe of his own, with a 1.56 ERA (over a full run better than the next two qualifiers, Steve Ontiveros and Bret Saberhagen).

In TBL, Belle (#3 in MLB OPS) and Maddux (#1 in ERA) led Zion to the championship 4-2 over Rochester, which was in the midst of the Barry Bonds (#6 in OPS) and Randy Johnson (#13 in ERA) era. Eddie Williams chipped in for Zion as well, with a triple-slash line of .275/.337/.536 and 14 HR.

For Zion, Maddux actually bettered his MLB stats with a 1.26 ERA in 320 IP as he put up a staggering 34 complete games.

Among the batting leaders from MLB, Belle came closest to replicating his offense in TBL, with a 1.093 OPS (only 59 points below MLB). Brobdingnag, led by Thomas and Ken Griffey, Jr. (1.076 OPS in MLB) finished second to Zion in TBL runs scored.

Assessing the SSP's, the evidence from 1994 is mixed. The two top qualifiers among batters were on another world, as was the top ERA leader – but the quantity of extremely good

results wasn't notably more than in a normal year. The effects of cardboard on TBL pennant races were minimal, because there wasn't a lot of cardboard.

One piece of cardboard did make a notable cultural splash in TBL, though. This occurred when the very first selection in the rookie draft was announced, and the name was "Bob Hamelin" – resulting in the earliest and perhaps most vigorous use of The Sign in TBL history. Hamelin did have the best season among rookie hitters, recording a .987 OPS in MLB, and indeed won the Rookie of the Year award. He got a nice card from APBA as a result. But, cardboard will out – Hamelin was a 26-year-old in his first 'full' season (he actually debuted in 1993), was the poster child for "unheralded", and lasted only four more seasons in the majors (although two of those were credible efforts).

In MLB, 1995 was the 'strike hangover' year. A late start to the season resulted in teams playing 140-some games. The short-season effects on numbers were minimal with that long a season. There were only six hitters with an OPS over 1.000, and almost all qualifying batters in the leaderboard were 'expected'. There were three notable hitters at over 1.000 with less than fulltime use – Todd Haney, Dean Palmer, John Vander Wal. Five qualifying pitchers with ERA's under 3.00 were again led by Greg Maddux and his 1.63 mark, again almost a run better than the next pitcher (Randy Johnson at 2.48).

In TBL, the season based on these outcomes resulted in Zion winning its second pennant in a row, again led by Belle (this year #2 in MLB OPS) and Maddux (yawn). The Belle and

Maddux Show beat Munich in the World Series, four games to one. (Munich's batting leader was Edgar Martinez, #1 in MLB OPS; its pitching leader was Ismail Valdes, only #13 in MLB ERA – and he dropped back almost a full run to a 4.29 ERA in TBL, although he was a 20-game winner.)

So TBL in 1996 saw nothing very out of the ordinary in terms of cards or outcomes resulting from the somewhat-but-not-a-lot shorter MLB 1995 season.

These observations lead to a tentative formulation of:

The Short Season Boundary: *Juuust a bit more: or it appears that an MLB season of about **140 games** is enough to mitigate the small sample size effects that result in the SSP's, but 115 is not*

Chapter 3 (2021)

So how do the SSP's apply to the TBL 2021 season, based on MLB 2020? Indeed, it was *much* shorter than any previous MLB season, at 60 games per team (mostly). It also took place in a different era of player usage in MLB. To name just a few obvious changes in the game –

Hardly any position player even tries to play every single game any more (Cal Ripken's consecutive games streak is a lock to last until there is no baseball any more);

Almost no starting pitchers work more than six IP in a start, so less than 200 IP in a full season;

The use of "openers" and larger bullpens.

So, usage is spread out more than in 1981. And, oh by the way, even more so because MLB also expanded rosters for the 2020 season – and for that and other reasons, TBL decided to (temporarily) raise its roster limits as well.

Therefore we can't do a true apples-to-apples comparison between 1981 (or 1994) and 2020. But we can still take a high-level look at how each SSP seems to apply as we begin the TBL 2021 season.

SSP #1: How many monster cards?

Among qualifying hitters, there are four with an OPS over 1.000, and 23 over .900 – so the sheer quantity is not excessive. But the top end has Godzilla and King Kong (Freddie Freeman, whose card is 11 hits with 1-5-5-6-6 power, six 14s and a partial HBP number; and, Juan Soto with an almost identical 11 hit, 1-1-5-6-6 power, six 14s and partial HBP number) with "über-monster" cards. *(Somehow APBA's "Rating" column in BBW shows Soto as only the 91st best player in the deck!)* There are also quite a number of hitters with five power numbers and/or two (or three) 1's on their cards.

SSP #1A: How many monster pitching grades?

Here there be monsters, as it says on one old map! There are no fewer than 11 starting pitchers with TBL Grade 18 or higher. (Northboro and Hoboken own seven of these between them.) An additional 56 starters have Grades 13 to 17. (For perspective, in the previous year's card set, it was 3 and 32 with Grades 18+ and 13-17, respectively.) No fewer than 23 relievers enjoy a TBL Grade 18* or better (compared to 5 in the previous set). Almost all of those relievers pro-rated to more than 50 IP, *i.e.*, they could be considered as 'full-time' relievers.

SSP #2: How many cardboard cards?

Quite a few – although we can't say definitively what is true 'cardboard' as opposed to a player who has made a legitimate and lasting change in their approach after several years of mediocrity (a la J. D. Martinez), or as opposed

to a rookie who may wind up being a better major leaguer than he was a prospect (Andrew Stephenson? Randy Arozarena?). We can cite Miguel Rojas as merely one among many candidates, as he rode a Really Hot Start (after which he cooled off to his normal level) to a 11 hit, 1-0-0-0 power, four 14s, partial HBP card. The rookie draft had three players (Bobby Dalbec, Jared Walsh, Randy Arozarena) with *three* 1s and at least 13 on-base chances – none of whom pro-rated to more than 85 games played for the 162-game TBL 2021 season.

SSP #3: how many stars/regulars/top prospects have crappy cards?

This count can also depend on who one considers a 'star' or 'regular' or 'top prospect'. But there is at least one example of each category who had at least 100 at bats in MLB 2020 (which would qualify as more than half-time play):

- *Javier Baez:* .599 OPS, getting a card with 8 hits, 1-5-6 power, only 1 14, and a partial HBP

- *Elvis Andrus:* .582 OPS, and a card with 7 hits, 3 0s, 3 14s – and a whopping five 24s.

- *Jo Adell:* .478 OPS, 2 0s, 6 hits, 2 0s, 2 14s, and a partial HBP (Adell was still taken fifth overall in the 2021 TBL draft).
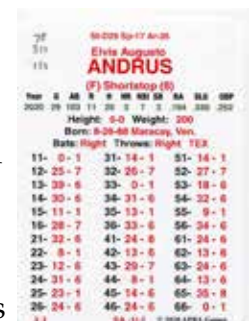
SSP #3A and 3B: *how many of those have to be used?*

I won't try to assess all 24 TBL rosters to determine this (we can all read the *Annual*'s team sections to do that for ourselves – thanks to the *Annual* writers for doing the spadework for us!). But consider that the waiver draft pool had hardly any pitchers with Grades above 1 or hitters with more than 11 on-base numbers on their cards. (This situation was also influenced by the one-year raising of roster limits; but it does still suggest that at least some of the crappy cards will see TBL usage this season.)

Finis

So how will all this affect TBL's pennant races in 2021? Of course, that remains to be seen – "it's why we play the games", after all. But, in closing, I will venture two predictions based on the SSPs as discussed in this article:

2021 TBL Prediction #1: *Who's in first?; or, the shorter the MLB season the **less predictable** TBL pennant races will be*

In this *Annual*, you'll read the usual projections from our knowledgeable prognosticators. I'm guessing that the the crystal-ball gazing SSPs will result being less accurate when all is said and done this season than it typically is. That's no disrespect to them; it's just that the short-season effect introduces more uncertainties into such look-aheads.

2021 TBL Prediction #2: *Do you feel lucky, punk?; or, the shorter the MLB season, the more that **in-game luck** will play a role in TBL pennant races*

In some ways, this is just a corollary of the first prediction (or rather, this is the cause to #1's effect). With all the monster stuff (especially pitching) and cardboard this year, I expect at least two or three TBL division races will come down to which team gets the hotter dice, especially in key matchups with other contenders.

(Yes, that's always true to some extent – but should be true even more, in this short-season-based year.)

Harking back to 1981, Munich went into the season as the unanimous favorite to win the pennant in TBL. But, the Marauders stumbled out of the gate, losing 9 of their first 12 games – with luck that had yours truly throwing the dice against the wall. (In that first season, most games were played face-to-face.)

At that point, I literally shuffled the deck (*i.e.,* I set the next starting lineup by random draws from the nine starting cards) – which, for whatever reason, kicked off a 23-game winning streak. Munich coasted to a World Series berth. Good dice had replaced the bad dice – the TBL season that was even shorter than in real life….

But then Munich lost to Paris in the World Series. Klutts (and the dice) triumphed over Schmidt and Ryan. It was the ultimate short series effect. Will something similar happen to some TBL team(s) in 2021?

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 2021.

Blue Hill Mudslides:	Kwang-Hyun Kim, P	*Columbus Jets:*	Dylan Carlson, OF
Brobdingnag Barbarians:	Joey Bart, C	*Gotham City Batmen:*	Kyle Lewis, OF
Calusa Indians:	Luis Robert, OF	*Grand Cayman Havens:*	Ke'Bryan Hayes, 3B

Hoboken Zephyrs:	Trevor Bauer, P	*Knoxville Blue Thunder:*	Triston McKenzie, P
Hudson Generals:	Sean Murphy, C	*Las Vegas Gamblers:*	Steven Brault, P
Kansas Koyotes:	Cristian Javier, P	*Maracaibo Rumrunners:*	Sixto Sanchez, P

Melrose Avengers:	Anderson Tejeda, SS	*New West. Whiskeyjacks:*	Alec Bohm, 3B
Midwest Mongrels:	Tony Gonsolin, P	*Northboro Phoenix:*	Ian Anderson, P
Munich Marauders:	Nico Hoerner, IF	*Riverwoolf Sharks:*	Casey Mize, P

Rocky Mountain Dragons:	Javier Baez, SS	*Warrenton Giants:*	Christian Walker, 1B
Rye Herons:	Hyun-Jin Ryu, P	*Whitman River Rats:*	Ryan Mountcastle, OF
Strong City Statesmen:	Randy Arozarena, OF	*Elders of Zion:*	Jesus Luzardo, P

commissioner's report

by Ray Murphy

What a year, amirite?

This "year like no other" tested every fabric of our society; even TBL wasn't spared. Well, fortunately the membership was spared: a couple of our ranks suffered with COVID. After all, much as we might not want to admit it, our median age is drifting toward the high-risk range for poor outcomes. So, first and foremost, I'm glad we are still here.

In that context, the challenges the league faced over the last year seemed… mundane. In the parlance of the pandemic, in fact, the TBL ripple effects weren't "unique", "unprecedented", or "once-in-a-lifetime". In fact, thanks to MLB's long-documented ability to shoot itself in the foot, TBL has plenty of experience dealing with truncated MLB seasons: we are actually quite well-practiced in solving for x, where x equals some number of actual games divided by 162.

The more interesting part of the contingency planning, at least in my eyes, came before we knew whether MLB would get to play at all in 2020. That's when we truly had the possibility of a blank canvas staring at us, and the ways that some of you imagined filling that canvas were just fascinating: pushing the league history in the other direction by playing 1982. Playing a Negro League season. Playing TBL Franchise All-Star teams. There were some really cool ideas floating around.

I found it telling that one option gained no traction: doing nothing. Maybe in the face of so much downtime/home time, doing nothing just made no sense to anyone. But more than that, I think TBL is so much a part of our lives and a big part of our personal definition of "normal," it just seemed unfathomable to give up TBL at a time when we were giving up so much else. Heck, even I was feeling the itch to get back into the

league as a player, rather than the non-playing commissioner role. (Don't worry, as life has gotten moving again this spring, the delusion that I was ready to return has thankfully passed. Still on my to-do list, but still out on the horizon.)

So, as we roll into the 2021 season, take a moment to celebrate:

> *The league withstanding* another challenge
>
> *Everyone holding together* and figuring out (with minimal acrimony) our best path forward under the unusual circumstances
>
> *Joe Auletta winning his 7th league title*, now just one behind Rich Meyer in terms of lifetime rings
>
> *Anton Greenwald joining* the manager's wing of the TBL Hall of Fame
>
> *Successfully executing* an entirely-remote draft, which I think was a first for the league.

Speaking of the draft, another item on the list of "pandemic losses" included the planned 2021 destination draft in Kansas City. But hopefully that's a temporary loss, with pencilled-in plans in place to convene in KC for our 2022 affair. But, there's a lot to do between now and then. It continues to be my pleasure to remain associated with all of you in this capacity. Good luck in 2021, and be well!

Fight to the Finish

There might be three contenders in the Clemente this year. We think the best of

them, as usual, is the **Whitman River Rats**, and that's just par for the course for *Brian Hanley*. He's been a big part of this division since his arrival in the league and the creation of our present six-division structure. In some seasons the choice is clear; but this year we're not so sure. Despite any hype to the contrary, the **Annual** is fallible – we've been wrong before (ask Clay Beard) – and at the end of the season they might be looking up from second place.

If they are, it's because Brian's long time friend and rival *Mark Ludwig* has won the pennant with his **Blue Hill Mudslides.** They have

the bats; they have pitching, but maybe not quite enough. They've made some big time moves to keep in the fight, and we think they're very good. There will be some superb head-to-head matchups during the season, and there may be moves down the stretch to cinch it.

2020 Clemente Division Final Standings				
Team	**W**	**L**	**Pct**	**GB**
Whitman*	99	63	.611	—
Blue Hill†	98	64	.605	1
Strong City	85	77	.525	14
Riverwoolf	35	127	.216	64

* Lost to Blue Hill in the Conference playoff.
† Lost to Brobdingnag in the Conference Championship..

Out in **Strong City**, the **Statesmen** may have something to say about that. Some

of their offseason moves were clearly pointed toward making it a three team race in the Clemente; but meanwhile, wily old *Eric Sheffler* wants to have it both ways by selecting Jo Adell as a part of his club's long term future. Can he ride both horses? Time will tell.

It's been a rough few years so far for *Daniel Dumont*'s **Riverwoolf Sharks**. They dropped 124 games last year, and may well lead the league in losses again: but this draft,

and we hope next year's draft, will put together a young, exciting team in the future. We express our boundless optimism with only the minimum amount of snark. But they'll still finish fourth.

Clemente Division

Jose Ramirez,
Whitman

1. **Whitman**   **26.5**
2. **Blue Hill**   **26.0**
3. **Strong City**   **24.5**
4. **Riverwoolf**   **13.0**

2020 whitman RIVER RATS in review

No youth movement here.   by Brian Hanley

2020 in Review
Final Record: 99-63 (1st, Clemente)

Defend the Crown. The River Rats won the battle but lost the war against rival Blue Hill. Taking six of seven in the last two meetings allowed Whitman to claim its tenth division title with a 99-win season, by just one game over the Mudslides. Mark claimed the victory by eliminating Whitman in a sweep of the Divisional Round of the playoffs.

What went right?

This team hit more home runs than any of its predecessors, swatting 230 in total with seven batters with 20+, and we scored 831 runs, a potent attack. Tim Anderson hit an impressive .306 with 88 runs scored, 27 HR and 110 RBI in just 123 games. Paul Goldschmidt hit 35 HR had 104 RBI and scored 98 runs while Kolten Wong crossed the plate 109 times and led the team in steals with 23. The pitching was mediocre by Whitman standards, but Kershaw went 20-3 with a 2.62 ERA and Lance Lynn went 18-8 while striking out 224. Most importantly, our divisional record in 2020 was 27-15 and we grabbed a first round bye.

Kershaw: Leader

What went wrong?

This club had a flawed offense carrying only 2 regulars with 4 or more walks and only one card with more than 10 hits. We had stretches were we failed to score due to lack of baserunners. The pitching was good, but the team ERA of 3.58 was the highest we have had since 2009 (excluding a rough 2018) and

we also set a team record for HR allowed with 231, offsetting all that power we generated. The headline remains that after winning the division, we were swept out of the playoffs. Giving all credit to a great Blue Hill team, those four games were one of those stretches where we could not seem to generate a hit or a walk, never mind a run.

3 Things

1. No youth movement here. The Whitman roster is aging faster than most in TBL. Coming off playoff appearances in 11 of the last 12 seasons, the current run has yielded one championship, two more World Series appearances, and eight division titles. The 2021 squad will likely make that 12 of 13 years but at some point – sooner than we would like – this roster is going to disintegrate.

2. Not enough high end draft picks. The problem with contending for such a long stretch is that you never have the luxury of high draft picks, nor do you have the ability to stock up on good young prospects. That time will come soon enough for Whitman but not this year.

3. Pitching, pitching and more of that. There is no doubt which part of this team will determine how far this team can go in 2021. The starting staff for this club is as good as any Whitman has ever put on the field and the bullpen is chock full of arms with 522 very versatile innings that will help protect leads. Pitching and defense.

whitman RIVER RATS

Brian Hanley (26th year)

It's going to be a photo finish.

We say the same things for the same reasons every year about the Whitman club. Praise for management, a recitation of their many successes in division and conference: the three defeats and, at last, the victory in the World Series. Somehow just winning a pennant and notching 99 wins (and the fifth best pitching staff and the third best offense) seems a bit of a disappointment.

But it shouldn't be. This is a team that, like any in the final four, could have won the Series last year. The Year in Review at left offers the chapter and verse of the team's successes (and, to some extent, its failures). The roster has changed very little: pitching has been added, along with an SNT with a solid bat and a CF (Shogo Akiyama) with a good glove; but it's largely the same actors.

That's the nub of the problem for Whitman, even though they're clearly in the thick of things this year (largely due to the fine pitching staff). The core, the most important River Rats, are getting a little old. Jose Ramirez, Nate Snell and Tim Anderson are in their prime, but they're exceptions. Kershaw, Goldschmidt, Molina and others are past that point.

In the meanwhile, they'll be in it all year, and will go as far as the arms will carry them.

Pitching: 11.5
Strength by the numbers.

Whitman has always been known for its pitching, and 2021 is no exception. Most of the help drafted this year (as for most teams in TBL) is for the pitching staff. It's not unalloyed good news: the rotation has low fatigue numbers (again, like most teams in TBL), and there are a few risky choices in the bullpen, but this a deep and tal-

**SNT:
Ryan Mountcastle.**

One of the best Oriole prospects in recent years, he's got a great bat, and a glove that is a work in progress.
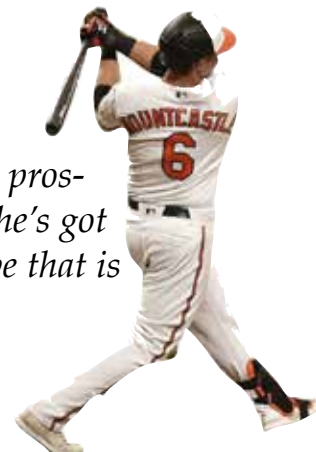
Turnover Rate: 32%

Arrived: Shogo Akiyama, Luis Cessa, Kendall Graveman, Codi Heuer, Chad Kuhl, Ryan Mountcastle, Chris Owings, Yusmeiro Petit, Drew Rasmussen, Sam Selman, Adam Wainwright, Dan Winkler.

Departed: Dario Agrazal, Victor Arano, Jake Cave, Brock Holt, Seth Lugo, Tony Sipp, Max Stassi, Pedro Strop, Daniel Stumpf.

Lynn: Key

ented group. Mr. Hanley really knows how to manage it, which makes it in even more valuable than the numbers show.

ROTATION. It starts with the ever-steady Clayton Kershaw (17 lefty C+43, 27 starts), who is among the best in baseball. The key guy, however, is Lance Lynn (Grade 14 C+21, 35 starts, and more importantly a 26 fatigue rating). Then there are 82 more very solid starts: Blake Snell (14 lefty HR-26), Chad Kuhl (14 C-26) and the ageless Adam Wainwright (13 C+31, also 26 fatigue). The rest are assigned to Kendall Graveman (Grade 8

C-24 HR+23), opener Tyler Clippard (Grade 15 C+41 HR+33 for a few batters) and Ross Stripling (Grade 3 HR-43, to be replaced at the first sign of trouble). It's a good rotation, though the fatigue numbers will bring in the bullpen sooner than in most years.

BULLPEN. Hey, kids, it's a parade! The bullpen has many arms in it, led by this year's closer, Codi Heuer (Grade 23* C-16 HR+51). Not quite 25, he could actually be good long term, but for this year he's just the head of a long line. His setup man is long time River Rat lefty Jake Diekman (Grade 21* C-54 HR+46), who was wild and unhittable last summer. Dan Winkler (Grade 18* C-62) and Yusmeiro Petit (Grade 17* C+31 HR-11) round up the late inning quartet, with nearly 240 innings between them.

There are roughly 190 good innings to back them up, all Grade 15*. Tyler Clippard is excellent (C+41 HR+33), rookie lefty Sam Selman (C-15 HR+32) satisfactory, and Emilio Pagan (C-23 HR-23) a little risky. Luis Cessa adds another 60 innings (Grade 11* C+15 HR+32). Kendall Graveman may see some time in the pen as well. Notably absent is last year's workhorse closer Adam Ottavino (Grade 3*) and rising star Yoan Lopez (Grade 4*), neither of whom got on track in the shortened season.

Heuer: This year

This pitching staff is the highlight of the team, and should keep them in most games. By August, though, they'll have worked very hard for their beer and pretzels.

Offense: 6.5
Too many inadequate at-bats.

This is where things get interesting. There are no true over-the-top offenses in TBL this year, despite some outstanding short-season cards; every team has its deficiencies. Whitman is no exception.

At the heart of the order, Jose Ramirez is just outstanding (1-1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 4 walks, 30 SSN for 36 SBA) though he does carry a +15/-7 platoon differential. The same is true for Tim Anderson (1-0-0-0, 12 hits, 2 walks+22, 28 SSN for 20 SBA), but +16/-8. Both players will lose some hits that way. Shortstop Miguel Rojas (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 4 walks+22, 32 SSN for 17 SBA, L+17 R-11) will suffer the same penalties.

Things are a little mix-and-match after that. Rookie SNT Ryan Mountcastle can hit the ball (1-0-0, 12 hits, 3 walks+22, L-6) for 95 games, and Paul Goldschmidt (3 0s, 10 hits, 6 walks) is a little more like the way we're used to seeing him; Cam Gallagher (4 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks, 68 games) will be fine when he's in there, as will Chris Owings (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 26 SSN). But there are far too many inadequate at bats: Brad Miller (1-5-6, 8 hits, 5 walks+42, L-8) is the best of the rest, while Kolten Wong (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, 28 SSN), Nicky Lopez (2 0s, 7 hits, L-9), Shogo Akiyama (2 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, L-9, 27 SSN), Yadier Molina (2 0s, 10 hits, 1 walk+42, 5 24s), and others will see more playing time than Whitman management would like.

Goldschmidt: More like it

There are a fair number of walks, as noted on the instructions, but that just points up the relative age of the roster. Between the 8s on 22 and the big shifts for the top bats, there'll be days when the offense is stymied.
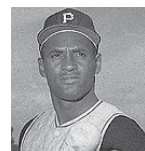
Defense: 6.0
Still outstanding.

We love to complain here at the *Annual*, but there's little to find fault with here. Whitman, like last year, is still outstanding, and it starts with the best defensive catcher in the game, the ageless Yadier Molina (C9 Th+6). He anchors an infield of mostly Fielding Ones: at first is Goldschmidt (1B5), at short, mostly Rojas

Molina: Still on top

(SS9) with a third of a season of Anderson (SS8), at third Ramirez (3B4), and *two* 2B9s in Wong and Lopez. The outfield isn't quite as robust, with Akiyama (OF3, 32 arm) the only Fielding One regular, though Hunter Renfroe (OF3, 30 arm) will see time there as well. The rest are OF2s, except Mountcastle, an OF1 who will have to play in the field. It's a very solid defense, especially up the middle.

Bench: 2.5
Ready to address most situations.

Whitman at least has some choices. There are a number of part-timers that will help in various ways, starting with Bearded Lady Extraordinaire Hunter Renfroe (1-1-0-0, 6 hits, 4 walks+22, L+4 R-5, 31 SSN). Nick Markakis (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks) has a useful swan song; Avisail Garcia (0-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+9 R-6) is a nice counter against opposition lefties; and Adam Haseley (6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks) is less bothered by platoon problems. The various mix and match options described opposite will help with everyday lineup choices, making the team more versatile. They'll need to be managed carefully to get the best results.

1st We think they'll win, but it's going to be a photo finish. Blue Hill can really mash the ball in a way Whitman

simply cannot, and the Statesmen are dangerous as well though a step behind the other two on the mound. As with other years, the head to head matchups in the regular season will determine how deep anyone goes in the playoffs.

We are accustomed to picking Whitman to win the Clemente Division and we can hardly be blamed for that, but the TQ differences are sufficiently small to account what is charmingly called the "margin of error." We'll see in December if we were right.

Whitman RIVER RATS

Ages of players on the Whitman roster, as of 07/01/2021:

39: Wainwright
38: Markakis, Molina
36: Clippard, Petit
35: Ottavino
34: Diekman, Lynn
33: Akiyama, Goldschmidt, Kershaw
32: M. Rojas
31: B. Miller, Stripling, Winkler
30: A. Garcia, Graveman, Pagan, Selman
29: Cessa, Foltynewicz, Owings, Renfroe, Wong
28: T. Anderson, Gallagher, Kuhl, Y. Lopez, Lucchesi, J. Ramirez, Snell
27: Aquino
26: N. Lopez, Mazara
25: Haseley, Rasmussen
24: Heuer, Mountcastle

TQ: **26.5**

2020 blue hill MUDSLIDES in review

There are a ton of walks in the everyday lineup.

by Mark Ludwig

BLUE HILL

2020 in Review
Final Record: 98-64 (2nd, Clemente)

Blue Hill won the second most games in franchise history finishing 98-64, just one game behind first place in the Clemente Division. This led to a rematch of last year's Wild Card series against Midwest, and the Mudslides took four out of five to set up an inter-division semi-final against Whitman.

The River Rats had won the division in a large part because they went 9-5 against the Mudslides during the regular season, but we got our revenge in the playoffs. Blue Hill swept away their long-time rival to set up another rematch from last year with Brobdingnag. And for the second year in a row the Barbarians ended our season, but at least this time it took 6 games.

What went right?

For the third year in a row the franchise record for home runs was broken, as the 2020 club hit 232. Bryce Harper surprisingly led the team with 40, followed closely behind by Christian Yelich's 38. Yelich also led the team with a .290 BA and .580 slugging percentage. Jordan Lyles led the team with 14 wins and Aroldis Chapman set the franchise record with 42 saves.

What went wrong?

This year's team didn't strike out as much as the last couple but Harper did set the franchise record with 203 Ks. Raffy Devers had a good year but I expected his card to produce more

Yelich: Team leader

than 18 HR. Not winning the division was a disappointment as we felt we had the best team in the Clemente, but going 5-9 against Whitman was the reason it didn't happen. And in the end for the second year in a row the Mudslides were no match for the Barbarians from Brobdingnag.

3 Things

1. Consistency. This year's key players are pretty much the same as last, except the offense for most of them is not quite as explosive. Luke Voit, Alex Dickerson, and Austin Nola might, however, have something to say about that. There are also a ton of walks in the everyday lineup, so hopefully that will set the table for the power hitters.

2. The bench isn't very deep. The starters will need to carry the load. Some of the hitters have pretty big shifts. but with all the home games on the computer I'm hoping they won't hurt us too badly. The bullpen is deep, so when we get a lead we should have a good chance to hold on to it most games.

3. The draft fixed the pen. Last year we had to rebuild the starting rotation, and this year we had to rebuild the bullpen. Luckily this year's draft was the one to do it in! We added three Grade 20s to the back of the bullpen. The starters are also better this year as we have 111 starts of Grade 12 or better, including a 19 to be the ace of the staff. We are preparing once again for a three team race for the division title.

blue hill MUDSLIDES

Mark Ludwig (26th year)

This should be a good Blue Hill year.

BLUE HILL

No one seems to know what the term 'broken record' means anymore. MP3s don't really skip in the same way.

Nonetheless, the antiquated turn of phrase applies, as it has applied for many years. Each year, when we examine the Clemente Division, we wind up talking about Whitman's regular position at the top of the standings, with Blue Hill a close second. Of course, regular season results don't necessarily translate to playoff outcomes: Blue Hill got further than their division rival last year; and the difference between the two this year isn't enough to measure.

So is this a yet another example of a broken record – one we've heard before? Yes, of course it is. We have *definitely* heard this before. And, as usual, we're not sure how it will come out. Having a third capable team in Strong City only complicates matters. But it's all part of the exciting job of prognostication. If it wasn't fun, we wouldn't do it.

Pitching: 11.5
Built to contend.

This was a good draft year for pitching, and the Mudslides needed it. In addition to adding a half season of the best grade in the draft (SNT Kwang-Hyun Kim, pictured right), they added the top end of their present bullpen – Ramirez, Taylor, Tate, and Mayers – just this year. They want this, and it's easy to imagine them getting it.

ROTATION. The best grade is, of course, Kim (Grade 19 C+23 HR+34), but the #1 pitcher

on the staff is Spencer Turnbull, who provides a full season as a Grade 12 (C-36 HR+53). He has two close friends: lefty Marco Gonzales (Grade 12 C+52 HR+16) and the returning Lance McCullers (Grade 12 HR+31). Gonzales has a 25 fatigue, but all of the others are 20 or 21 – which will bring the bullpen in earlier than in the past.

Turnbull: #1

The rest of the starting rotation is solid. Zach Eflin (Grade 8 C+25) has 27 starts; Jose Urena (Grade 8 C-45) makes 14; and Josh Tomlin (Grade 6 C+43) the rest. The starting staff should keep Blue Hill in the game most days.

Turnover Rate: 29%

Arrived: Jonathan Arauz, Brad Brach, Todd Frazier, Jorge Lopez, Kwang Hyun Kim, Mike Mayers, Jace Peterson, Yohan Ramirez, John Schreiber, Dillon Tate, Blake Taylor.

Departed: Matt Albers, Yonder Alonso, Justin Anderson, Aaron Brooks, Cory Gearrin, Luis A. Garcia, Hunter Pence, Sean Rodriguez.

SNT: Kwang-Hyun Kim.

A real contender's pick, Kim was the best grade available in the new player draft. He made his mark in Korea – now he's a star in St. Louis and Blue Hill.
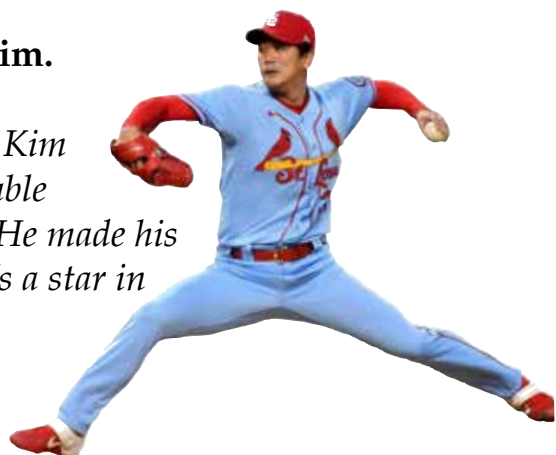
BULLPEN. Last year's ace, Aroldis Chapman, is only a Grade 11* this year; his place has been taken by 200 innings of Grade 20*: Mike Mayers (C+16 HR+41), Yohan Ramirez (C-62) and lefty Blake Taylor (C-51 HR+26).

They have help: Dillon Tate (Grade 16* HR+42), Blake Parker (Grade 16* C-24 HR+15), and Anthony Bass (Grade 15* C+21 HR+33) have another 165 very solid middle innings. Lefties Chapman and Justin Wilson (Grade 10* HR+46) and righty Brad Brach (Grade 9* C-62) add another 125.

This is an excellent bullpen – for what is there. The problem is that this is not a usual year, and 325 solid innings (and after that Grade 1*s, 5*s, and whatever's left of Josh Tomlin) will be stretched to breaking. Watch this space for the acquisition of bulk innings to get the club to the finish line.

Offense: 8.5
Seven deep, then – creativity.

After a little dip in his career, Bryce Harper is definitively back (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 6 walks, 31 SSN for 29 SBA) with no annoying platoon split. And he has friends, starting with Alex Dickerson, who raked in 2020 (1-1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks+22, L-8). These guys will play about every day. And, of course, there's Luke Voit, who has fewer hit numbers but those he has are huge (1-1-1-5, 10 hits, 3 walks+22). This card will also be in the lineup every day.

Then there's the middle infield. Jeff McNeil (4 0s, 22 hits, 3 walks+22)

Harper: He's back

Dickerson: With friends

and Trevor Story (1-0-0-0, 20 hits, 3 walks, 32 SSN for 50 SBA. Rafael Devers (1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L-9 R+3) is off his breakout season but is still pretty solid. Austin Nola, a part of last year's draft, gets most of the reps behind the plate (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L+12 R-4).

That takes the lineup seven deep. It matches up very well against other division contenders. After that, though, it will be a matter of creativity. Christian Yelich had a rough 2020 (1-5-5, 7 hits, 6 walks, 10 13s, 28 SSN, L+11 R-6); he'll have to play quite a bit. Todd Frazier was brought in to hit lefties (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L+7 R-6); and Jace Peterson is a potentially useful bearded lady (1-0, 6 hits, 8 walks). Some of the bench players may see use here as well.

When we see a lineup like this – seven-ninths of a top-notch one – we tend to focus on the parts that have the greatest impact: power, or speed, or lots of hit numbers. The lower end of the Blue Hill attack is flawed, but there are some extra options available. The possibility of some explosive innings, even against the best pitching, makes Blue Hill a dangerous opponent. It would be a shock if they didn't cross the plate more than 900 times this year.

Defense: 4.0
A bit deficient.

There is another side to this, of course. Catching the ball doesn't contribute as much to the TQ as hitting it, but it *is* important: it helps shorten innings and it supports the pitching staff. This is an area where Blue Hill is not as strong, with Fielding Two players at most positions.

There are two strong performers: Trevor Story (SS9) and the catchers, all C8s: Nola (Th+1), defensive

Pina, Story: Defensive standouts

replacement Manny Pina (Th+6) and Kurt Suzuki (Th-3), who probably won't be called upon to catch very much. Christian Yelich is an OF3, but he'll not play every day; Dickerson and Harper are both OF2s, and Harper has his usual 36 arm. Peterson is an OF1. Voit is a 1B3, Devers back to a 3B3, and McNeil is a 2B7. The top notch defender Yolmer Sanchez is a 2B8 with very little usage, and Frazier and Arauz are 3B4s, but overall the defense is a bit deficient.

Bench: 2.0
What's left.

There is not a lot on the roster past the starting lineup. Yolmer Sanchez has a nice card (1-6-6-6, 9 hits, 6 walks, 2B8) but almost no usage; Harold Castro (0-0-6, 12 hits, 3 walks) will likely be the best pinch-hitter or defensive replacement (OF2) off the bench. Jonathan Arauz (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks) will be useful as well.


We're guessing that it's not enough. Their pitching staff matches up with Whitman's and with Strong City's, but it lacks enough innings in the bullpen despite having no bad starts.

This can be fixed during the trading period, and it almost has to be: come September, there will be many innings available from teams on the boundary of contention whose rosters dictate a jump to

Voit: Good hits

2022 priorities. There's always the chance that this team falls out of the race: but this should be a good Blue Hill year. We're perfectly willing to be wrong about the final ranking – and as for the postseason: that's always an unknown country.
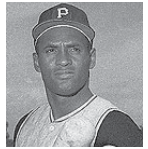
Ages of players on the Blue Hill roster, as of 07/01/2021:

37: K. Suzuki
36: Parker, Tomlin
35: Brach, Frazier
34: L. A. Garcia, M. Pina
33: C. Anderson, Bass, A. Chapman, J. Wilson
32: Kim
31: A. Dickerson, Morgan, A. Nola, J. R. Peterson
30: Lyles, Voit
29: M. Gonzales, Mayers, McNeil, Odom, Y. Sanchez, Urena, Yelich
28: Ford, Harper, J. Lopez, Stephenson, Story, Turnbull
27: H. Castro, Eflin, McCullers, Tate
26: Y. Ramirez
25: B. Taylor
24: Devers
22: Arauz

TQ: **26.0**
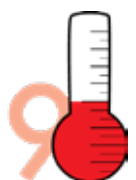
2020 strong city STATESMEN in review

A fall swoon cannot happen again.

by Eric Sheffler

2020 in Review
Final Record: 85-77 (3rd, Clemente)

The Statesmen were picked by the *Annual* to finish third in the Clemente, and that is exactly what they did. Both Whitman and Blue Hill performed far better than Clay Beard's season pre-play suggested, but Strong City was only one game off the pace suggested by that pre-play. Our plan for this year was to get younger and provide better offense and pitching as we begin the 2021 season. Help for this season and the future came in the draft, and the team hopes to compete for the playoffs once again this year.

What went right?

The pitching staff, led by Zack Wheeler (14-9, 3.90 ERA) and rookie Mike Soroka (13-10, 3.71 ERA), carried the club nearly into the playoffs. The team's 3.71 ERA ranked fourth best in the league while the 1.18 WHIP tied for seventh. Nolan Arenado's 46 HR and 119 RBI drove the offense. Only Brobdingnag gave up fewer than the staff's 185 HRs.

Arenado: Drove the offense

What went wrong?

In all honesty, the bottom line was that the other teams won more in October and November as we went into an ill-timed funk. A 17-25 record killed any chances for a playoff run. October was the worst month of pitching that we had and the 7–15 record proved that stat line. Statesmen ownership, looking with 20/20 backward vision, would not have made the mid-season trades had our astrologer predicted the collapse.

3 Things

1. Pitching. The pitching must once again carry the day for a very weak offense. Statesmen mainstay Carlos "Cookie" Carrasco, a year removed from a devastating health scare, once again leads the starting staff into the season. Wheeler is back and strong again but second year pitcher Mike Soroka is working through some off-season injuries that will limit his starts. Taijuan Walker, picked up from Hudson as he recuperated from Tommy John surgery last year, will be a strong arm in the rotation as well. The bullpen will have Trevor Rosenthal, Drew Pomeranz, and Kyle Zimmer anchoring end game scenarios to help the starters hopefully collect wins.

2. The draft. Moving up to the fifth pick in the draft to select Jo Adell will not pay benefits this year – a calculated move to start creating an outfield of players that are actually under 30 years old. It could be a move to keep the team out of the playoffs again but long-term youth in the OF was absolutely needed. The addition of Randy Arozarena late in the first round will help but only for one-third of a season, while Mauricio Dubon adds a little speed and OF games for now and the future.

3. No fall swoon. The schedule for October and November appears to be the most difficult two months for the team based on league wide projections. A fall swoon cannot happen again, otherwise missing the playoffs will certainly again be the club's fate.

strong city STATESMEN

Eric Sheffler (18th year)

What a tease.

Your 2020 draft features a top starting pitcher, who then makes three starts in a shortened season and turns up injured. You also take a once in a generation hitter who performs at a level well below the lofty expectations. And there's the star shortstop who only plays half the season, the future closer who gets suspended, and the All-Star third baseman who hits .253. Your club wins 85 games, which is not enough.

What's more, there are two fierce contenders in the same division, and you're going to have to back and fill in places just to get the rotation, the bullpen, and the lineup in order. So what to do? A timid manager, even a veteran one, would look at the 13th draft position and the rest of the 2021 draft (and the coming 2022 draft) and retool around Guerrero, Arenado, Mondesi, Carrasco, Soroka and the rest, and hope for better times ahead.

But not Sheffler. What a tease. Not only does he make some power moves to bring him the #2 pick overall (at the cost of a considerable amount of 2021 and 2022 future assets), but he uses that pick to take *Jo Adell*, who isn't old enough to drink in most places and who will not help at all this year (as opposed to other players who might), and then Randy Arozerana, who is a big bat right now but might vanish like a puff of smoke. A few pitchers have been brought in to supplement this drive, and maybe – just maybe – they can elbow their way into the playoffs. Are they good enough? Is this a play for a late season move? (If so, it's a move in reverse – their first 2022 pick is a #6). Or are they actually for real and have Jo Adell as the cherry on top?

We don't know. It's certainly not the timid course. But it's admirable for that. But he's still a tease.

Pitching: 9.5
As far as the staff will take them.

The Clemente Division is pitching rich, other than rebuilder Riverwoolf. To play in this arena means running out some good arms, day in and day out.

Carrasco: This is nice

These guys have a fair number of those, though it remains to be seen if there are enough of them to keep in this race.

ROTATION. Let's begin with long time StatesAce Carlos Carrasco (Grade 14 C-15 HR+16) with a full season. This is nice. Also nice is that there are two other full season starters to go with him: Taijuan Walker (Grade 15) and Zack Wheeler

Turnover Rate: 29%

Arrived: Jo Adell, Scott Alexander, Randy Arozarena, Mauricio Dubon, Erick Fedde, Mike Fiers, Luke Jackson, Tim Lopes, Isaac Paredes, Lou Trivino, Kyle Zimmer.

Departed: Austin L. Adams, Jarlin Garcia, Ender Inciarte, Brett Martin, Jordy Mercer, Frankie Montas, Daniel Murphy, Jake Odorizzi.

SNT: Randy Arozerana.
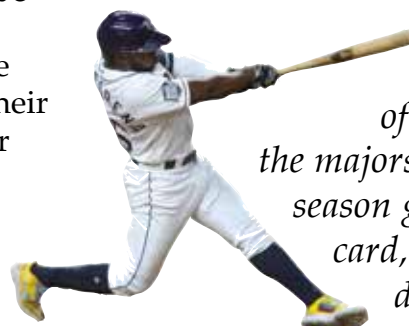
He appeared out of nowhere and took the majors by storm. The short season gave him a big impact card, and he'll make a big difference in this lineup.

(Grade 11 C+34 HR+51, 26 fatigue). They have 92 starts between them. They match up well, though they're not quite as good.

The next tier is competent, spread among several bodies. Erik Fedde (Grade 10 HR-23), Michael Pineda (Grade 10 C+24 HR+62), and Mike Soroka (Grade 12 C-44 HR+62) have 44 starts between them. The rest are taken up by Mike Fiers (Grade 5 C+25), who will eat up innings at least with a 25 fatigue.

BULLPEN. The Statesmen have the services of three capable top end arms, beginning with Trevor Rosenthal (Grade 23* HR+31), who is back after some time in the wilderness. He's joined by rookie Kyle Zimmer (Grade 23* C-52 HR+62) and lefty journeyman Drew Pomeranz (Grade 18* C-61 HR+44). They have 180 innings between them. That should help close out games when the team leads.

Rosenthal: He's back

The middle innings are a bit more of a patchwork. Lou Trivino (Grade 15* C-26), Cam Bedrosian (Grade 14* C-23 HR+62), and Sergio Romo (Grade 12*) work from the right side; Andrew Miller (Grade 13* HR+62), Scott Alexander (Grade 12* C-62) and Daniel Norris (Grade 11* C+26 HR+36) are the southpaws. It's about 300 innings total, and as with Blue Hill, it's probably not quite enough. . . but while they can make a move, this team, as Mr. Sheffler says in his instructions, will go as far as the staff will take them.

Offense: 6.5
Riding two horses.

When we do offensive analysis, we lay out all the cards and examine the principal ones – as we sometimes say, the ones that scare us. But the first card we need to examine affects a lot of what's actually on this roster – and what is not. That bit of cardboard belongs to Joe Adell, the 22-year-old outfielder (2 0s, 6 hits) who won't see very many at bats this year. Because he is *here*, others are not.

What is here is certainly good in places. SNT Randy Arozarena (1-1-1-4, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, 31 SSN for 11 SBA) has the most powerful card when he plays (62 games); similarly, the 78 games of Bo Bichette (1-5-6-6, 11 hits, 31 SSN for 14 SBA) will be fun to roll. Vlad Guerrero isn't quite the player we expect him to be but he is capable (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22). The best full time card, however, belongs to David Peralta (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks, L-8). He plays most days.

We would normally have featured Nolan Arenado, but he's had a bit of an off year (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks). He also misses almost a quarter of the season. Raul Mondesi (6-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 29 SSN for *90* SBA – Holy Vince Coleman!) is a little short, as is Adam Frazier (1-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+22). Mauricio Dubon (2 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L+5 R-4) has a lot of usage; Justin Upton (1-1-6, 8 hits) has a little left in the tank; and Yuliesky Gurriel (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L+8 R-5) will be in many lineups. Yasmani Grandal (1-0-0, 8 hits, 6 walks) will do most of the catching, though Kevin Plawecki (3 0s, 12 hits, 2 walks+42) has a surprisingly good card for a third of the season.

We keep circling back to Jo Adell, who could have been someone like Alec Bohm, Ke'Bryan Hayes, or one of the outstanding pitchers on offer in 2021. Does that mean we disapprove of adding this future star? No, of course not. But the lineup here in Strong City shows the evidence of trying to ride two horses. Hard to say what's right.
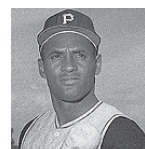
Adell: Starts here

Defense: 5.5
Very good, some outstanding.

Any evaluation of Strong City defense begins with the best corner man in baseball, the peerless Nolan Arenado (3B6). Taking a player like Hayes or Bohm in place of Adell due to their field position certainly doesn't make much sense – Arenado is the franchise player. And he's part of a Fielding One infield: Gurriel (1B5), Frazier (2B8) and Mondesi (SS9) are all excellent as well. Dubon (2B7) and Bichette (SS8) are a step down when they play. Behind the plate, Grandal (C8 Th+6) is almost as good as it gets, with Plawecki (C8 Th+1) is quite useful as well. Vlad Guerrero (1B3) won't have to use his glove very much.

Arenado: Best in the field

In the outfield, David Peralta (OF3, 32 arm) is Fielding One, and all of the other outfielders are OF2s with adequate arms. This is, overall, a very good defense with some outstanding parts.

Bench: 3.0
Some options.

There are some options available for the team, which a reader might find surprising after we have made such an effort to downplay the offense. But there are a lot of choices, giving the club some better looks against certain grades and in late game situations.

There are also some extra bench players. Leury Garcia (1-0-0, 10 hits) can pinch hit especially against lefties; Tim Lopes (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 35 SSN for 14 SBA); and Isaac Paredes is, well, 22.

Still, this is a very viable bench, which makes the offense a little better than we've rated it. The experience of the manager counts a lot here; knowing how to use everyone on the roster when they can best help the cause. We give them credit for that.

3rd

But for all of that, we don't think they can run with the other horses in the division. There isn't quite enough pitching (though it's very good at the top); the lineup isn't the equal of Blue Hill's; and a Fielding One defense will help, but not as much as one more bat would have.

So in the end, what does this tell us? If nothing else, that the decision of who to take, and how to play, is based on what we want our experience to be. The motivations of Brobdingnag, or Warrenton, or anyone else are not the same as Strong City. And that's as it should be.

strong city STATESMEN

Ages of players on the Strong City roster, as of 07/01/2021:

38: Romo
37: Gurriel
36: Fiers, A. Miller
34: Carrasco
33: K. Davis, D. Peralta, Upton
32: Grandal, Pineda, Pomeranz
31: S. Alexander, Rosenthal, W. M. Smith
30: Arenado, L. Garcia, Plawecki, Wheeler
29: Bedrosian, Frazier, L. Jackson, Trivino, Zimmer
28: Fedde, D. Norris, T. Walker
27: Lopes, Newman
26: Arozarena, Dubon
25: Mondesi
23: Bichette, Soroka
22: Adell, Guerrero, Paredes

TQ: **24.5**

2020 riverwoolf SHARKS in review

It's hard to find sunshine in a team that lost 127 games.

by Daniel Dumont

2020 in Review
Final Record: 35-127 (4th, Clemente)

It is hard to lose 127 games. But numbers help us see the problems. Pitching – yes, a 5.94 ERA and only two pitchers with at least six wins. Defense – yes again, with 117 errors leading to 138 unearned runs (1,077 yielded total). Offense – a team batting average of .205 and 167 homers helping to produce only 494 runs. 583 run differential over 162 games – ouch!

After 114 losses in 2019, Riverwoolf is asking Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers to sing their theme song during the seventh inning stretch: "Yeah, I'm free, free falling." The draft brought in some promising talent, but this team has a long way to go to come back to league average.

What went right?

A few hitters had good seasons. Part-timer Tommy La Stella hit .270 in 72 games. Eric Thames slammed 26 home runs and led the team with 58 runs batted in. Matt Beaty did well in a platoon role, hitting 12 long balls in 57 games with a .548 slugging pct. Reliever Tanner Rainey had a good season with a 1.33 ERA and 53 strikeouts in 47 innings. Justin Wilson added a 2.35 ERA and 24 Ks, but he only pitched 23 innings. It's hard to find many rays of sunshine in a team that lost 127 games.

What went wrong?

The team batting average of only .205 was anchored by Jake Lamb, Austin Riley, and Rio Ruiz, who all had averages below .200. Nine batters performed under the Mendoza line in at least 100 at bats. Team on base percentage was .266, and slugging percentage was only .355, both at the very bottom of TBL.

And then there was the pitching, with a team earned run average of 5.94. The top four starting pitchers struggled: Jon Lester (4-15, 4.86); Vince Velazquez (4-17. 6.19); Ivan Nova (6-24, 4.97); Felix Hernandez (6-12, 7.02). The bullpen was a mix and match disaster that usually added gasoline to the fires it inherited.

Thames: HR and RBI

3 Things

1. The starting rotation will be improved in 2020. Number one will be Framber Valdez, and he will be joined by number two Ryan Yarbrough, both lefties. Lester is back as the third lefty, but the rest of the staff will feature Velazquez and newcomers Chris Mazza and Casey Mize. It will still be shaky most days, but there is hope for the future.

2. The bullpen features less gasoline this season. When the Sharks lead they will be more able to keep it. Closer will be Jesse Hahn, with set up from Tanner Rainey and Brad Boxberger, Dan Altavilla will provide some early help. After that, though. . .

3. There will be better hitting this time around. Newcomer Cedric Mullins provides hope in the outfield, and Willi Castro should be a plus in the infield. The Sharks are hoping for a strong season from Tommy LaStella and a better one from Riley. Evan White looks glove-ready but still needs to work on his swing.

riverwoolf SHARKS

Daniel Dumont (4th year)

Progress is the most important word.

It says something about the Riverwoolf Sharks and their evolution that this year, when they are among the leaders in turnover percentage at 55%, it's the *lowest* in years. What's been added is significant; Mr. Dumont had a very good, very focused draft, and will have a chance for another one next year.

Are they good? No, not really; but are they better? Certainly. We will make our usual disparaging remarks about the on-field roster this year, because, well, it's the job of the *Annual* to tell you what we see, and with that solemn duty comes a certain required amount of snark; but keep in mind that this is a work in progress, and that in that sentence *progress* is the most important word.

Pitching: 3.0
The cards still say "Pitcher."

As with nearly every area, this rating represents an upgrade. The pitching staff is still far from major league competitive, but there are some decent guys on the staff. There are two real starters and 100 closer innings, and that means that there will be some good pitching experiences this year. Not many, but at least a few.


Valdez: Best Framber

ROTATION. The starters are led by the best Framber in baseball, Framber Valdez (Grade 10 C+31 HR+36), who has 27 starts. Ryan Yarborough (Grade 9 C+35 HR+32), arrived by trade, has 24. Things kind of spiral down after that; there are four Grade 5s that provide about 90 starts: lefty veteran Jon Lester (Grade 5 C+24 HR-26), and righties Vince Velasquez (C-24),

SNT: Casey Mize.

Perhaps the best pitching prospect in this year's draft, it may take some time for him to reach his potential . . . but the Sharks have plenty of that to spare.
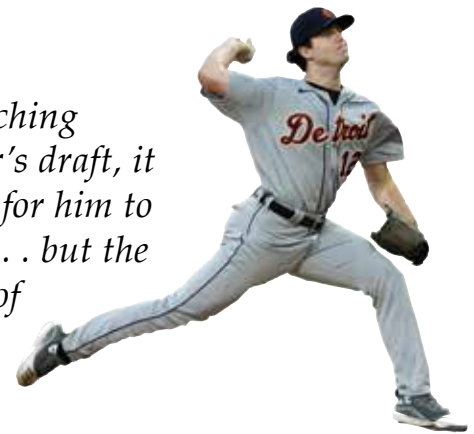
Turnover Rate: 55%

Arrived: Anthony Alford, Dan Altavilla, Christian Arroyo, Drew Butera, Daz Cameron, Willi Castro, Jarrod Dyson, Santiago Espinal, Jesse Hahn, Adeiny Hechavarria, Matt Kemp, Reynaldo Lopez, Chris Mazza, Casey Mize, Adrian Morejon, Cedric Mullins, Michael Perez, Luis Torrens, Austin Voth, Evan White, Ryan Yarbrough.

Departed: Jake Bauers, Keon Broxton, Melky Cabrera, Jhoulys Chacin, Nestor Jr. Cortes, Carlos Estevez, Derek Fisher, Austin Hedges, Felix Hernandez, Dawel Lugo, Russell Martin, Hernan Perez, Dwight Jr. Smith, Andrew Suarez, Eric Thames, Charlie Tilson, Gabriel Ynoa.

Chris Mazza (C-32 HR+31) and the very scary Reynaldo Lopez (C-45 HR-62). Adrian Morejon is almost as disturbing as a Grade 7 (C+33 HR-62). Casey Mize, a Grade 3, has less scary peripherals (C-16 HR-33) but is, well, a 3.

All of this is an improvement on last year's rotation, but they're still mostly cardboard bearing the word 'Pitcher'.

BULLPEN. Jesse Hahn doesn't have the best overall grade, but he's clearly best for the closer role (Grade 17* C-44 HR+62); Tanner Rainey is a Grade 20*, but his HR-34 makes him a little

chancy. (Where are the fences up in Rivière-du-Loup?) Then there are two other useful relievers: Brad Boxberger (Grade 12* C-22) and Dan Altavilla (Grade 8* C-56). This quartet has about 200 innings among them, which is pretty good.

What is less good is that after those four, there may be innings from the two HR-62 guys, some Grade 1s, and waiver acquisition Austin Voth (Grade 2 C+21 HR-46), who actually helps. For games the club is ahead, there's something Riverwoolf can do to preserve the lead. But the rest of the time . . . it'll be a long evening.

Hahn: Best choice

Offense: 4.0
Many choices, few scary.

LaStella: Had pic already

The Riverwoolf roster has many choices, but not very many scary cards. The most solid card once again belongs to Tommy LaStella – we already had the picture in last year's *Annual*, so we just moved it over here. He looks good other than the platoon split (4 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks, L-12 R+2). Rookie Willi Castro looks very good as well (1-4-5, 13 hits, 3 walks+22), and should get every possible at bat. Rookie Cedric Mullins (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 30 SSN for 25 SBA, L-9 R+2) is a very capable all-around threat. J. P. Crawford has settled in as the player we thought he would be (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, 26 SSN for 25 SBA).

And that's all the good news. Rio Ruiz is borderline all right (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks) and Austin Riley has a little power (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks), as does Dwight Smith (1-6-0, 8 hits, 3 walks); but they will generate plenty of outs. After that, there is a parade of, well, *cards*. Matt Kemp (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+4 R-5), Adeiny Hechavarria (6-0, 10 hits, 2 walks), and Luis Torrens (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks) are the best of what has to play. The names that also appear in the standard lineups include Evan White (1-0-0, 7 hits, 3 walks, 13 strikeouts); most-time catcher Michael Perez (2 0s, 6 hits, 3 walks+22, 8 strikeouts); Matt Beaty (1-5, 8 hits, 6 24s), and Alex Gordon (2 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks+42). There are even more outs there.

This lineup is going to have occasional good innings: there is a little speed, some power, and some decent cards. But there will also be many bad innings, in which necessary plate appearances will be filled by guys who should only be used in one of the Guru's replays.

Defense: 3.5
Will extend innings.

There is some good news. J. P. Crawford (SS9) has shown that he can really pick it, and much of the usage behind the plate is very solid: Perez is a C8 with a Th+3, and ageless part-timer Sal Butera is a C8 with a Th+1. Torrens is there for his bat, though (C7 Th-4). Evan White is a 1B5, and can serve defensively if he doesn't start, while Cedric Mullins (OF3, 33 arm) has an excellent defensive card for a rookie, while Alex Gordon's last card has an OF3 with a 34 arm. Hechavarria is a 2B8 when he plays.

Castro: Had to get pic

Then it gets entertaining to say the least. There are two 2B7s (David Bote, Christian Arroyo); LaStella is a 2B6;

and Rio Ruiz is a 2B5 and may get time there. Willi Castro (SS7 2B6 3B3) doesn't have any really good position, and while Ruiz and Espinal are 3B4s, Riley is a 3B3. Beaty, who will play some first base, is a 1B3, as is Jake Lamb. Other than Daz Cameron (OF2), there are a fleet of OF1s.

Crawford: Can pick it

There are quite a few options, but other than Hechavarria and possibly White, there aren't any real defensive replacements. The pitching staff doesn't really need to have any innings extended, but that may well happen.

Bench: 2.5
Interesting assortment.

There is an interesting assortment of players for Mr. Dumont to choose from, which may make it possible to mix and match. In addition to the many options in the offense section above, the Riverwoolf roster includes Drew Butera (6-0, 6 hits), here for his glove; David Bote (1-0-0, 7 hits, 3 walks, 31 SSN for 6 SBA, L-8 R+3); Christian Arroyo (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-7 R+5); Jake Lamb (1-6-6, 7 hits, 3 walks); Santiago Espinal (6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks); and Daz Cameron (2 0s, 8 hits). Jarrod Dyson (7 hits, 3 11s, 35 SSN for 17 SBA) came out of the waiver pile. Anthony Alford (1-1-2, 8 hits, 33 SSN for 8 SBA) is a weird power/speed guy.

It's hard to tell whether this makes the offense that much better, but we reward teams for their versatility.

4th
We don't even think it's necessary to show Captain Obvious when we reveal the expected outcome for the Sharks this season. They'll be high in the draft next year, just as they were high this year. There are still reasons for optimism,

however. This is a matter of lottery tickets in abundance, with a few key players – Crawford, Mullins, Castro, Riley, Valdez, Yarborough – to build around. Distinctive in that list is that all of those guys are under 30.
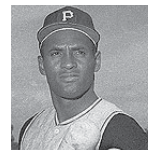
We like the direction this is going. In retrospect, there was less snark than our usual quota. We look forward to being excited about this young team in the making.

riverwoolf SHARKS

Ages of players on the Riverwoolf roster, as of 07/01/2021:

37: Butera, Gordon, Lester
36: J. Dyson, Kemp
34: Nova
33: Boxberger
32: Hechavarria, La Stella
31: Hahn, Mazza
30: Erlin, Lamb
29: Velasquez, Voth, Yarborough
28: Altavilla, Beaty, Bote, Hoffman, Mi. Perez, Rainey, Dw. Smith
27: R. Lopez, Ruiz, F. Valdez
26: Alford, Arroyo, Crawford, Espinal, Mullins
25: Torrens, E. White
24: Cameron, W. Castro, Mize, Riley
22: Morejon

TQ: **13.0**

Three Reverse Gears

2020 Mays Division				
Final Standings				
Team	**W**	**L**	**Pct**	**GB**
Rye*	91	71	.562	—
Maracaibo	74	88	.457	17
Gotham City	70	92	.432	21
New Westminster	62	100	.383	29

* Lost to Brobdingnag in conference semi-final.

The Mays has had its pennant races in the past, involving one or more of its present occupants. Some of them have been epic, down to the last game struggles with the winner going to the postseason and the loser sometimes going home because there just wasn't enough room in the Wild Card for them. This year won't be one of those.

Instead, it's a one-team race. *Walter Hunt*'s **Maracaibo Rumrunners** have cashed in a lot of future and present value to take their shot at the big prize this year. There was too much present value not to contend, so they've gone for it, patching holes and building up a strong pitching staff that will carry them – they hope – through the playoffs.

It would be imprudent to completely write off the **Rye Herons**, however. *Craig Musselman*'s boys can hit, and have *some* pitching – especially in the top part of the starting staff – just not enough for a contender. But they can still hit, with a solid core that's a good deal younger than the aging crew they replaced.

New Hall of Famer *Anton Greenwald* has his work cut out for him this year, though. The offensive deficiencies of the **Gotham City Batmen** are significant, but the real *yeesh* moment comes when you look at the pitching staff. They clearly are bat men this year because they certainly aren't much in the arm department. This is a rebuild in progress, with a lot to do to get them back on top.

Tatis, Bohm, Verdugo, Means – some great names on the roster of the **New Westminster Whiskeyjacks**. *Jim Jeatt*'s crew is in the middle of a get-younger, get-more-talented rebuild, but this year's edition of the team is engaged in a quick race to the bottom for the same reason as Gotham City – a deficiency of good arms on the mound. They lost 100 games last year and may easily hit that mark again this year; they and Dr. Anton's team are very close in this race, two of the three reverse gears in the Mays.
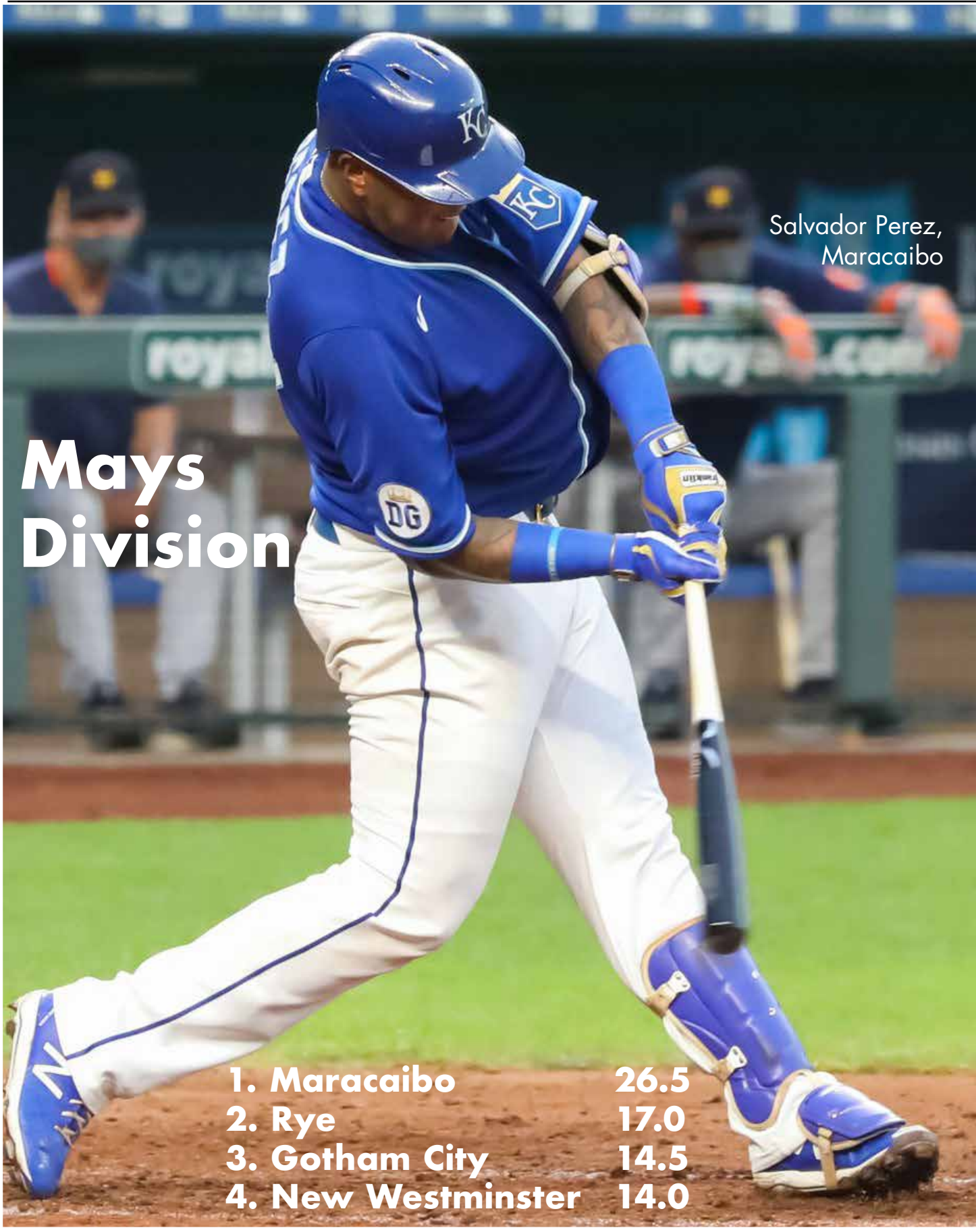
Salvador Perez,
Maracaibo

Mays Division

1. Maracaibo	26.5
2. Rye	17.0
3. Gotham City	14.5
4. New Westminster	14.0

2020 maracaibo RUMRUNNERS in review

It was a season to amuse, but not one especially to remember.

by Walter Hunt

2020 in Review
Final Record: 74-88 (2nd, Mays)

It was never going to be a contending season, so at least there was no suspense. What's more, compared to the previous year (where the club actually won three more games and was just as anticlimactic) this was actually a *fun* team to manage. They hit more than 200 homers, and the very limited bullpen performed better than expected. They beat anticipated results too: they once again didn't lose 100 games (as was suggested by some pre-season predictions, including this publication.) Still, it would be presumptuous to call the season a success. Not a contender, not a real early draft position – don't we explicitly advise against that sort of cleft stick?

What went right?

Starling Marte had a great season. He hit 34 homers and drove in 82. He contributed a .283/.326/.528 slash line, and stole 13 of 15. He was joined by another bright spot: Danny Santana (.280-27-69, 10 steals) who played all over the place. He struck out a lot, but the whole team did, and he started rallies and kept them going.

Santana: Bright spot

On the mound, rookie Sandy Alcantara won 12 and veteran Cole Hamels won 10; but the real stars were the relievers. Keone Kela saved 25 in 29 innings, Greg Holland was very wild but recorded a 2.00 ERA, and Diego Castillo won 6 and saved 11, striking out 72 in 65 innings. Overall, the team had only 12 complete games, so the bullpen was active in all of the rest.

What went wrong?

The .292 OBP and 4.72 ERA, 1,367 strikeouts and being outscored 801-678 suggest how remarkable it was that they recorded 74 wins. The team overperformed, despite six players with 100 or more Ks, no starter with an ERA under 4.32, and some miserable performances on both sides of the ball (Arcia .181, despite 17 homers; Dylan Moore .218, German Marquez 5.18 with 209 hits in 182 innings, Jake Arrieta 4-11, 6.08). They must have hit in the clutch or something.

It was a season to amuse, but not one especially to remember.

3 Things

1. Going out on a limb in 2021. The club has cashed in a lot of chips to have a contender: a new second baseman, half a new rotation, some more bullpen – is it worth it? The real answer has to be *yes*; what was already here deserved to contend, since entropy is powerful.

2. The contender is fragile. It doesn't all hinge on Eloy Jimenez, but it's important that the current roster performs well in the current season – there is no way to really replace it (except for a sole #2). It means that Perez, Marte, Cain and the rest have to earn their salaries.

3. Sanchez, Madrigal, and other younger guys must step up. In order to be good for longer than 2021, the picks have to work out, and players like Dylan Moore and Raimel Tapia (and others) have to prove that it wasn't a fluke.

maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

Walter Hunt (35th year); Hall of Famer

Avoid the Capitulation Rebuild.

It's become a TBL mantra over the years - "Winning is more fun than losing." There may be no one in TBL that despises losing more than TBL Hall of Famer Walter Hunt. The Maracaibo Rumrunners have used every resource over the years to try and avoid the Capitulation Rebuild – the 46 win season that kicks off a long climb back to contention. The 74 wins in 2020 is as close to bottoming out as Maracaibo is likely to get.

It's been four years since the Rumrunners posted a winning record, and 5 long years – going back to their 101-win 2016 season in the Aaron Division – since they won over 90 games. The *Annual* is predicting that the drought ends this year. There's a lot to like here.

Pitching: 12.0
A lot to like.

ROTATION. This part of the team has gotten a lot of attention over the last few years. The Rumrunners picked promising youngster Sixto Sanchez (Grade 10 C+24 HR+34, 19 starts) in the 2021 draft after stockpiling Sandy Alcantara (Grade 13 HR+26, 19 starts) and Dylan Cease (Grade 13 C-53 HR+25, 32 starts) in the second round in 2020.

Turnover Rate: 29%

Arrived: Rafael Dolis, Derek Fisher, Ben Gamel, Shane Greene, Dinelson Lamet, Nick Madrigal, Jake McGee, Jose Marmolejos, Sixto Sanchez, Jonathan Schoop, Ryan Weber.

Departed: Colten Brewer, Jeff Brigham, Ian Desmond, Adeiny Hechavarria, Clay Holmes, Danny Santana, Matt Strahm, Sam Travis.

SNT: Sixto Sanchez.

A 21 year old fireballing righty from Miami, Sanchez was one of the top starters in a draft brimming with quality pitching. Maracaibo snapped him up with the #9 pick in the February 2021 draft.

None of those guys is the staff ace, however. Dinelson Lamet (Grade 21 C+16 HR+35, 32 starts, 22 fatigue) was acquired in a blockbuster off-season deal with Rocky Mountain. His terrific grade and peripherals match up with almost any starter in the league. His 22 fatigue is a minor annoyance, but it's actually pretty good by modern standards.

After the top 4 horses, Maracaibo hands the ball without hesitation to the durable German Marquez (Grade 9 C+21 HR+36, 35 starts, 26 fatigue). The top five starters have 137 solid starts between them. Ryan Weber (Grade 8 C+15 HR-21, 14 starts) and veteran Jake Arrieta (Grade 4, 24 starts) will labor for the other 25.

Lamet: Staff ace

This group is excellent. The real wild card is probably Cease with his scary peripherals, but Maracaibo should be well-positioned to hand it to the pen most days.

BULLPEN. The template for the Maracaibo bullpen is Mariano Rivera, who had ludicrous peripherals to go with his ludicrous grades. The HR ratings are key here. When Walter's serious about winning, he's defeating the homer close and late.

Greg Holland (Grade 18* C+32 HR+53, 79 IP) is tabbed to do his best Mariano impression this year. He's the closer, chosen over a few guys with higher grades because of his sparkly peripherals.

The two setup guys are Diego Castillo (Grade 21* C-45, 59 IP) and Rafael Dolis (Grade 22* C-62 HR+52, 66 IP). Neither can find the plate with a hound dog and a GPS, but those grades will play, and Dolis in particular will be outstanding with the huge homer number. Between the top 3 there are 204 innings of Grade 18*+ relief.

maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

The bridge crew has lefties in it – unlike the three mentioned above. Jake McGee (Grade 16* C+43 HR+24, 55 IP) and Ryan Borucki (Grade 16* C-52 HR+44, 46 IP) will torture left-handed hitting. The excellent Shane Greene (Grade 14* C+16 HR+35, 76 IP) will be a busy man this year, working through the middle innings. These three add 177 more quality innings of 8-stealing goodness.

There is some bulk relief as well. Mark Melancon (Grade 10* C+36 HR+51, 63 IP) – formerly a closer with this team – is still good enough to contribute big in a support role. Jalen Beeks (Grade 8* C+34 HR+45, 53 IP) lacks the grade but has the signature Rumrunner peripherals. Joe Kelly (Grade 10* C-62 HR+62, 3 starts, 27 IP) and Ryan Weber's 66 IP as a Grade 8* also show up here. That's 209 more innings. Everyone steals hits.

The total is 590 innings of very solid bullpen. This pen has a championship look.

Offense: 9.0
Power hitting club.

The typical Maracaibo championship offense leads the league in hits, has respectable power and plus speed. That's not this team. The wacky world of COVID baseball turned Maracaibo into a power hitting club.

The star of this show is Eloy Jiminez (1-1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks) – the first round draft pick from last year. He had a great season, and he'll bat cleanup all year. Salvador Perez (1-1-5-6-6, 13 hits, 100 games) is similarly tricked out after bashing the ball all over the place for eight weeks. The only downside is he takes three months off. Mitch Moreland (1-1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-10) hits fifth on the boards, and gives the Rumrunners a really frightening middle of the order.

Setting up the monsters in the middle are speedy Dylan Moore (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+2 42s, 27 SSN for 48 SBA) and Raimel Tapia (2 0s, 12 hits, 3 walks, 138 games). Now *that* is a Maracaibo card.

The bottom of the lineup brings the lumber but in a modest way. Maikel Franco (1-0-0-0,

Jimenez: Cleanup

10 hits, 2 walks, 162 games) is still the third baseman here, and will play against all right-handed starters. Against lefties, the talented Isiah Kiner-Falefa (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+11 R-6) plays third base. Starling Marte (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, 32 SSN for 34 attempts) bats towards the bottom of the lineup because he doesn't have five power numbers like the rest of the lads. Jonathan Schoop (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, 5 24s) and Orlando Arcia (3 0s, 10 hits, 6 24s) bat eighth and ninth, and will be hoping no one is on base when they come to bat.

Marte: Speed, not power

This lineup will pound most pitching staffs into a jelly. The guys at the top get on base and the power in the middle is considerable. They will score runs.

Defense: 5.0
Good, though not elite.

Maracaibo typically has airtight defense during their championship runs. This team is excellent in some positions, but has a few tender spots.

The strength of the team is at catcher where Salvador Perez (C9, Th+2) holds court. Jonathan Schoop (2B9) is an elite second baseman, but his backup is young Nick Madrigal (2B7). Starling Marte (OF3, 34 arm) is a stud in right. Mitch Moreland (1B5) has been terrific here for years, but Dylan Moore (1B3) will struggle.

Schoop: Elite

Orlando Arcia (SS8) is down a notch this year from previous ratings. He has no decent backup so he's out there all year. Maikel Franco (3B4) is pretty good, and he has Kiner-Falefa (3B5) backing him up nicely. The outfield include two pedestrians – Eloy Jiminez (OF2, 30 arm) and Raimel Tapia (OF2, 32 arm) are average defenders.

Maracaibo is pretty good defensively, but not elite.

Bench: 2.5
Some nice hitters

There are some nice hitters on the bench. Nick Madrigal (6, 12 hits, 1 walk+42, L-7 R+3, 78 games) will get plenty of run on this team with his excellent contact profile. He is really a throwback hitter – very light power but typically a really high average, like Tommy Herr or Dick Groat. His career in this age of Home Run Derby will be very interesting.

Derek Fisher (4 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks, 43 games), Ben Gamel (4 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks) and Jose Trevino (5 0s, 10 hits, 1 walk, 65 games) would sneak into the starting lineups of most teams, but here they offer some nice pinch hitting possibilities and they make Maracaibo a team you don't want to match benches with in extra innings. Matt Wieters (6, 8 hits, 2 walks+42, 53 games) is here for defense if Salvatore Perez needs a day off.

Luis Rengifo and Jose Marmolejos are here to tend the tomato garden in the bullpen. This bench will help in some games.

Ages of players on the Maracaibo roster, as of 07/01/2021:

37: Hamels
36: Melancon
35: Arrieta, Cain, G. Holland, Moreland, Wieters
34: McGee
33: Dolis, J. Kelly
32: Greene, S. Marte
31: S. Perez
30: Weber
29: Gamel, Schoop
28: Beede, M. Franco, Kela, Lamet, Marmolejos, D. Moore, J. Trevino
27: Beeks, Borucki, D. Castillo, D. Fisher, Tapia
26: O. Arcia, Dominguez, Kiner-Falefa, Marquez
25: Alcantara, Cease
24: Jimenez, Madrigal, Rengifo
22: S. Sanchez

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Madrigal: Throwback

1st

Leagues ahead of their nearest competition in the Mays. With Walter's trade for Lamet in the offseason, the Runrunners zagged with everyone else in the division zigged. They are comfortably better than every other team in the division in almost every category.

The question is what this coming year – and the next one – may bring. This team has made a major roster shift from its last period of success: Maracaibo traded for Lamet, for Schoop, for Greene, and (during the draft) for Dolis and McGee. These are all contender acquisitons. But consider what's come on to the roster through the draft: almost the entire present and future starting rotation (Dylan Cease, Sixto Sanchez, Sandy Alcantara, and possibly Tyler Beede if he makes a comeback). Injury notwithstanding, Eloy Jimenez was the biggest addition to the roster in recent years. Nick Madrigal has very little power, but could be an on-base star in years to come. Tapia, Moore, even someone like Rengifo, are young enough that their better years might be ahead of them.

But this comes at a cost. Maracaibo has less in the draft than almost any time in the last two decades. They have a second rounder – and an eighth rounder. There is no real way to improve what's there now without giving up something. This is what you get: what you see now. If there are major problems, this could be one year of success and then back to the drawing board.

TQ: **26.5**
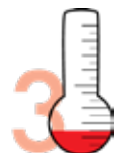
2020 rye HERONS in review

A wait and see approach.

by Craig Musselman

2020 in Review
Final Record: 91-71 (1st, Mays)

In a year in which the other three teams in the Mays division were in rebuild mode, Rye prepared to make the playoffs, but with a wary eye on the league-dominant Brobdingnag. Rye coasted to a 91-71 record and a playoff berth but unfortunately drew Brobdingnag as a first-round opponent. Down three games to none, fine pitching performances by Gio Gonzalez and Kirby Yates saved Rye from a sweep, but Brobdingnag went on to win the playoff series four games to two.

What went right?

Rye's offense was exciting and was dangerous throughout the batting order. Three guys had over 100 RBI (Jose Abreu, J.T. Realmuto and Whit Merrifield) and two guys scored over 100 runs (Alex Bregman and Merrifield). Paul DeJong had 41 homers, and Abreu had 34. Three other guys were in the 20s, as the team had 200 home runs on the year. All went according to plan.

Abreu: Part of the plan

What went wrong?

A September trade was wrong-headed. That was known at the time, but Rye made the trade anyway. Midwest was offering dominant closer Kirby Yates and Gio Gonzalez for a #2 and #4. Throughout September, I told myself, *don't do that, it's dumb.* At the last minute, with pandemic related confusion regarding 2021 prospects, I did it anyway. As was predictable, the trade was insufficient to overcome the talent disparity in the playoffs, and the traded 2021 draft picks severely limited the team's ability to be competitive again in 2021. Midwest traded away those two pieces, still made the playoffs, and lost as one would predict with or without the trade. I do believe that the Guru may still be chuckling some, not at my expense, but at having made such a deft trade. Rye's trade was just plain dumb.

3 Things

1. Pitching. The Rye brain trust manages eight APBA baseball franchises with equal interest, focus and both roster-building and game-playing fun. In 2021, two are league-dominant, four are fully competitive playoff contenders, and two, including the TBL Rye Herons, are not competitive. The Herons do not have adequate pitching in 2021, although the offense is solid. Early in the offseason, there was thought of trading more 2022 draft picks to maintain 2021 playoff chances, but that plan was replaced by a wait and see approach, pending the return of the team's two best starting pitchers, Chris Sale and Jameson Taillon, in 2022. Either the team will be competitive then, or a partial rebuild will be in order.

2. Winning year to year. Rye has never bought into the TBL boom/bust/massive rebuild franchise management model. It seems that as more teams go through massive rebuilds, the potential success and rate of the rebuild declines.

3. Rye has hope for 2022. Sale and Taillon should come back, Hyun-Jin Ryu should pitch well for Rye, there are enough starters otherwise to have a good rotation, and the offense has good potential for several more years. And I got my second COVID shot, so there should be several more years.

rye HERONS

Craig Musselman (16th year)

This is an off year for Rye due to the pitching staff, but the offense will be fun.

We pride ourselves at the *Annual* staff with our fearless prognostications for the season. We win some, we lose some — but last year we said Mr. Musselman's club would win the Mays Division and it did just that. Rye has a solid core on offense, and all things being equal, we could have expected that the Herons would do well again this season. Alas, covid hit in real life and the pitching staff fell apart for this season.

The TQ says Rye is just a little bit better than division rivals Gotham City and New Westminster. The difference, however, is an offense that looks more capable than that of its equally pitching challenged rivals. The Herons have not lost their offensive mojo, and if we had to make a call here, we would suggest that Mr. Musselman's team is going to fare better than he thinks despite poor pitching. Teams have pitching flaws all around TBL this year—and this is a lineup that looks to be able to capitalize on those flaws. It's not good enough to catch Maracaibo to win the division this season, but it should outpace the other two teams to cement a second place finish.

SNT: Hyun-Jin Ryu.

An SNT for the second straight year – last year for Munich, this year for Rye. He's not as new, but is still shiny.

Pitching: 4.5
Some quality, but not enough.

The Herons have 100 starts of Grade 11 or better, and the peripherals are not too bad. The final 62 starts drop precipitously, however, and will cause great consternation in Rye. There are over 300 innings of relief Grade 11 or higher, but control and HR ratings are scary. After that . . . well, as Mr. Musselman writes in his instructions, this is another squad that will staple its starters to the mound until pounded out to conserve the better relief innings. That is the recurring theme in the Mays Division this season.

Singer: Capable

ROTATION. Stapling the starters might work a little better in Rye than it will elsewhere in the Mays. The top four starters are very serviceable. Hyun-Jin Ryu is the ace (Grade 13 C+25 HR+31). Rookie Brady Singer (Grade 12) will be a capable number two, and Joe Musgrove (Grade 12) is a pretty close number three. Jaime Barria is a workable fourth starter (Grade 11 C+25 HR+26), but he is available only 11 times.

Turnover Rate: 24%

Arrived: Connor Brogdon, Carlos Estevez, Bryan Garcia, Cam Hill, Taylor Jones, T.J. McFarland, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Brady Singer, Taylor Widener.

Departed: Victor Alcantara, Andrew Cashner, Roenis Elias, Jeff Samardzija, Marcus Walden, Kirby Yates.

rye HERONS

After that, it's Adrian Houser (Grade 4), Gio Gonzalez (Grade 4 C-45 HR-14) and Trevor Williams (Grade 2 HR-43). The Herons will be in a number of games with their offense, but the lower part of the rotation will make them high scoring affairs.

BULLPEN. Mr. Musselman has himself a closer in Bryan Garcia (Grade 18* C-26 HR+62), although he is a tad wild. The problem will be getting the game to him for the save. His set up men are more than a little shaky. Nick Wittgren is the best available (Grade 13* C+41 HR-16), while Taylor Widener (Grade 14* C-46 HR-41) and Cam Hill (Grade 14* C+31 HR-36) will be homer-prone. Connor Brogdon (Grade 11* HR-56) is similarly afflicted. Jared Hughes (Grade 7* C-33 HR+21) is the best of the rest, which includes T. J. McFarland (Grade 4* HR-35), Josh Osich (Grade 2* HR-56), and some Grade 1*s. Games that get out of hand will *really* get out of hand.

Wittgren: Best available

Offense: 6.5
Solid at the plate.

The upside to the Herons in 2021 is its hitting. This team will hit and it will score runs. Most positions are filled capably with only a few weak spots. There are some bad splits, so the directions call for opposing managers to be certain to use the bench to soften some of that blow. While the bench is not as good as it has been in the past, there are some options there that can provide a hit when needed in a key spot in a game.

The regulars are led by J. T. Realmuto (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks) and first baseman Jose Abreu (1-1-0-0, 12 hits, 2 walks). David Fletcher continues to be a pesky on base machine (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks). Marcell Ozuna (1-1-5-6, 11 hits, 5 walks) and Whit Merrifield (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks) are solid contributors.

Abreu: Leader

Designated hitter Ty France (0-0-6, 11 hits, 3 walks+42) is very good though he's saddled with a L-12. Austin Slater platoons with Ozuna and kills lefties (1-0-0, 9 hits, 6 walks+1 42, L+7). Paul DeJong is workmanlike and best thought of for his glove (2 0s, 9 hits) in a down year. Alex Bregman is also down but solid with the glove (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks). Tony Kemp (0-6) and Delino DeShields (2 0s) platoon in center and provide speed but little offense. Still, it is a solid team at the plate.

Defense: 3.5
Good infield, average outfield.

Bregman (3B-5) and DeJong (SS-9) are stellar on the left side of the infield. Fletcher is fine as a 2B-8, and Abreu gets a 1B-4. Realmuto is a C-8, but only a Th-0 this season. The outfield is OF2s weak arms, except when Ozuna takes his OF1 out to left.

There is no help on the bench for late in the games that is appreciably better, although Mr. Musselman instructs us to get Ozuna off the field late in games Rye leads. Most games Rye will be close to Fielding One.

DeJong: Stellar

Bench: 2.5
Some options.

There are two nice pieces on the bench, Guillermo Heredia (1-1) and Daniel Robertson (10 hit numbers, 3 walks, no power). Mr. Musselman must be wondering what happened to Mallex Smith and Matt Joyce, who appear to have lost the ability to put a bat on a ball in a meaningful way. Joyce does have 5 walks, so he has some value as a pinch-walker.

Dustin Garneau is a C-6 who does not hit well, and Smith, Taylor Jones, and J. T. Riddle will be used very sparingly. Thankfully, the Herons have a pretty solid offense with platoon partners where needed to overcome the worst of the bad splits. The bench shortage will not be as bad as it might be for other TBL teams this season.

2nd Overall, Rye is a better team than its closest rivals in Gotham City and New Westminster. Over the course of the season, this could amount to fairly significant difference in wins between the Herons and the other two. We don't bet at the *Annual,* but if we did it would seem likely that Mr. Musselman is going to happily take a mini-bounce this season and be ready to compete strongly again in 2022. A drop to second place from his position atop the Mays last season is not such a far drop. The pieces are in place for this team for the future, especially on offense, and the team is still working towards making itself younger on a gradual pace.

The bounce back will depend largely on improving the pitching staff. Some of the pieces for that may be here already. Some of the pitchers are young and can provide hope to management for better seasons in the near future. Rye management tends to stay the course.

Mr. Mussleman manages his teams well, builds benches that can provide help for the lineup, and knows how to use a pitching staff to its best advantage. This is not a franchise afraid to hold on to its best players for the long term, masterfully plugging in younger players relatively seamlessly to keep the ship afloat.

This is definitely a mini-bounce season, but Mr. Musselman hints in his instructions that he intends to enjoy it, whether it ends well or poorly. Keep your eyes on this team as you watch it make that bounce.

rye HERONS

Ages of players on the Rye roster, as of 07/01/2021:

36: Joyce
35: J. Hughes
34: Abreu, Ryu, Singer
33: Garneau
32: McFarland, Merrifield, Osich, Workman
30: Heredia, Ozuna, Realmuto, Wittgren
29: T. Kemp, Riddle, Sparkman, T. Williams
28: DeShields, Estevez, P. Fry, Houser, Musgrove, Slater, M. Smith
27: Bregman, DeJong, Fletcher, C. Hill, T. Jones, D. Robertson
26: Brogdon, France, B. Garcia, Widener
24: Barria

TQ: **17.0**
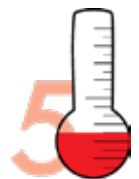
2020 gotham city BATMEN in review

Gotham City has always been known for hitting home runs.

by Anton Greenwald

2020 in Review
Final Record: 70-92 (3rd, Mays)

Forgettable. That is a quick but accurate summary. Gotham City is rebuilding and we finished at 70-92. Not bad enough for an early draft pick and nowhere good enough to get into the playoffs. We pieced together a pitching staff that served but couldn't hold up with just one starter over .500. We had some offense with five players having OPS over .800 but not much higher. Injuries in MLB the year before derailed the heart of the team and I just can't bring myself to continue to talk about last year in TBL.

What went right?

Gotham City started rebuilding trying to fix the infield first; and so far, it looks OK. We have an SS9 who is a decent hitter in Willy Adames (27 doubles and 13 HRs). We have a third baseman, Gio Urshela, who can field (3B5 in 2021) and hit (.304 with 34 HRs and 41 doubles in TBL). One of our second basemen can hit (Luis Arraez, .298 in TBL) but none, except for backup new addition Tyler Wade, can field and Wade can't hit. Ji-Man Choi looks like he might actually play first base instead of mostly DH but our second draft pick this year, Bobby Dalbec, is expected to fix that. Future catcher TBD. Our main hope, Tom Murphy, broke his foot in spring training in 2020 and will not play in TBL.

Urshela: We have a 3B

What went wrong?

Our pitching was *bad* in 2020. Only one starter had a positive year, Anibal Sanchez, but he washed out in MLB in 2020 and should retire!

Eduardo Rodriguez (7-11, 5.37), Jakob Junis (7-16, 5.46) and Danny Duffy (8-12, 6.18) all struggled. The bullpen was in and out, with some guys doing really well and the others not so much.

3 Things

1. This year our starters are weak again. Grades are only 8, 8, 7, 7, 4, 1, 1 with one-fourth of the season going to the bottom 1's. We traded one good reliever and a draft choice closer (for a pick next year) so that our bullpen is below par (16, 14, 13, 13, 11, 9, 9, 9, 8, 7, 1) but has sufficient innings. Next year? Some of this crew should still be playing by the end of the 2021 season. Believing that fixing batters comes first, pitching will suffer another long year but things may look up for 2022. A number of our relievers started games in 2020 and without devastating injuries, Gotham City could have a decent rotation by then. Rodriguez, who sat out MLB in 2020 should be back after a bout with COVID.

2. Gotham City has always been known for hitting home runs. We hope that Anthony Santander and Dalbec continue this legacy, leading GC back into contention soon.

3. Half seasons. In MLB Giancarlo Stanton, Santander, and Tommy Pham did very well when healthy, but that was only for half a season each. We hope that our first draft pick, Kyle Lewis, plays up to promise. If Mark Canha can contribute we might have five really good outfielders here with Stanton moving to DH.

gotham city BATMEN

Anton Greenwald (36th year, Hall of Famer)

Many of these are not pitching names a manager wants on his roster for too long.

Gotham City won 70 games last year, finishing third in the Mays. We here at the *Annual* think that third place is the high end again this season, but the TQ suggests there may well be fewer than 70 wins and that the Batmen will be in a battle with New Westminster to get out of the basement. Mr. Greenwald is in the middle of a rebuild, and as always, he is sacrificing pitching staff in the now to build back an offense worthy of the name "Batmen."

The problems are twofold for this season. First, the offense is not quite there yet with several platoons exposing some of its weakness. And then there is the pitching. A team needs someone to throw the ball over the plate consistently in a way that will end in 27 outs if it wants to win.

That is the major issue for this year. Too many low grade starters, not enough quality relievers, and bad peripherals everywhere we look. It is going to be a long summer in Gotham City as the rebuild carries on.

Pitching: 2.5
Just say no to the bullpen.

There are four starters with Grades 8 or 7, but only for 97 starts. So, again this season, there is no ace. That means that 65 truly awful starts remain to be filled. Mr. Greenwald instructs us to staple those hurlers to the mound for at least five, and then even more innings if the score is really, really bad against the Batmen. When it is bullpen time, there is just not enough to have hope of many winning efforts. It's always problematic when instructions refer to the relievers by Grade rather than name, and Mr. Greenwald tells us to "use the 16, 14, and 13" as both the set up men and the closers. The lefty specialist is

SNT: Kyle Lewis.

Newest of the Batmen in training—will he fit the mold? Gotham City hopes Lewis will be one of the stars in an outfield of five good ones.

Turnover Rate: 32%

Arrived: Keegan Akin, Tyler Alexander, Bobby Dalbec, Randy Dobnak, Tom Eshelman, Jose Garcia, Sam Howard, Anthony Kay, Ian Kennedy, Kyle Lewis, Martin Maldonado, Tyler Wade.

Departed: Brandon Dixon, Wilmer Font, Greg Garcia, Chi Chi Gonzalez, Nick Goody, Jonathan Lucroy, Matt Magill, Yusmeiro Petit, Anibal Sanchez.

denoted as "any lefty." This is going to get ugly quickly.

ROTATION. Danny Duffy (Grade 8) and Nate Eovaldi (Grade 8 C+44) are the aces for this season. Rookies Randy Dobnak (Grade 7 C+24 HR+42) and Keegan Akin (Grade 7 HR+23) start 43 times. Lefty Jordan Montgomery (Grade 4 C+35) takes the next 27 starts. That gets the Batmen to 120 starts of low average. Jacob Junis (Grade 1 HR-45) and Michael Wacha (Grade 1 HR-41) are terrible in the remainder of the starts. This is a disaster waiting to happen. We

Eovaldi: One of the aces

pride our clear vision at the *Annual* staff workroom, and we can see the fire three blocks away, smell the smoke rising, and hear the clang of the fire bells as they wheel into place the …

Reyes: Keeps it in the park

BULLPEN. …and here come the no-name firemen to the rescue. Some of these men have good skills, and they will actually knock down the blaze. Alex Reyes (Grade 16* C-62 HR+46) is wild but will keep the ball in the park for 57 innings. Richard Bleier (Grade 14* C+36 HR+62) will likely be the best "closer" thanks to his peripherals. Matt Andriese (Grade 13*) is the innings eater with average ability to put out a fire. Thus we have names for the 16*, 14* and 13*.

The middle men all pour gasoline on any fire they see, and they have plenty of innings to work their magic. Luis Perdomo (Grade 11* C-56 HR-15), Chaz Roe (Grade 9* HR+62, but only 26 innings), Tom Eshelman (Grade 9* HR-26), Tyler Alexander (Grade 8* HR-33 for 107 innings), and Anthony Kay (Grade 7* C-55) mix and match various flammable elements. Haven't seen enough? How about two Grade 1*s in Dellin Betances (C-62) and Ian Kennedy (HR-62)? That fire we saw from several blocks away at the *Annual* staff building? We are driving home and can still see it in the rear view mirror no matter where we go.

Offense: 5.5
Not enough here this year.

This is not the Batmen offense we are used to seeing in contending years. There are some good pieces, some interesting ones, and some names that should just not be on the back of a Batmen uniform. The infield is promising,

with Gio Urshela (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks) at third base and a first base platoon of Ji-Man Choi (4 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks) and rookie Bobby Dalbec (1-1-1-6, 9 hits, 4 walks+42). Willy Adames (1-5-6-6, 9 hits, 4 walks) looks like an emerging power source and defensive whiz at shortstop.

In the outfield there's half a season of the oft-injured Giancarlo Stanton (1-5-6-6, 8 hits, 6 walks+42). He will share with Anthony Santander (1-1-0-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks), a nice part of the Gotham future

Dalbec: Rookie power

Then there is the promising Luis Arraez (0-0-6, 12 hits, 2 walks), a likely batting champ, and SNT Kyle Lewis (1-5, 9 hits, 5 walks), who doesn't quite fit the Batmen mold. That might be a good thing.

Mark Canha (0-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks+42) and the platoon of Robinson Chirinos (2 0s) and Martin Maldonado (1-6) are in the lineup for their gloves rather than their bats. Dan Vogelbach (1-0-0) and Matt Carpenter (0-6) round out the lineup and they appear to have made a pact with Tommy Pham (2 0s) to throw their bats into the conflagration created by the pitching staff for this season.

Defense: 4.5
Some flashy leather.

This team will catch the ball, however, as they steam their way out of the towering inferno. Lewis and Santander are OF3s, but all four outfielders have weak arms. Adames (SS9) and Urshela (3B5) are strong on the left side, and Wade (2B8) helps when Gotham City has a lead. Maldonado is a C9, Th+3, but Chirinos is a Th-4. Choi and Dalbec are adequate at first base.

Urshela: Strong

Bench: 2.0
Depends on who is in the lineup.

There will be some moves possible due to the platoons at catcher, first, and second base. Vogelbach provides power off the bench when he does not start, and there's a defensive replacement at second – Tyler Wade (1-6, 6 hits, 4 walks+42) – but he can't hit. Pham can pinch run, and the rest depends on which side of the various platoons are in the lineup. There is a good deal of usage; the problem is that it just doesn't make things that much better.

3rd This team is not close to contending this season, and it will be a battle for the Batmen to climb out of the cellar; fortunately they have competition up in Canada. Mr. Greenwald is building *his* kind of team, however, in the way he always does. First and foremost, there are players who can hit for power. They may not do this as much as he would like to see this season, but the hope is there for the future. He loves on base percentage — and this is a team with lots of guys who have plenty of walk and hit by pitch numbers. He has some speed in Adames and Pham, but when a team is built for power, speed is an afterthought. He has guys who can catch the ball on a regular basis. The offense is weak this year, to be sure; but if his quality players come back next season ready to fill the bases and hit some home runs, this rebuild will pick up speed.

This is the second consecutive season that the pitching staff is a mess. Duffy, Montgomery, and Reyes are the best bets for the future, but clearly many of the current staff should rent, not buy. There comes a point when the words "pitcha, pitcha, pitcha" need to be said earlier in the draft to create massive change. They'll likely have strong draft position in 2022, which just might allow him to go after both offense and pitching successfully. And if he can, we all know that he can be a force to be reckoned with. Let's hope the rebuild is quick for the Batmen.

gotham city BATMEN

Ages of players on the Gotham City roster, as of 07/01/2021:

37: R. Chirinos
36: I. Kennedy
35: Carpenter
34: Bleier, Maldonado
33: Betances, Pham
32: Canha, Duffy, Roe
31: Andriese, Eovaldi, Stanton
30: Choi, Wacha
29: Urshela
28: Sa. Howard, Junis, J. Montgomery, Perdomo, Vogelbach
27: Eshelman
26: Akin, T. Alexander, Dalbec, Dobnak, Kay, A. Reyes, Santander, Ty. Wade
25: Adames, K. Lewis, Long
24: Arraez
23: Jo. Garcia

TQ: **14.5**

2020 new westminster WHISKEYJACKS in review

Pitching is something that we don't do well.

by Jim Jeatt

2020 in Review
Final Record: 62-100 (4th, Mays)

A 62 win season for the Whiskeyjacks in 2020 was a 12 game improvement on 2019. The win total was bitterly disappointing. Reading the headlines in pre-season, management believed that a pennant run was possible. The New West boys were out by nine games by the end of April. At 14 games behind by the end of May the dream was gone. The season provided few moments of joy as the season slogged to its conclusion.

What went right?

On offense the individual totals for the leaders were low but new players held big roles in the line-up. Fernando Tatis began his potential Hall of Fame career batting .265 with 13 HR and 33 RBI in 84 games. He was assisted by Willie Calhoun (.268 with 23 HR and 46 RBI) and Alex Verdugo (.290, 13 HR, and 55 RBI).

Verdugo: Nice rookie season

Nick Ahmed and Christian Vazquez led the club with 59 RBI each. Jonathan Schoop led the club with 26 homers.

What went wrong?

A roster of Grade 12 starters was supposed to deliver positive results. The combination of Domingo German, Chris Bassitt, Robbie Ray, Alex Young, and Jason Vargas went 35-69. The games were generally lost before the bullpen cart warmed up. Including Adam Plutko there were four starters with an ERA over 5. Good work by relievers Hector Neris and Junior Guerra was wasted as too often games were long gone before they came in to put out fires.

3 Things

1. The 2019 Draft. Fernando Tatis, Alex Verdugo, John Means and Chris Bassitt were all drafted in 2019 and are already having a positive impact on the club. These players are the start of a core of players who could help the team back to .500. The problem at present is that there is not much depth. The 2020 draft netted a solid hitter in Alec Bohm, but work still needs to be done on offense.

2. The 2018 Draft. Scott Kingery, Lewis Brinson, Domingo German, Willie Calhoun and Ryan McMahon – these players need to decide if they are major league caliber starters or part-timers. All have had issues legally or otherwise of various sorts but need to demonstrate an ability to contribute on a daily basis. For this season, it does not look they are ready for prime time yet.

3. Pitching. There are still too many pitchers with control issues. 19 pitchers were with the club in 2020 and 2021. The staff in 2020 had 2 Ws and 7 Zs. In 2021 the club has 5 Ws and 9 Zs. The COVID era devastated the staff as several pitchers disappeared and had poor seasons. Even when it looked better the team only picked up 62 wins. Newly drafted Kyle Freeland, only a Grade 6, has 35 starts and will be a solid number four starter. After that, it drops off quickly. Pitching is something that we *don't* do well.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

Jim Jeatt (17th year)

A race with Gotham City to the bottom of the Mays

In the *Annual* workroom, we think we know what will happen. Last year, we said that New Westminster would finish second in a division where we saw everyone regrouping for the future. Taking our word for it, Mr. Jeatt was disappointed to see his Whiskeyjacks only improve by 12 wins and finish fourth in the Mays Division. We don't claim to be perfect, and some things do defy our ability to tell the future. Heck, we regularly predict that Midwest will be the best fourth place team in TBL, and then it finishes second over and over in the Ruth Division. But there were all those starters with a Grade of 12 and solid grades in the bullpen last season. Yes, we mentioned the bad peripherals, but still, a 10.5 TQ for the pitching staff pre-season boded well for the boys from New West.

So it should be no surprise that with a pitching TQ of 3.5 this season, we are predicting a fourth place finish. That's going to be tough, given that there's no pitching in Gotham City either. But it is going to make for some kind of fun as we see if Mr. Jeatt can cajole his boys to get out of the cellar in 2021 or if, instead, they play at the 40-win level he is predicting in his instructions.

Pitching: 3.5
Staple those starters and pray.

There are 87 starts of Grade 10 or above. Then it drops to 35 starts of Grade 6, with the rest all Grade 4. The better starters will keep the ball in the park; the lower graded ones will throw lots of homerun balls. And then we have a bullpen in New West that is short on innings and long in bad peripherals. Mr. Jeatt names his relievers, which Mr. Greenwald does not, but it doesn't really matter. There is no true closer, the set up pitchers are limited, and the middle and early men also have

bad peripherals. Mr. Jeatt makes no bones about this in his instructions, suggesting stapling starters to the mound into the sixth inning as he has an average of only 4 innings of relief available for each game. It won't be enough.

ROTATION. Chris Bassitt (Grade 14 C+24 HR+26) heads the staff. Unfortunately, the next two starters are John Means (Grade 10 C+42 HR-54) and Alec Mills (Grade 10 HR-32), who will cough up way too many homeruns as they try to do their six

Bassitt: Heads the staff

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Alec Bohm, Jazz Chisholm, Stefan Crichton, Kyle Freeland, Joey Gerber, Monte Harrison, Taylor Hearn, Jonathan Loaisiga, Keury Mella, Alec Mills, John Ryan Murphy, Gregory Polanco, Tyler Rogers.

Departed: Nick Ahmed, Jerry Blevins, Ryan Buchter, Alex Colome, Sam Gaviglio, Sean Newcomb, Jonathan Schoop, Jose Suarez, Sam Tuivailala, Jason Vargas.

SNT: Alec Bohm

This guy hits the ball hard and often. He's a great addition for his bat, and fills a position where there's no real incumbent. He should be here for a while.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

innings. Kyle Freeland (Grade 6) will be the innings eater with average peripherals. And then comes the truly awful troika for the rest of the starts. Adam Plutko (Grade 5 HR-21), Robbie Ray (Grade 4 C-62 HR-33), and Alex Young (Grade 4 HR-34) are going to be flinching as line drives shoot past them and staples hold their toes to the rubber longer than they should be there.

BULLPEN. There is a 16* and a 15* to serve as closer, but their control is too poor to be used that way. New Westminster has a closer by committee: four lower grade pitchers who throw the ball over the plate and keep the ball in the park. They include Stefan Crichton (Grade 13* C+35 HR+52), Keury Mella (Grade 10* C+34 HR+25), Joey Gerber (Grade 11* HR+41), and Jonathan Loaisiga (Grade 11* C+25). Some of those pitchers also help cover setup, along with wild men Junior Guerra (Grade 16* C-52 HR+52), Taylor Hearn (Grade 15* C-62 HR+23), Ryan Helsley (Grade 12* C-61 HR-42), and Jake Webb (Grade 10* C-23 HR+62). For the opening innings, if the staples must be removed, there are a bunch of low grade-bad peripheral pitchers who present further trouble, making the club eager to staple, re-staple, and pour glue over the shoes to keep the starters in the game.

Offense: 5.0
Things Fall Apart quickly on offense.

There are some nice pieces on offense in New Westminster this year — just not enough of them. This team will have a difficult time scoring; given its pitching staff woes, this is another disaster in the making. Management thinks it

will bottom out in the forties, but at the *Annual* we seldom make such dire predictions. Let's just say it will be a challenge to score runs and leave it at that.

Verdugo: Contributes

SNT Alec Bohm (0-6-6, 12 hits, 3 walks) is the strongest card on the team. Alex Verdugo (4 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks) contributes nicely, as do Christian Vazquez (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks) and Garrett Cooper in a pretty good half-season (1-5-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks). But the Man is Fernando Tatis, Jr. (1-1-4-5, 10 hits, 4 walks+42).

Tatis: The Man

And then, like the novel title says, *Things Fall Apart*. Ryan McMahon hits a little at second base (1-5-5, 8 hits, 3 walks). Lewis Brinson (3 0s, 9 hits) and Tim Locastro (3 0s, 10 hits) platoon in center, and another platoon of Gregory Polanco (1-0-0, 6 hits) and Monte Harrison (2 0s, 6 hits) mans right field. Niko Goodrum is the designated "hitter" (1-0-0, 7 hits) some of the time, but Brian Goodwin will get more play there (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks).

Defense: 3.5
There are going to be errors.

There are only two stars in the field. Tatis is a SS-9 and Vazquez is C-9, Th+1. The rest is very pedestrian. Cooper is a 1B3, McMahon a 2B7, and Bohm a 3B3. The starting outfielders are all rated OF2, although Verdugo has a 34 arm in left and the right field platoon features Harrison's 36 and Polanco's 37. There are going to be errors, and pair those up with bad pitching grades and worse peripherals — that will extend some innings; so, well, you get the point. Lots of runs, unearned and earned alike.

Vazquez, Star

Bench: 2.5
Some options.

There are some options on the bench, including Pedro Severino (1-6, 9 hits), Michael Chavis (1-0-0, 8 hits), and Dexter Fowler (1-5, 8 hits). This whole group of players and bench men is fairly interchangeable, and while it gives Mr. Jeatt some flexibility, it does not provide enough pop.

The good news is that there is a large bench. The bad news is that it is not always useful. There is a third catcher in John Ryan Murphy, who probably should not be used. Jazz Chisholm can pinch run, and clearly has some future upside. Mr. Jeatt has to be wondering what the heck happened to Willie Calhoun and Scott Kingery, however, who seem to have forgotten how to hit.

4th The question, then, remains a simple one — will New Westminster or Gotham City finish last in the Mays Division? This is a race to the bottom, and for those of us who like to watch those things, we have a good race to follow. Like Gotham City, pitching is the big culprit. Gopher balls by starters, runs scored as stapling instructions keep them on the hill, and gasoline on the fire from the bullpen condemn this team to a bad season. New Westminster, however, is not a team called the Batmen, and on paper it looks like the Whiskeyjacks will also struggle to hit the ball as well as their rival.

Despite all that teams take the field, and when they do, anything can happen. So we are going to hedge our bet here. Perhaps there is cosmic payback this season. Maybe they'll outperform this prediction. Maybe Gotham City players crumble under the pressure and they drop to the bottom.

Both teams have atrocious pitching, and that fact makes it well nigh impossible to be sure that a 0.5 TQ difference means we've gotten it right. Put it all together, and this is a race for the bottom that will be entertaining all season long.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

Ages of players on the New Westminster roster, as of 07/01/2021:

36: J. J. Guerra
35: Fowler
33: Hale
32: Bassitt, Neris
30: Cooper, Goodwin, Murphy, Ty. Rogers, Vazquez
29: Crichton, Goodrum, Ray, Mills, Plutko
28: Freeland, Locastro, Means
27: Brinson, Kingery, Mella, P. Severino, J. Webb, A. Young
26: Calhoun, Hearn, Helsley, Loaisiga, McMahon
25: Chavis, Verdugo
24: Bohm, Gerber
23: Chisholm
22: Tatis

TQ: **14.0**

Print the Playoff Tickets

According to the *Annual*'s accounting, the Ruth Division is home to the two best pitching staffs in the league. They'll clash 14 times over the course of the season, each trying to score runs against the other. It won't be easy, partly due to the awesome arms on the mounds and partly due to the popgun offenses that accompany them.

But *Steve Powell*'s **Hoboken** club has the edge with one of the best pitching staffs the league has ever seen. While the offense is just mediocre, it has some pop, and Mr. Powell has the resources for a mid-season acquisition, if he needs it. After earning the title "best fourth-place team" in the league last year, the Zephyrs look to ride their arms deep into the playoffs. They're too good to ignore and too deep to fail. Yes, print those playoff tickets now.

But the **Midwest Mongrels** won't go down without a fight. *Darrell Skogen* has assembled the second-best pitching staff in the league. While the highs aren't as high in the rotation or in the bullpen, it is still a staff to be reckoned with. The fierce race in the Clemente Division is the only thing keeping this team from printing early playoff tickets, but it still has an underdog's chance of taking the division, and perhaps its Shiny New Thing will make a big difference in the race.
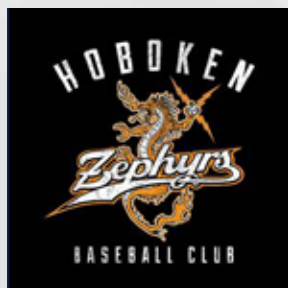
2020 Ruth Division Final Standings				
Team	**W**	**L**	**Pct**	**GB**
Brobdingnag*	122	40	.753	—
Midwest †	89	73	.549	33
Knoxville	87	75	.537	35
Hoboken	85	77	.525	37

* 2020 TBL Champion.
† Lost to Blue Hill in Wild Card playoff.

The **Knoxville Blue Thunder** finished a game out of the playoffs last year, and this year, *Pat Martin* has wisely decided to regroup. With those two powerful pitching staffs in the division, Mr. Martin took more young lottery tickets to bolster a roster that needed some bolstering. As a result, the team is younger and the pitching staff is deeper. So they'll bide their time this year, while coalescing into a future force to be reckoned with. The talent is there.

Meanwhile, defending TBL champion **Brobdingnag** has fallen back into recovery mode. Many of the names are the same, but injuries and the odd MLB season just passed has left this team a mere shell of its former self. *Joe Auletta* is a cunning team-builder, though, and may already be looking two seasons into the future. With a strong, but smaller, core of talent, the Barbarians will be back, but this version of the team will have to take the abuse it dished out last season.

Ruth Division

Shane Bieber,
Hoboken

1. Hoboken	32.0
2. Midwest	28.0
3. Knoxville	21.0
4. Brobdingnag	20.5

2020 hoboken ZEPHYRS in review

Have we assembled enough offense?

by Steve Powell

2020 in Review
Final Record: 85-77 (4th, Ruth)

After a third place showing in 2019 with a near .500 team, Hoboken looked to contend for an International Conference playoff spot. And when the dust finally settled on the 2020 pressure cooker, not only were we out of contention but resting squarely at the bottom of the Ruth. This was not in the cards per the *Annual*, when in fact it actually *was*. Clay Beard's pre-play report predicted it, and we were only too happy to comply.
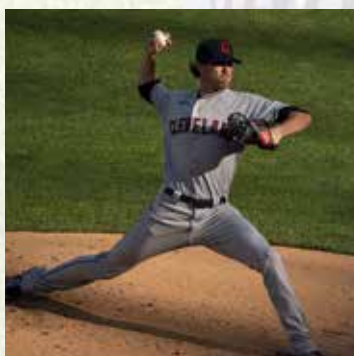
What went right?

Any success enjoyed by Hoboken can be traced back to the starting rotation. The trio of Shane Bieber (17-9, 3.61, 1.01 WHIP), Luis Castillo (15-9, 3.86), and Kenta Maeda (10-7, 3.61) were key contributors, while Trevor Richards (10-3, 3.52) made the most of his 23 starts. Liam Hendriks was often good as the closer, with 6 wins and 29 saves with a 2.21 ERA.

Bieber: Key contributor

Despite managing a .244/.297/.430 batting line in this year of the big fly, six players connected for 20 or more homeruns, led by Josh Bell's 35. Francisco Lindor contributed the best overall performance with a solid if not spectacular .288/.322/.520 with 31 HRs, 47 doubles, 102 runs, and 19 steals in 20 attempts. Donovan Solano hit .340 in 81 games, and Renato Nunez chipped in 22 HRs in 190 at bats.

What went wrong?

The November swoon. The big October push that had us at least tied for a post-season berth promptly fizzled with a 7-13 November. We went winless again division rival Midwest in our last 10 contests (after sweeping them in April). The offense that was predicted to score 900 runs fell short at 740. The grip and rip approach at the plate that produced gawdy strikeout numbers the year before continued as seven batters (Lindor, Bell, David Dahl, Javy Baez, Aaron, Judge, Nick Castellos,and James McCann) fanned more than 100 times. Bottom end starters Brad Peacock and Yonny Chirinos combined to go 12-17. Closer Hendriks and setup/closer Aaron Bummer combined for 16 losses.

3 Things

1. Starting pitching. Will the addition of Trevor Bauer (Grade 23) be enough to secure a post-season berth in a division where three of the four teams are solid contenders? Add him to Bieber (23), Maeda (18), Cahill (18) and Ponce De Leon (14), and we have 130 top quality starts.

2. Can we hit well enough? Have we assembled enough offense for an entire year to support our starters? With a handful of good bats whose usage ranges from 76 games (Judge), 84 games (McCann), and 97 games (Brosseau), we need to maximize their usage for the long haul.

3. Will this group remain in contention beyond 2021? Always a concern whether it be injuries, slow starts and prolonged slumps, or just a lack of ability to make adjustments.

hoboken ZEPHYRS

Steve Powell (32nd year)

This is by far the best pitching staff in the league. In fact, the league has rarely seen a pitching staff this good.

It was 10 years ago that Mr. Powell managed his team to the TBL World Series for the first time. That 110-win team fell to a loaded Melrose club, but this could be the year they make a return appearance. This is the best pitching staff in the league. In fact, the league has rarely seen a pitching staff this good. Not only are the grades stratospheric, but the peripherals are mostly positive as well.

This team will go as far as those arms will take them, as the offense is a few cards short of being a beast. In fact, on most days, they'll field a team that has three replacement-level players in the lineup. There's good power, but every team seems to have power in this odd year.

In addition, the hitters will have to bash often, as only two players can steal bases with any regularity, and only three hitters have more than

Turnover Rate: 32%

Arrived: Jason Adam, Yency Almonte, Trevor Bauer, Mike Brosseau, Trevor Cahill, Phil Gosselin, Brusdar Graterol, Matt Harvey, Travis Lakins, Wil Myers, Evan Phillips, Devin Williams.

Departed: Javier Baez, Luis Castillo, Travis D'arnaud, Jay Jackson, Renato Nunez, Brad Peacock, Dereck Rodriguez, Connor Sadzeck, Justin Shafer.

SNT: Trevor Bauer.
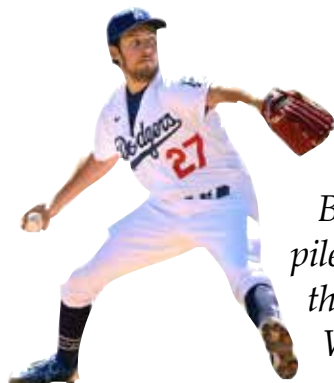
It's not often you get to add a full-season starting pitcher of Bauer's caliber. It cost a pile of talent, but he makes the Zephyrs instant World Series contenders.

10 hits (and only one of those plays more than a half-season). So, it comes back, once again, to the pitching staff. As they fare, so fares this team.

Pitching: 19.0
Good luck, everyone.

The top end of the starting rotation and the bullpen are as good as it gets. The strength of the rotation isn't just two deep, either. It goes four deep, extending to dominate two-thirds of the season. Yes, the team needs 24 Grade 1 starts, but the bullpen has the arms to cover those starts early and often.

While the top of the bullpen is only two deep, they're arguably the best two relievers in the league this year. With a lead in the seventh inning, the Zephyrs are going to be nearly impossible to rally against. The rest of the pen isn't as overpowering, but they do feature mostly positive peripherals. Given the strength of the rotation, they'll have ample innings to rescue the mere mortal starters.

Bieber: Young star

ROTATION. It's more fun writing about this rotation than it will be to play against it. It starts with young star Shane Bieber (Grade 23 C+21 HR+26), but it doesn't end there. He's joined by SNT Trevor Bauer (Grade 23 C+31), Kenta Maeda (Grade 18 C+42), and rejuvenated Trevor Cahill (Grade 18 C-54 HR+21, fatigue 14). That's 108 starts, or two-thirds of the season. Good luck, everyone.

hoboken ZEPHYRS

Daniel Ponce de Leon (Grade 14 C-62 HR-36) and Yonny Chirinos (Grade 9, fatigue 17) chip in 30 more decent starts. That leaves Trevor Richards (Grade 1, fatigue 17, if it matters) and Carlos Rodon (Grade 1) to make the final 24 starts, but there are bullpen arms to make sure they don't have to go too far into any game. Despite these two Grade 1 starters, this rotation will carry the team most days.

BULLPEN. What's better than having the highest-graded reliever in the set? Having another who's almost as good. Rookie Devin Williams (Grade 27* HR+52) joins veteran Liam Hendriks (Grade 22* C+53 HR+51) to contribute 147 ultra-stopper innings. Since both are active and either can close, games against Hoboken have essentially turned into six inning contests. Think about that and look at the rotation again.

The rest of the pen isn't as strong, but it is deep. Brusdar Graterol (Grade 13* C+44 HR+46), Jason Adam (Grade 13* C-62), Yency Almonte (Grade 12* C+32 HR+36), Travis Lakins (Grade 12* C-33 HR+36), Archie Bradley (Grade 11* C+41 HR+44), Aaron Bummer (Grade 9* C-54 HR+62), and Evan Phillips (Grade 8* C-62 HR+43) bring the total number of innings to 506. It'd be better if the 12*s and 13*s were 15*s and 16*s, but they only have to pitch in middle relief, not set-up, and the peripherals are generally solid. One other weakness is that Bummer is the only lefty.

Offense: 7.0
Usually just six deep.

The sublime Wil Myers (1-1-4-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, L+3 R-3) has many singles as extra-base hits. Other players with double-1s include part-timer Aaron Judge (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42,

Williams, Hendriks: 1-2

no shift), Nick Castellanos (1-1-4-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, L-5), and James McCann (1-1-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+42+22, L+9 R-8). McCann, with a half-season of usage, plays only against lefties.

The team has more power in Michael Brosseau (1-4-5-5, 11 hits, 3 walks+42, L+5 R-7), the suddenly-dangerous Donovan Solano (4 0s, 12 hits, 2 walks+22), and Starlin Castro (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+10 R-10). Only Solano has a full season and no limiting batting shift, but these three hitters will do some damage whenever they get to play.

The usually reliable Francisco Lindor (1-6-6, 9 hits, but 2 10s, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 22 attempts, no shift) has taken a step back in the one year the Zephyrs could have really used him. He still bats second every day and offers the team's only real speed in the everyday lineup.

The rest of the hitters will fill the bottom of the lineup, where they have the potential to kill many rallies.

At least Freddy Galvis (1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+42) has some pop. Josh Reddick (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+2 R-3), Josh Naylor (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L+2 R-3), and Austin Romine (2 0s, 9 hits, a walk, L+3 R-3) don't offer much help, unless they get lucky.

With these players in the game (and Reddick plays every day) the lineup's just six deep.

Myers: Sublime

Defense:
Not very inspiring.

3.5

Lindor: Defensive standout

Francisco Lindor retained his SS9, and Aaron Judge kept his OF3 with a 36 arm. The two catchers are C8s, but both have negative arms, including Romine's -4. That's all the Fielding 1 players. Freddy Galvis (3B4), Donovan Solano (2B7) and the first basemen (1B3) are all average. Josh Reddick, Josh Naylor, and Wil Myers are all OF2s, and Nick Castellanos (OF1) has to play out there against lefties. Reddick (36) and Myers (33) at least have solid arms.

Unless Lindor is involved in every play, this defense is not very inspiring. It will extend innings, which won't help even the great pitchers.

Bench:
Big Fudge and the rest.

2.5

There are several useful cards on the bench, but none better than the amazing Jake "Big Fudge" Marisnick (OF3, 35 arm, 1-1-6-6-6, 13 hits, a walk, L+4 R-5). He has fewer than 100 plate appearances to be used in key moments, but oh, what a weapon. Stephen Piscotty (OF2, 34 arm, 1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, 34 SSN for 11 attempts, L-4) and Phil Gosselin (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+3 R-6) are useful benchwarmers, especially given this team's lineup. Albert Almora (OF3) has one use. Josh Bell (1-5, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, L-4) and David Dahl (don't ask about his card) are waiting for better days.

Marisnick: Weapon

1st This is Hoboken's division to lose. Midwest will be breathing down their necks with another take on the pitching-first mantra, but Mr. Powell's team possesses an unmatched pitching staff. It's even better than Brobdingnag's monster staff that won the league championship just last year.

It may take work and some luck, given the limitations of the offense, but this team is positioned to go deep into the playoffs.

hoboken ZEPHYRS

Ages of players on the Hoboken roster, as of 07/01/2021:

34: Reddick
33: Cahill, Maeda, Peacock, Solano
32: Gosselin, L. Hendriks, Romine
31: S. Castro, Galvis, J. McCann
30: Bauer, Marisnick, Myers, Piscotty
29: Adam, Bradley, Castellanos, Judge, Ponce de Leon
28: Bell, Richards, Rodon
27: Almonte, Almora, Brosseau, Bummer, Chirinos, Dahl, Lakins, Lindor
26: Bieber, E. Phillips, D. Williams
24: Naylor
22: Graterol

TQ: **32.0**

2020 midwest MONGRELS in review

Can they hit enough?

by Darrell Skogen

2020 in Review
Final Record: 89-73 (2nd, Ruth)

The Dawgs gave up on their playoff hopes in September of 2020 and traded away closer Kirby Yates and slugger Yuli Gurriel. And then the team rebounded and made it to the playoffs with another 88-win year. Once again, the best fourth-place team in its division couldn't take the next step, falling to Blue Hill in a six game Wild Card series. Back to the drawing board for 2021 – can the Dawgs win 89 again? Don't bet against them – they went 88-89-88 over the past three seasons.

What went right?

Despite the bad averages, the team cranked out 347 doubles, 24 triples, and 237 homers, scoring 766 runs. Cody Bellinger led the team with 38 dingers. Trea Turner hit .259 with 41 doubles, 5 triples, 12 homers, and 39 stolen bases. As usual, however, no Dawg scored or drove in 100 runs. The little engine that could climb the hill continued to do it in 2020.

Team ERA rose from the mid 3's to 4.29 in the year of the homer. It was good enough, however, as the bullpen once again floated a weak starting staff to 88 wins (though MadBum went 17-6, 3.74). Yates was 7-2 with 24 saves, 1.26 ERA, and 63 Ks in 43 innings before the trade. Pedro Baez picked up the slack, at 8-3 with 8 saves in the final two months, and a 1.63 ERA. The rest were solid, including Tyler Webb (2.31), Brandon Brennan (2.54), and Richard Rodriguez (3.14).

Bumgarner: 17 wins

What went wrong?

Rougned Odor tanked at .174 in 453 AB, although he did hit 21 doubles and 20 homers. Gurriel was a major disappointment, hitting .239 before his trade at the end of September, despite 31 doubles and 21 homers. Max Kepler hit .221 – but with 34 doubles and 36 homers. Eddie Rosario was stuck at .242 – with 31 doubles and 27 homers. You get the point – low batting averages, plenty of power. Jose Berrios underperformed at 8-11, 4.55, as did David Price at 5-9, 5.25.

3 Things

1. Can those two new young aces do the job? The Dawgs actually got a shot at starters with two high round picks, adding Tony Gonsolin and Dustin May to the rotation. In addition, Corbin Burnes steps into a starting position, and the team hopes for greatness there. Can Jose Berrios and Zach Davies be stronger this year than last? For now, it looks like a pretty good rotation.

2. Bullpen, bullpen, bullpen. Yates is gone, but in come Tommy Hunter, Oliver Perez, and Aaron Slegers to provide depth. Webb and Rodriguez need to stay strong, and former stars Edwin Diaz and Chad Green need to step up their game. Again, it's a good crew.

3. Can they hit enough? This is always the $64,000 question in Midwest. V-Mart drafted pitching this season. Travis Shaw came over in a late season trade and will platoon at third with rookie slugger Edwin Rios. The Joshs – Fuentes and Harrison – enter to platoon with Eric Hosmer and Odor on the right side of the infield. Will it be enough? Stay tuned.

midwest MONGRELS

Darrell Skogen (20th year)

Someone has to score to win games.

Give Mr. Skogen two first-round picks in any year, and there's a 95 percent chance he'll take two pitchers, as he did in 2021. He has redefined the art of team-building by focusing on pitching first. This isn't exactly news, but this year, the Mongrels have upped the ante. By the *Annual*'s imperfect reckoning, they have the second-best pitching staff in the league.

And therein lies the problem, since the best pitching staff in the league is over on division rival Hoboken's roster. While it's true that Midwest's starting rotation isn't quite as formidable as Hoboken's, Midwest's bottoms out at Grade 9, not Grade 1. Midwest's bullpen isn't quite as dominant at the top as Hoboken's, but it's deeper.

The two teams will go head-to-head and bat-to-bat all year long. The pitching matchups will undoubtedly make for some memorable games. But someone has to score to win games, and Mr. Skogen's trade for SNT Nelson Cruz may make a difference, at least occasionally. It will be a division race to watch all year long.

Pitching: 15.0
Talented, young, and deep.

This is a pitching-first team with an intimidating staff. The rotation is deep and enviable, with mostly positive peripherals *(we're looking at you, Cody Ponce)*. The rotation will keep the team in every game, even when it doesn't simply overpower its opponents. This rotation isn't just talented; it's young. Its oldest member turned 28 in February.

Like the rotation, the Midwest bullpen is deep, with mostly positive peripherals *(we're looking at you, Chad Green)*. It mixes lefties and righties at every level, and it lines up effectively to help the

rotation. With more than 600 innings, this relief staff will be used often. This team will ride its arms as far as it can, likely into the playoffs. How far it gets will be in the hands of the person rolling the dice and making the decisions.

Burnes: Hello

ROTATION. Say hello to your new ace, plucked out of the end of the eighth round in the 2020 rookie draft. Oh, to be so smart (or lucky). Corbin Burnes (Grade 20 C-21 HR+53) measures up against just about any other ace. He's backed up by rookie Tony Gonsolin (Grade 16 C+42 HR+46), veteran Zach Davies (Grade 15 C+22), and rookie Dustin May (Grade 15 C+21). They

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Wil Crowe, Nelson R. Cruz, Josh Fuentes, Tony Gonsolin, Josh Harrison, Tommy Hunter, Dustin May, Oliver Perez, Cody Ponce, Brooks Raley, Edwin Rios, Aaron Slegers, Andrew Velazquezn.

Departed: Chad Bettis, Madison Bumgarner, Adam Jones, Shawn Kelley, Derek Law, Eduardo Nunez, Ronny Rodriguez, Stevie Wilkerson.

SNT: Tony Gonsolin.

The Guru loves his young, hard-throwing pitchers. Nelson Cruz is a great add, but Gonsolin is here for the long term.

provide 105 quality starts with positive peripherals.

The rest of the rotation is less imposing. Cody Ponce (Grade 13 HR-62, fatigue 17) only takes the mound for a handful of starts, but they'll be a blast … or a blast-off. Jose Berrios (Grade 11) is solid if unexciting. Nick Margevicius (Grade 9 C+21) is the only lefty in the rotation. Aaron Slegers (Grade 13 C+46 HR+52) makes one start on the last day of the season. Wil Crowe thankfully doesn't have to do much more than tell jokes all season to keep the clubhouse loose.

BULLPEN. Edwin Diaz (Grade 21* C-51 HR+35) has returned to prominence and will close games for Midwest again. The deep set-up crew include righties Richard Rodriguez (Grade 17* C+32), dangerous Chad Green (Grade 20* C+25 HR-32), and Pedro Baez (Grade 17* C-21). The lefties are Tyler Webb (Grade 17* HR+26) and ageless Oliver Perez (Grade 17* C+36 HR+62). That brings the total to 373 high-end relief innings. Impressive.

Diaz: Returned

The bottom part of the bullpen features a mix-and-match set of arms that will likely rotate in and out of the active roster. Aaron Slegers (Grade 13* C+46 HR+52), Tommy Hunter (Grade 10* C+26 HR+34), and Andrew Kittredge (Grade 8* C+24 HR+62) offer excellent peripherals. Brooks Raley (Grade 12* C+21) is a useful lefty. That leaves Brandon Brennan (Grade 7* C-45 HR-45) and Jose Alvarez (Grade 6* C-32 HR+62), for a minute-and-a-half. All told, there are 620 innings, which is enough for any team.

Offense: 7.5
Some shifts to overcome.

The offense consists of so many platoons that it's almost like two different teams. The Mongrels need so many bats, in fact, they can only carry six relievers at a time, which certainly limits the bullpen's effectiveness. Still, there are some studs here and lots of speed, although there are, obviously, some shifts to overcome. It'll be a fun challenge to manage.

No one personifies this issue better than Nelson Cruz (1-1-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks+42, L+16 R-7). He plays every day. The transcendent Trea Turner (1-0-0-0-0, 12 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 46 attempts, L+7 R-4) also plays every day, as do Eddie Rosario (1-1-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 11 attempts, L-11 R+2) and a diminished Cody Bellinger (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, 33 SSN for 19 attempts, L-6 R+2).

Cruz: Personifies

Eric Hosmer (1-1-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, 34 SSN for 11 attempts, L-12 R+4) plays against righties only, as does Mad Max Kepler (1-5-5, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L-16 R+5). Travis Shaw (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks), Rougned Odor (1-1-0-0, 7 hits, 2 walks, L-11 R+4), and Sandy Leon (2 0s, 5 hits, 6 walks) fill out the lineup vs. RHPs. It kind of drops of a cliff there, but remember the pitching staff. That's where the energy went.

The all-powerful Edwin Rios (1-1-1-5-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L+3 R-6) beats up only on lefties. It must be a personal thing. Josh Fuentes (4 0s, 12 hits, no shift) is scheduled to face only lefties. Victor Reyes (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 31 SSN for 29 attempts, L+4 R-3), Josh Harrison (1-5, 10 hits, 2 walks+2 42s, L+1 R-2), and Elias Diaz (1-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, 6 24s, L+1 R-2) fill out the lineup vs. LHPs.

Defense: 3.5
A mixed bag.

There are so many cards, it's hard to keep track. Fuentes (1B5) and Hosmer (1B4) are solid, but across the diamond, Shaw (3B5) may have to cover for Rios (3B3). Up the middle, Turner (SS8) is only average this year, as is Harrison (2B7), although Odor (2B8) has always been a good fielder. In the outfield, Bellinger (OF3 with a 34 arm) roams centerfield. Rosario, Kepler and Reyes are all OF2s, but Reyes has a weak arm. The news behind the plate isn't as good. Leon (C8) and Diaz (C7) can catch, but neither will throw anyone out (Th-4). All in all, it's a mixed bag, and the outcome may depend on batted balls finding the best fielders at the right time.

Bench: 2.0
Limited.

Due to the number of platoons, there is some overlap, so platoon partners may be able to hit for each other, at least when it matters most. There are no instructions for defensive replacements, either. The only other players on the roster, who may help at one point or another include Kevan Smith (4 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+42, L-4 R+3), although he's also a Th-4. Bryan Holaday is a C8 Th+3, but offers little else. Andrew Velazquez (SS8, 4, 6 hits, 5 walks, 26 SSN for 17 attempts, L+2 R-5) probably won't get a chance to show off his limited speed and power.

2nd Ever since losing the World Series in seven games to Brobdingnag in 2014, the team has not advanced past the Wild Card series every time's it's made the playoffs. This year may break that trend. This team is rated 4.0 points behind Hoboken (all from the difference in the pitching staffs).

Even the Guru recognizes that you have to score runs, eventually, to win a game. Despite his emphasis on pitching, Cruz was his biggest trade acquisition. But it's still about pitching; hard throwing young arms are a Mongrel mainstay.

In the hands of the Guru, who already has a World Series win to his credit, the race may be closer than anyone thinks. But he'll have work around those offensive shifts and the bottom of the batting order. The Ruth Division race may be one for the ages.

midwest MONGRELS

Ages of players on the Midwest roster, as of 07/01/2021:

41: N. Cruz
39: O. Perez
34: Hunter
33: P. Baez, Harrison, Holaday, Raley, K. Smith
32: J. Alvarez, S. Leon
31: Bumgarner, Hosmer, Kittredge, T. Shaw
30: El. Diaz, Green, R. Rodriguez, T. Webb
29: Rosario
28: Davies, Fuentes, Kepler, Slegers, T. Turner
27: Berrios, Ed. Diaz, Gonsolin, Odor, Ponce, E. Rios
26: Burnes, Z. Collins, Crowe, V. Reyes, A. Velazquez
25: Bellinger, Margevicius
23: D. May

TQ: **28.0**

2020 knoxville BLUE THUNDER in review

Youth and trades are finally paying off.

by Pat Martin

2020 in Review
Final Record: 87-75 (3rd, Ruth)

We are building a solid core that will make us consistent contenders in the Ruth Division, one of the most balanced divisions in TBL. The plan continues to include trading as needed and drafting youth to add to the core. We are nearing the payoff and expect to contend again this season.

What went right?

The youth of the past three drafts on offense have stepped up to form a solid core that helped return the Blue Thunder to relevance. If Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano can finally remain healthy, then the wait will finally pay off. We had seven batters exceed 23 home runs (Mitch Garver, Matt Chapman, Ozzie Albies, Eduardo Escobar, Jorge Polanco, Sano, and Kevin Pillar). Gerrit Cole (18-10, 2.49) stepped up to be the ace we had hoped he would be, Patrick Corbin (15-14, 3.66) as the longest tenured performed as expected, and Kyle Gibson (9-13) remained as a solid piece of the rotation. Three of the starters had double digit victory totals (including J.A. Happ at 12-5). And the top end of the bullpen did their jobs admirably. Ryan Pressly won four and saved 29 games with a 2.41 ERA, while Nick Anderson struck out 73 in 59 innings with an ERA just over 3.

Cole: Stepped up

What went wrong?

The hope is that your clean up hitter will come close to being a force in the lineup. When he can't find the Mendoza line, and the offense is only 17th overall in production, the plan falls apart quickly. Chapman, Garver, Pillar, and Moran all hit under .230. A team batting average of .238 matched with an OBP of .303 meant those 233 HR were not as productive as they could have been. Four of the five starters had double digit losses. The bullpen turned out to be solid but unreliable. The biggest problem was the inability to defeat Midwest (3-11) .

3 Things

1. Trading, trading, trading. When we saw that we were falling well short of expectations, the trading bug bit and we were able to move ourselves back into a decent draft position and pick up some valuable players that will help in 2021 and beyond.

2. Youth and trades are finally paying off. The last few drafts have seen the focus shift from immediate need to what can we use to build for long term consistency. Also the last few trading seasons have seen us have to pivot from what we can do to win now to what can we do to become relevant again.

3. Twins and Hope. While we have always leaned towards taking a Twin when all things are considered equal at the time of picking during the draft, this year was a step back in that philosophy. The hope is that the core we have in place will be solid enough to be able to rebound from off seasons and injuries and return to playoff contention for years to come.

knoxville BLUE THUNDER

Pat Martin (35th year)

Despite the obvious talent here, it hasn't all come together yet.

While prepping for this coming season, it seems as if Mr. Martin took two steps backward for every step forward. For every Tristan McKenzie, the team's Shiny New Thing, the team added a Nick Pivetta. Both players have talent, but only one has showed it so far. The goal, it can be surmised, is to increase the core of talent for future competitive runs.

This step-back strategy probably has more to do with their division rivals than the Blue Thunder's competitiveness. With Hoboken and Midwest loading their rosters to take no prisoners, perhaps Mr. Martin decided to play it safe and do a side shuffle. As a result, without the pressure to win now, his team benefited for the long-term by acquiring future promise over current value.

This claim didn't take an Einstein to figure out. After all, while this team has some terrific talent, the current value just doesn't run deep enough, especially in the pitching staff. Any team with Gerrit Cole will win its share of games, but a pitching staff doesn't stop at one guy. So, despite the 87-win season just passed, the team is regrouping with a needed an influx of youthful pitching talent.

fast and your mouth is dry from screaming.

The good news is that there's a deep bullpen to make up for the long end of the rotation. There are almost 600 innings of decent support, and the team may need all of it to make up

Cole: Staff ace

for the 90 games of low-grade starters. Managers all over the league may be forced into using a quick hook when it comes the pitchers. The Blue Thunder will likely become expert in quick hooks, especially for those 90 games.
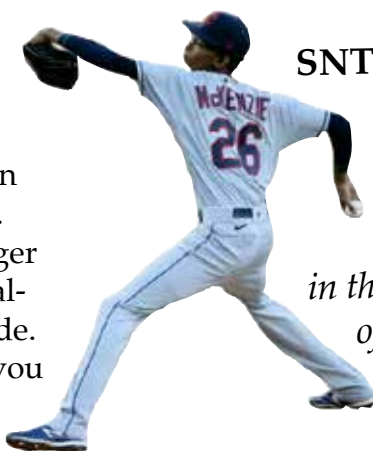
Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Shaun Anderson, Jacob Barnes, Jake Cave, Kyle Finnegan, Ryan Jeffers, Brett Martin, Triston McKenzie, Jake Odorizzi, Nick Pivetta, Tarik Skubal, Ryan Tepera, Caleb Thielbar, Nik Turley, Phillips Valdez.

Departed: Jesse Biddle, Luis Cessa, Wade Davis, Travis Demeritte, Mike Fiers, Ryne Harper, Kevin Mccarthy, Hector Rondon, Erik Swanson, Lou Trivino.

Pitching: 7.5
A rollercoaster ride.

Although homer-prone, the starting rotation has a worthy top end that covers 72 games. Unfortunately, the season runs slightly longer than 72 games. The precipitous drop in quality after that is as steep as a rollercoaster ride. And just like that rollercoaster ride, when you reach the bottom, your heart is pumping

SNT: Triston McKenzie.

While McKenzie was actually the second starting pitcher Mr. Martin selected in the draft, we chose him because of his greater impact in 2021.

Mr. Martin is an astute manager, and in his instructions, he considers these lower-grade starters to be merely openers, which call for a quick hook. He's going with eight relievers active every month to reduce the strain on the bullpen from so many opener games. Welcome to baseball in 2021.

ROTATION. The ace of the staff is still Gerrit Cole (Grade 16 C+26 HR-26), who toes the rubber 32 times. He's joined at the top end of the rotation by SNT Tristan McKenzie (Grade 17 C+21 HR-25, fatigue 19) and J.A. Happ (Grade 14 HR-15). They add 40 more starts. Then things get messy.

Rookie Tarik Skubal (Grade 8 HR-53, fatigue 20) gets 20 starts. Then come openers Kyle Gibson (Grade 5), Patrick Corbin (Grade 2 C+31), Jake Odorizzi (Grade 1 C+34 HR-53), and Robert Gsellman (Grade 1 C-33 HR-36, fatigue 19) for one start in May. With all the negative HR ratings, the team's physical therapist will be busy treating whiplash symptoms.

BULLPEN. But the bullpen can come in to rescue the starters in close games. At the top of the deep pen is unconventional closer Nick Anderson (Grade 16* C+33

Anderson: Unconventional

HR+36) because of his positive peripherals. But he has only 45 innings. Fortunately, he has a large set-up crew.

Lefties Caleb Thielbar (Grade 18* C-32 HR+62), Nik Turley (Grade 14* C-32 HR+51) and Brett Martin (Grade 14* C-62) are joined by righties Shaun Anderson (Grade 15* C-62 HR-22), Kyle Finnegan (Grade 13* HR+34), and Ryan Tepera

(Grade 13* C-56 HR+31). While this group is a bit wild, there are 330 of these innings.

The early crew, which starts warming up as early as the third inning, includes Trevor May (Grade 12* HR-33), Phillips Valdez (Grade 10* C-36 HR+31), and Ryan Pressly (Grade 9* C+23 HR+31). These three contribute more than 200 incredibly useful innings. Jacob Barnes (Grade 3* C+33 HR+45) and Andrew Chafin (Grade 1* HR-23) are around to mop up when things get messy, which may happen from time to time.

Offense: 7.0
Good power, on-base challenged.

There's good power here, starting with a break-out campaign by Byron Buxton (1-1-1-5, 10 hits), who's scheduled to lead off every day. Two others in the everyday lineup boast five power numbers: Matt Chapman (1-1-4-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-3) and Miguel Sano (1-1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-9). If this team hit against its own pitching, they might set league records.

Buxton: Breakout

Wilmer Flores (1-1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks L+3 R-3) turned in an excellent card, and gives the team four double-1 cards. Kevin Pillar (4 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, 28 SSN for 19 attempts, L+7, R-6) is the only player on the team with 11 hits, but he has that awkward shift. The emergency instructions say he plays every day, batting eighth.

Ozzie Albies (1-5-5, 10 hits, 1 walk+22, 29 SSN for 11 attempts, L-7 R+2) contributes a half of a powerful season, although he bats ninth, so Mr. Martin may squeeze more usage out of him. Table setters Manny Margot (6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 44 attempts, L-3) and Jorge Polanco (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 26 SSN for 17 attempts, L+6 R-4) get on for the power hitters.

That leaves the catching tandem of Ryan Jeffers (1-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, L-3) and Tony Wolters (6-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-7) to do whatever they can to keep innings alive. Jeffers is obviously the better hitter of the two, but he has only 70 games. Overall, the power is legit, but the team is, in general, on-base challenged. It will need some luck to keep innings alive, especially when it reaches the bottom of the order.

Defense: 4.5
The outfielders will help.

Let's start in the outfield, where all three starters are all OF3s, and all but Margot have plus arms. In the infield, Chapman (3B5) is a standout.

Albies (2B8) is excellent for his half-season, but no one else is better than average. Speaking of average, that's Polanco (SS8) and anyone who plays first (1B3). The catchers field well (C8), but both Jeffers (Th-4)

Chapman: Standout

and Wolters (Th-3) won't stop a running game. Considering the pitching staff likes to pitch up in the strike zone, the outfielders will help catch the balls that don't leave the park.

Bench: 2.0
At least there is a bench.

Because all of the starting outfielders miss playing time, fourth outfielder Harrison Bader (OF3 with a 35 arm, 1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, 29 SSN for 12 attempts, L+8 R-6) will get to play a lot against lefties. Colin Moran (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, but 5 24s, L-7) is a useful bat off the bench. Mitch Garver (C7 Th+1) and Grayson Greiner (C7 Th-1) are available. Greiner has power (1-5-5), but not much else, while Garver has not much at all. Jose Peraza (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+42) and Eduardo Escobar (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+22) offer infield support. Beyond the

players needed to fill in, there isn't much left, but at least there is a bench.

3rd Depending how the power plays itself out and how effective the middle relief is, this team could be one of the better third-place teams in the league. It can't be expected to keep up with Hoboken or Midwest, but it could fall to last place if the homers are all solo blasts, and the relief pitching collapses. Despite the obvious talent here, it hasn't all come together yet for the Blue Thunder. At least Gerrit Cole, who's another year older, has some more playmates in the rotation. If the youngsters develop quickly, it could come together fast.

Ages of players on the Knoxville roster, as of 07/01/2021:

39: J. Happ
34: Thielbar
33: K. Gibson, Tepera
32: Escobar, Pillar, Pressly
31: J. Barnes, Corbin, T. May, Odorizzi, Turley
30: N. Anderson, G. Cole, Flores, Garver
29: Finnegan, P. Valdez, Wolters
28: Cave, Chapman, Greiner, Moran, Pivetta, J. Polanco, Sano
27: Bader, Buxton, Peraza
26: S. Anderson, Margot, B. Martin
24: Albies, Jeffers, Skubal
23: McKenzie

TQ: **21.0**

2020 brobdingnag BARBARIANS in review

This is clearly a year of retrenchment and rejuvenation.

by Joe Auletta

2020 in Review
Final Record: 122-40 (1st, Ruth)

After a disappointing loss to eventual champion Whitman in the 2019 playoffs, Brobdingnag saw a lot of cards go right for 2020, added another big bat (Nelson Cruz) to an already solid lineup, and started the season as the prohibitive favorite. With every team in the division at least 8 games above .500 they won by 33 games.

In the playoffs they were able to shorten the rotation and rode four dominant starters to a 12-4 postseason mark to win their seventh TBL title. Led by hired gun Cruz (41 homers, 107 RBI, .962 OPS) they were second in the league in runs scored. With only one pitcher having an ERA above 3.65, they gave up more than 100 runs fewer than any other team.

What went right?

Verlander (24-5), Strasburg (17-5), and Glasnow (9-0) went a combined 50-10 with a 2.63 ERA. This allowed the Barbarians to go with a five man bullpen most of the year, giving them an extra hitter for key situations.

The batting order was very deep. Because of big positive shifts the lineup went eight or nine deep most games, and seven batters drove in 75+ runs.

Finally, the bench — both hitters and pitchers — contributed. Ryan Yarborough won 16 games, all in relief. Fifteen pitchers registered wins or saves. Pinch runner Jarod Dyson was 23 for 23 in steal attempts, and pinch hitters Austin Hays, Brandon Nimmo, and David Freese combined for a .304/.408/.549 slash line.

Verlander: Again

What went wrong?

Not much in 2020. The team set a goal to beat the Rochester win record and was on pace to do it through six months, but cooled down the last two months to fall short, though they did tie the franchise record with 122 wins.

Longer term, the heavy workloads, especially on the starting staff, may cause concern. The top two starters, Verlander and Strasburg, will miss 2021 with arm problems.

The catching situation is still not settled going forward. The tag-team of Jacob Stallings and Omar Narvaez got the team through 2020, but the long term answer to Joe Mauer's replacement is still a search in progress.

3 Things

1. How good can we be this year? Will the good parts of the 2021 roster (and there are some very good parts) carry the team far enough to reach .500 in 2021? Gone is the bench depth, and the pitching is feast or famine with almost exactly half a season of Grade 13+ starts, and half a season of Grade 6-.

2. This is clearly a year of retrenchment and rejuvenation. The 2020 roster had 10 players age 33 and above. Will enough of the new names develop quickly enough for Brob to bounce back or will this slide into a longer rebuild?

3. Has the team added its future franchise catcher? They added Carson Kelly via a trade with Las Vegas, and moved down to grab their man Joey Bart in the draft. If one develops the retrenchment will likely be brief. If both develop Vlad has a valuable chip to trade.

brobdingnag BARBARIANS

Joe Auletta (33rd year; Hall of Famer)

. . . the team looks to be sliding back to earth. In a hurry.

Brobdingnag is a cold, harsh, inhospitable land. The only level ground is found in the deep valleys and the mountainous plateaus. Most of the land is filled with jagged peaks and narrow gorges. The baseball team that plays there reflects its terrain. After reaching another peak, Mr. Auletta's seventh TBL championship, the team looks to be sliding back down to earth. In a hurry.

With the 2020 championship behind them, the 2021 team has taken a turn not seen in the frozen land since 2018, when the Barbarians dropped from 113 to 46 wins. Another peak and another valley. This team probably won't drop that low, but the surviving members of the monster team that won 122 regular season games in 2020 must look around at the roster and wonder what the hell happened.

It's true that the shortened 2020 MLB season produced some unusual results, but injuries also took their toll on this team. Then the master craftsman of this team traded away many useful players. As a result, this team won't be nearly as much fun to manage as last year's, but they still have a strong central core of talent.

Pitching: 4.0
Many names are the same.

While 13 pitchers have returned from the championship season, that's part of the problem. Many of those holdovers didn't exactly repeat their high-grade performances. The few that did will find support wanting. These pitchers get a mulligan, though, because the whole team is taking a step back in 2021.

Most of the new pitchers who've joined the team are here to simply
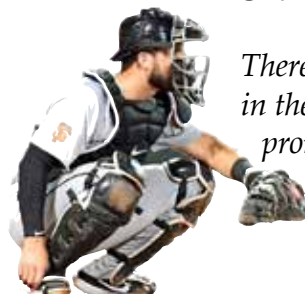
SNT: Joey Bart.

There were better catching cards in the draft, but none with more promise than Bart. His task: stop Brobdingnag's revolving door behind the plate.

Turnover Rate: 26%

Arrived: Joey Bart, Tyler Bashlor, Luis V. Garcia, Javy A. Guerra, Derek Holland, Carson Kelly, Phil Maton, Luis Patino, Jojo Romero, Patrick Sandoval, Myles Straw, Julio Teheran, Touki Toussaint.

Departed: Nelson R. Cruz, Jarrod Dyson, David Freese, Javy Guerra, Austin Hays, Collin Mchugh, Scott Oberg, Oliver Perez, Jacob Stallings, Ryan Yarbrough.

get it from Opening Day to Fan Appreciation Day, *a.k.a.* the last day of the season. Some of the newcomers have talent, but it's largely latent and invisible. It may not be pretty, but it'll be legal. Quite a few of these pitchers likely won't be here in 2022.

ROTATION. For 87 games, this rotation matches up against anyone, except perhaps Hoboken. Even though the peripherals aren't as positive as past years, Walker Buehler (Grade 16 HR-25, but with an 18 fatigue), Brandon Woodruff (Grade 14 C+25), and Tyler Glasnow (Grade 13 HR-24) form a pretty solid top end of the rotation. The problem is that the rest of the rotation isn't just bad, it's like a black hole where wins go to disappear.

Filling out the rotation are lefties Patrick Sandoval (Grade 6 HR-46) and Derek Holland (Grade 3 HR-53)

Buehler: Solid

brobdingnag BARBARIANS

for 30 starts. They're rated L in the computer game, but really should be M. As in "Mmmm." Not to be outdone, veteran Julio Teheran (Grade 1 C-26 HR-62) gets to toe the rubber nearly 30 times. Former stars Justin Verlander (Grade 6 C+35 HR-62) and Stephen Strasburg (Grade 1 C+36 HR-21) get a handful of starts, if Mr. Auletta has the stomach for it.

BULLPEN. Last year, the Barbarians boasted 193 innings of closer-grade relief. This year, the team has that many innings of relief that steal hits without help. Closer-by-default Giovanny Gallegos (Grade 15* C+22 HR+36) at least has positive peripherals. He's set up by Casey Sadler (Grade 12* C-62), Craig Kimbrel (Grade 12* C-62), and Will Harris (Grade 9* C-26).

So much for the good news, if you can call it that. The next group of relievers will probably get more play this year than the next Rolling Stones single. Keynan Middleton (Grade 7* C-34), rookie Luis Patino (Grade 6* C-62), Phil Maton (Grade 5* C+33 HR+51), and Roberto Osuna (Grade 4* C+62 HR+62) add another 168 innings for, get this, middle relief.

But wait, there's more. Righties Ryne Stanek (Grade 2* C-62 HR-51), Javy Guerra (Grade 1* HR+43), Tyler Bashlor (Grade 1* C-25 HR-33), and Touki Toussaint (Grade 1 C-55 HR-42) will

Gallegos: By default

turn outs into hits and walks with regularity. The only lefty in the pen is JoJo Romero (Grade 1* C+41 HR+32), who looks out of place with his peripherals. While there's almost 600 innings, the bullpen will be a boon for the opposition.

Offense: 9.5
Capital-A Amazing first four.

Power has always part of the best Brobdingnag teams. The heart of the order this year has that in spades. The acknowledged stud of the team is the Amazing Juan Soto (1-1-5-6-6, 11 hits, 6 walks, 29 SSN for 23 SBA, only 4 13s, and no shift). Too bad he has to miss 35 games.
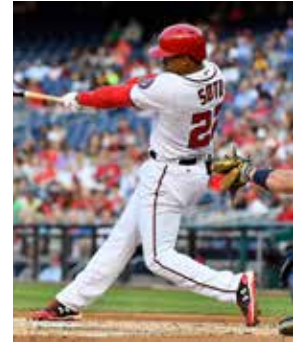
Soto: Amazing

His batting practice buddies include Mookie Betts (1-1-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks, 32 SSN for 32 attempts, only 4 13s, L-17 R+4) and Manny Machado (1-1-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks, 26 SSN for 25 attempts, only 4 13s, and no shift, but two 10s and 3 24s). They look almost mortal by comparison. Funky Ronald Acuna (1-1-5-6, 8 hits, 6 walks+42, 34 SSN for 25 attempts) joins in the fun for 124 games.

No other regular player has four power numbers, but Brandon Nimmo (1-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks+42, L-15 R+4), Carson Kelly (1-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks, L-9 R+4) and Carlos "Bearded Lady" Santana (1-6, 7 hits, 6 walks) at least can pop one out now and then, if nothing else.

That leaves table-setters Cesar Hernandez (5-6-6, 10 hits, 3 14s+22, L-7), Carlos Correa (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+22), and Yoan Moncada (3 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks), who are shadows of their former selves. Omar Narvaez (2 0s, 6 hits, 5 walks+22, L-6) is here because Kelly can't play 162 games. The bottom of the lineup is as exciting as marshmallows and is indicative of the team's fall from grace.

Defense: 5.0
Surprisingly good defense.

The Barbarians can flash the leather. Machado (3B5), Correa (SS9), and Hernandez (2B8) form a solid infield unit. Acuna (OF3) and Betts (OF3,

35 arm) don't let balls get past them. Soto (OF2) and Santana (1B3) are only average, which is a quibble.

Kelly (C7, but with Th-4) and Narvaez (C7, Th+1) won't stop many baserunners, but in a valley year for the team, it won't matter. Still, this is a surprisingly good defensive team overall.

Bench: 2.0
A little bit of not much.

You've seen all the good news. Young Luis Garcia (6-0, 11 hits, L-16 R+5) has his uses, but is still learning the strike zone. Myles Straw (6-0, 8 hits, including 2 11s, 2 walks, 29 SSN for 22 attempts) provides speed off the bench. Francisco Cervelli (1-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks+42+22, L-6 R+3, but 5 24s) may see some time at DH. SNT Joey Bart (3 0s, 9 hits, a walk+2 42s) is still learning the game, but may be ready by 2022. Willians Astudillo (1-5-6, 9 hits, L-4 R+2) has limited use. And Brendan Rodgers keeps waiting for good health.

4th A hair behind Knoxville, we think. They're clearly built to be not good, but the need to keep the sort of players that Mr. Auletta wants on his team – the top hitters and pitchers – means that they are unlikely to draft in the top two or three. There are several worse teams. Going into the season they're in the uncomfortable middle . . . but of course that will change.

In some ways, the Barbarian management was placed in a very difficult position by the uncertainty of the 2020 season. Anyone who has watched Mr. Auletta in action over the last decades knows how much careful preparation he puts into drafts and trades, and how hard it was to know what our 2021 season would be like. For a man who knows the shape of things to come weeks or months before the rest of us even glimpse the outline, it cut into his edge. As a

Betts: Flashes

result, this cannot easily be one of those bounce years. But we'll see how this goes.

At least the team gets to bask in the glory of another TBL championship for the year. That's enough to keep any team going through a down season. While this version of the team is obviously not built to win, there's enough here to root for. The top three starters give the team a chance for more than half the season. The Amazing Four in the lineup most days will produce some big numbers. And that's something, anyway.

Ages of players on the Brobdingnag roster, as of 07/01/2021:

39: Verlander
36: W. Harris
35: Cervelli, C. Santana
34: D. Holland
33: Kimbrel
32: Strasburg
31: C. Hernandez
30: Gallegos, Sadler, Teheran
29: Astudillo, Narvaez, Stanek
28: Bashlor, Betts, Machado, Maton, Nimmo, Woodruff
27: Glasnow, Middleton
26: Buehler, Correa, C. Kelly, Moncada, Osuna, Straw
25: J. A. Guerra, Rodgers, Toussaint
24: Bart, Romero, Pat. Sandoval
23: Acuna
22: Soto
21: L. V. Garcia, Patino

TQ: **20.5**

20
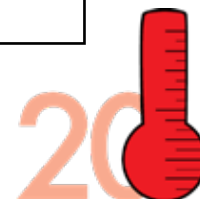
2020 TBL world series

Kershaw

Brobdingnag vs. Munich

Some teams catch fire late and play their way to greatness. Some take a different route, stumbling through their seasons and playing well late in the season to take the Cinderella role. But some are expected to go wire to wire with very little contest, and that was the position Joe Auletta found himself in with the Brobdingnag Barbarians this season.

Vlad found little reason to send his minions out to "remove" players from this team during the season, as they won the Ruth Division by 33 games and finished 23 games better than the cream of the Clemente crop and 31 better than the best in the Mays Division. As for the International Conference? Joe's boys were 38 games better than the Elders, 22 better than a splendid Las Vegas club, and 21 better than the magical last dance of the Marauders from Munich. On paper, this was a team all others respected and feared.

Pressure, for certain. Some great teams are paralyzed by their press clippings and go belly up. Not the Barbarians. Rye provided a good challenge, losing games one and two 4-3 and game three 3-1 before winning the next two games to make game six possible. That was another nail-biter, but again, the Barbarians leaned into their pitching and held on to win 2-1. Next up were the boys of Blue Hill, the trendy pick to win the Clemente, but who had to settle for the Wild Card series as they lost the final game of the regular season to champion Whitman. Angered by that sign of weakness, the Mudslides kicked Midwest 4-1 and Whitman 4-0 to win the right to take down the Barbarians. Brobdingnag had to go ten innings to win the opener, and then laughed in a 10-0 drubbing of the Slides in game two. Mark's Monsters came back to win game three 5-2, and then they got shellacked again, 13-1, in game four. Once again they scrapped their way back, winning game five 7-1. It looked like this

might be a replay of the 1960 Yankee-Pirate series, but the Barbarians handle pressure calmly, winning game six 5-0. Another challenger foiled.

Against this drama, the National Conference was playing down to its finale as well. The Gamblers and the Marauders both had to go seven to get past the pesky Dragons and Elders. And then that wily old Hall of Fame manager in Munich, Paul Montague, got his boys to exceed expectations, knocking the powerful Gamblers out in six games. Munich made it to the series with a team the *Annual* charitably mentioned in its pre-season analysis could hope for a last hurrah before falling off a very high cliff. Cinderella came to the dance, indeed, as the team predicted to be third in the Mantle Division surpassed all hopes.

But not all fairy tales end well. And not all teams expected to go wire to wire fall to the pressure of pre-season hype. The Barbarians were clearly not ready to play the role of Prince Charming in a story that could once again make Cinderella the belle of the ball.

Game 1 at Brobdingnag
Greinke vs. Verlander

Cinderella was hopeful in the first inning as Munich got to Verlander for a run after only three Marauders had come to the plate. Vlad called down to the dugout and reminded Charming not to be so nice, and after tying the game in the bottom of the first stanza, the beginning of the end played out in the third inning. A grand slam by Yoan Moncada made it 6-1, and Cinderella was fearful that the midnight hour was coming soon. Undaunted, she persisted, and the Marauders played their

Moncada

way back into the game with a three run homer by Justin Turner in the sixth. Alas, it was not to be. Yu

Darvish, pitching in relief, yielded seventh inning homers to Juan Soto and Ronald Acuna. Game over, clock starting to strike midnight.

Brobdingnag 8, Munich 4
WP-Verlander   LP-Greinke   S-Gallegos

Game 2 at Brobdingnag
deGrom vs. Strasburg

Cinderella danced until the third inning, when the Barbarians loaded the bases quickly off deGrom and then got a sacrifice fly from Soto and a three run homer from David Freese. When Nelson Cruz homered in the sixth, it appeared the rout was on, but back to back doubles by Anthony Rizzo and Austin Meadows put a twinkle in Cinderella's eye once again. And that was it. Cinderella stopped dancing and headed for the hall as the clock rang for the sixth time on its way to midnight.

Freese

Brobdingnag 5, Munich 2
WP-Strasburg   LP-deGrom   S-Osuna

Game 3 at Munich
Stanek vs. Ryu

Cinderellas, however, never lose hope. The Marauders tried in the second inning, getting runners on first and third and chasing opener Ryne Stanek, but Ryan Yarbrough slammed the door as he heard Vlad threatening a thrashing of all the Barbarians if they let a run score. Ryu yielded a homer to Cesar Hernandez in the third, and some say the ball flew over the fence thanks to the wind from Vlad's outraged roar. In the fifth, Hernandez tripled in Acuna and Soto singled him home. 3-0 and Cinderella had some tears of determination in her eyes. The Marauders loaded the bases in the bottom half of the inning with no outs, but they did not score. Undaunted, Meadows and Kyle Schwarber slammed solo homers in the next frame to make it 3-2. Dang, that Cinderella is one tough little hopeful princess wannabe.

Soto

Soto the Barbarian cranked a homer in the eighth, however, and his lads took a 4-2 lead into the ninth. Reliever Will Harris gave up a long homer to Willson Contreras, and then with two out, Adam Eaton also slammed one over the wall. Vlad roared in the pressbox—but the game went into extras. And extras. And extras. Cinderella was tenacious. Austin Hays came off the Barbarian bench in the seventeenth inning and knocked a big fly off Darvish, and Tyler Glasnow saved the game. The bell rang for the ninth time.

Brobdingnag 5, Munich 4, 17 innings
WP-Strasburg   LP-Darvish   S-Glasnow

Game 4 at Munich
Verlander vs. Weaver

And still Cinderella refused to give up on her dream. RBI singles by Acuna and Hernandez gave the Barbarians two runs in the second, but the Marauders rode a Schwarber blast to cut the deficit in half. Hernandez scored on a Soto single in the sixth and it was 3-1. When Soto scored on an error by Eric Sogard in the eighth, it appeared be over. But Cinderellas never, ever give up. With two outs in the bottom of the ninth, the Marauders rallied again as Justin Turner singled, Meadows singled, and Contreras slammed a three run homer off Glasnow to send the game to extras again.

Betts

Hernandez and Mookie Betts both slammed homers in the eleventh off Tommy Kahnle. Surely the clock was striking midnight. But wait—Contreras hit a two out homer off Giovanni Gallegos to make it a one run game with slugger Schwarber next up. Mighty Casey always strikes out, however, and the hopes of Cinderella faded as the clock finally struck midnight.

Brobdingnag 6, Munich 5, 11 innings
WP-Buehler   LP-Kahnle   S-Gallegos

TBL

In the Crucible

No one takes the bounce more often than *Paul Harrington*'s **Las Vegas Gamblers**, and this is year two of his upward tra-

Las Vegas Gamblers

jectory in hopes of reaching the World Series. After just missing with a loss in the Conference finals, Mr. Harrington went back to the drawing board. Off season trades, along with the draft, brought in two catchers, two quality starters, two quality relievers, and a host of set up men. The team is solid, but is it good enough to finally make the World Series?

Kansas will have something to say about the division championship. At the *Annual* we watch as *Bill Schwartz* quietly builds a contending team year in and year out in the Aaron Division. There is no big bounce — just a sure competence based on good pitching, strong hitting, and solid defense every season. Mr. Schwartz and his boys will provide a good challenge this season, and if misfortune falls to the Gamblers, this is a team that could sneak into a division champi-onship. This team often

outpaces our predictions, but it will take a great season from the bullpen to offset the backend of the rotation to make a successful challenge possible.

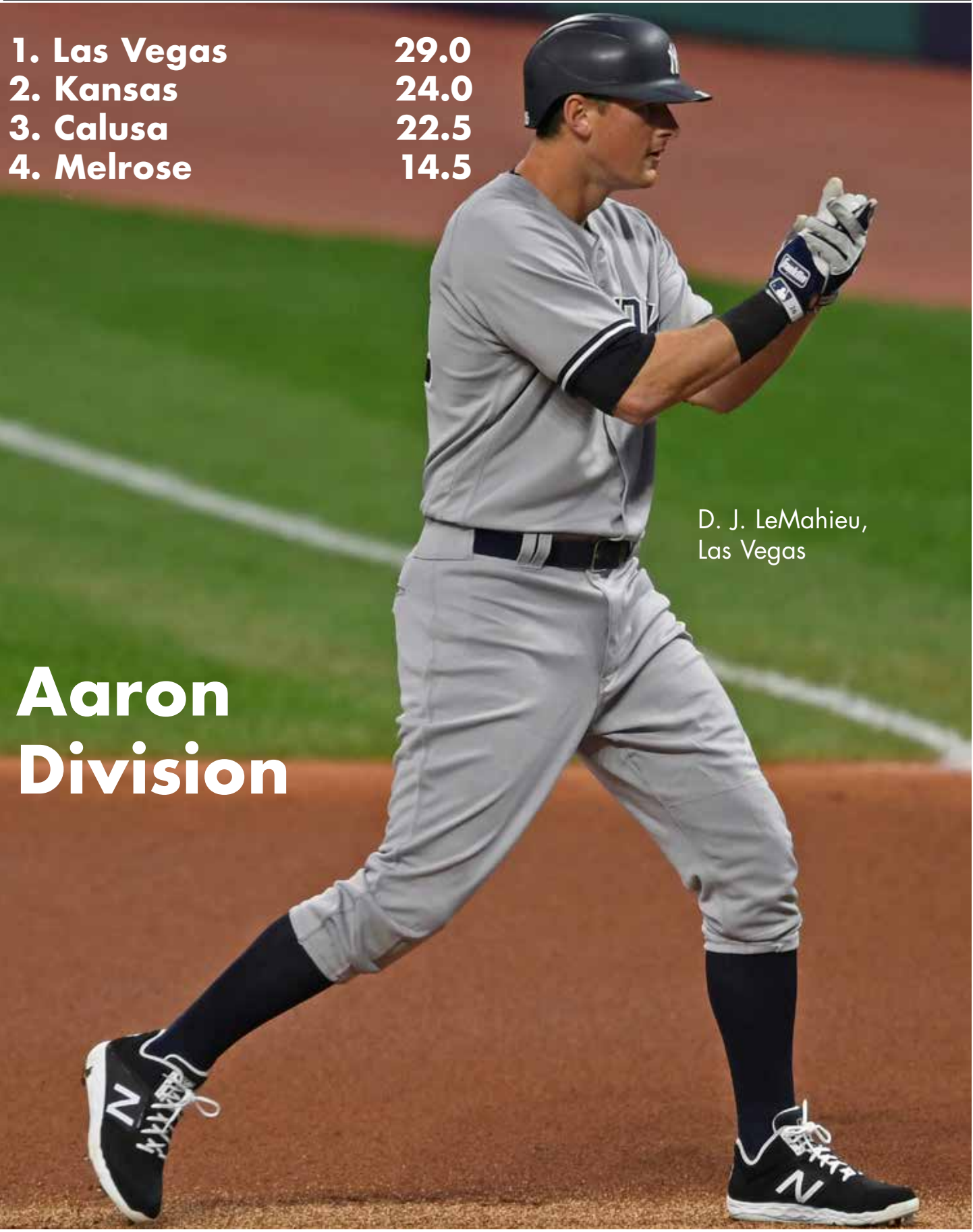Ah, the *Calusa Indians* — who had the #1 pick in the late draft. *Gordon Rodell* tells us the outlook is one of gloom and doom for this year, and that

analysis seems spot on. The starting staff is suspect, the bullpen is wild, and the team is in year three of rebuilding mode. Some good things will come out of this season, but contention for the playoffs is not likely one of those things.

And then, we have the curious case of the *Melrose Avengers*. Everything that could go wrong for *Mark Freedman* did. The pitching has fallen apart, the hitters' bats have turned into ping-pong paddles, and the gloves have suffered from Tin Man Affliction. It's not going to be a pretty season for the Avengers. But TBL can rest assured that a bounce is in the cards. For now, the boys of Melrose are stuck in the Valley of Death.

1. Las Vegas	29.0
2. Kansas	24.0
3. Calusa	22.5
4. Melrose	14.5

D. J. LeMahieu,
Las Vegas

Aaron Division

2020 las vegas GAMBLERS in review

Looking to run the table in 2021.

by Paul Harrington

2020 in Review
Final Record: 100-62 (1st, Aaron)

After two seasons of 100+ losses, Las Vegas had resurrected itself yet again as a team to be feared and respected. The Gamblers outlasted the Avengers to win the Aaron Division, beat back a challenging Dragons team, only to lose out to eventual NC champs Munich in six games.

The season was dissected by the Vegas brain trust and it was thought that there were deficiencies in both the starting staff and the bullpen. The top half of our 2022 draft was sacrificed, as was new 1B Christian Walker, to rectify the situation. We assembled the strongest pitching staff in Gamblers history, possibly in TBL history! The offense was already strong once again. Together they should give us a chance to "run the table" in 2021.

What went right?

Quite a bit. The Gamblers scored 882 runs and stroked 268 homers. They also posted a team record .468 slugging pct. Rookie Pete Alonso slugged 48 HR, driving in 124 and scoring 109 runs. Ryan Braun had 51 doubles and 35 HR from the leadoff spot and Josh Donaldson popped 53 doubles and 36 HR. On the pitching side, staff ace Lucas Giolito had a great "coming out" party, going 14-5 with a 3.17 ERA. Charlie Morton had a great first (and last) season in a Gamblers uniform, posting a miniscule ERA of 2.78 and a record of 16-8 and 10 complete games!

What went wrong?

A few hiccups along the way included the team setting a franchise record with 1,408 strikeouts.

Table setters Braun and D.J. LeMahieu posted a combined batting average of .237 and an OBP of only .295! Christian Walker, brought in to anchor 1B, had a paltry slash line of .217/.299/.344. He now labors in Warrenton. Starter Caleb Smith, in his first full season of 28 starts, went 6-14 with a bloated 5.76 ERA, yielding 40 homers and 73 walks in only 150 innings. He now toils for Grand Cayman.

3 Things

1. Trades, trades and more trades. Big trades with teams like Melrose, Warrenton, Grand

Alonso: Rookie standout

Cayman and Brobdingnag allowed Las Vegas to rebuild and strengthen our pitching staff. Pete Alonso was whining about playing 1B more, so Walker was moved to accommodate him. This freed up the DH spot so Cano barely needs to touch a glove this season, which makes us stronger defensively.

2. A good draft. After good seasons from Carson Kelly and Steven Vogt in 2020, the clock struck twelve and Kelly turned back into servant Cinderella and Vogt into a rotten pumpkin. Kelly was shipped to Brobdingnag for Jacob Stallings and Jeff Mathis was brought to Vegas for Vogt. The Gamblers owned the 72nd pick in 2021 and were shocked to find Kyle Higashioka still available, so he was snapped up. Catching for 2021 in Vegas is now a great strength.

3. A better, stronger pitching staff. The rest of the draft mostly went for bullpen additions. A solid crew that complements the starters. It's probably a step behind 2020 Brobdingnag, but a close step.

las vegas GAMBLERS

Paul Harrington (25th year)

*The Gambler Goal is a berth in the TBL championship series.*

There is no half-way with Paul Harrington and his Gamblers. Feast or famine, all in or nowhere to be seen — that is the Gambler way. When last season's team fell just short of its goal to reach the TBL World Series, Paul Harrington rolled the dice to try to find an ace or two up his sleeve, to mix a metaphor badly. Two new starters; two new quality relievers, two new catchers. A whole new bullpen. Out with the old, in with the new, in a paroxysm of trading similar to taking five cards in a black jack hand in an effort to beat the house. Mr. Harrington tells us in his instructions and in his intro to this article that he feels great about his chances for this season.

But this is the *Annual*, where we challenge assumptions all the time. Can he really win this bet at long last? No doubt the Gamblers are the best team in the Aaron on paper. They should win the division, although the Kansas Koyotes won't go down lightly. Pre-season analysis by our staff, however, says that on paper Northboro is going to the big dance. So bring it on, Gamblers—time to show the stuff you are made of. Mr. Harrington is never one to walk away from a challenge, and he is always going to bet on the come. Time will tell.

Pitching: 14.0
The best in the conference – again.

The rotation is solid with 138 starts of Grade 15 or higher, and all 162 at 8 or better. They strike out hitters but are a little wild, which will matter with the generally lower fatigue ratings this season. The big three for a playoff run is solid, and although SNT Steven Brault is a walk machine, he won't yield many big flies.
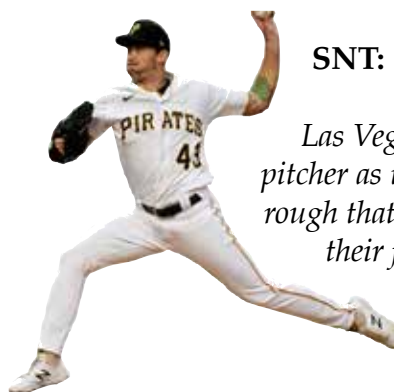
SNT: Stephen Brault.

Las Vegas is banking on this pitcher as the diamond in the rough that will help them reach their first World Series.

Turnover Rate: 45%

Arrived: Adbert Alzolay, Shawn Armstrong, Steven Brault, Humberto Castellanos, Sam Haggerty, Jimmy Herget, Kyle Higashioka, James Hoyt, Nate Jones, Aaron Loup, Tyler Mahle, Chris Martin, Jeff Mathis, Lucas Sims, Gabe Speier, Jacob Stallings, Taylor Ward.

Departed: Homer Bailey, Matt Bowman, Trevor Gott, Carson Kelly, Jose Martinez, Tim Mayza, Mike Morin, Charlie Morton, Jake Newberry, Felix Pena, Caleb Smith, Felipe Vazquez, Stephen Vogt, Christian Walker.

The bullpen is good, but not as good as Vegas would like in a short playoff series. The closer has great peripherals and is set up nicely by a left-right combination with higher grades. The four middle men are solid but not spectacular, and two of them are wickedly wild. Hey, we're gambling here, but on balance this is a staff that should complement the strong starting to make a deep run in the playoffs.

ROTATION. Six starters are Grade 15 or higher. Lucas Giolito is the ace with 32 starts (Grade 16, fatigue 24), closely followed by sophomore apprentice ace Zach Plesac for 22 starts (Grade 17

Giolito: Ace again

C+46, fatigue 26). Brault is a great third starter and the lefty among the trio (Grade 16 C-45 HR+46, but only fatigue 17). Lefty Rich Hill (Grade 16 C-31, fatigue 20), Tyler Mahle (Grade 15, fatigue 21) and rookie Adbert Alzolay (Grade 16 C+62 HR+46, fatigue 17) take the rest of the 138 starts. Elieser Hernandez (Grade 13), Homer Bailey (Grade 8) and opener Austin Brice (Grade 8, fatigue 10) round out the rest of the starts. It's a solid but slightly wild group that usually will keep the ball in the park as it works.

BULLPEN. Is there enough at the top? Mr. Harrington has selected Chris Martin as his closer (Grade 18* C+46 HR+42, 50 innings). Other teams have much higher grades in that position in their pens. Vegas does have Lucas Sims for consideration (Grade 23* C-26, 74 innings), but those innings and the control issues mean he is best used in the set up role. His lefty counterpart, Zach Britton (Grade 19* HR+62) is a great counterbalance to stop late rallies.

Then it gets dicey (pardon the pun, gentle readers). The middle innings are in the hands of four relievers who are not largely different from the starters they would be relieving. Two of these are wild right-handers. Jimmy Herget (Grade 17* C-62) and James Hoyt (Grade 14* C-35 HR+41) will work best starting innings. Mr. Harrington has procured the services of a lefty-righty combination to come in mid-inning to stop rallies, however, in lefty Aaron Loup (Grade 16* C+41) and righty Shawn Armstrong (Grade 15* C+33 HR+36). Loup is much better

Martin: Selected closer

than a traditional LOOGY with his 69 innings, but Armstrong only has 42 innings and will have to be used judiciously.

And that brings us to "the rest of the staff." It ain't pretty here, folks, with Oliver Drake (Grade 11* C-34 HR-23), lefty Tim Hill (Grade 8), and Austin Brice (Grade 8* C-62) picking up the slack as needed for a total of 132 innings. Vegas will gamble that they will not be needed often thanks to strong starting efforts.

Offense: 8.0
Down from last season.

These are not the maulers of last season. Three hitters sparkle: D. J. LeMahieu (1-0-0-0-0, 13 hits, 3 walks), Xander Bogaerts (1-5-5, 11 hits, 3 walks, R-5), and Robinson Cano (1-0-0-0, 12 hits, 2 walks). LeMahieu can only play 135 games, Cano 132. Then there are the three power hitters: all or nothing Adam Duvall (1-1-5-5, 9 hits, 3 walks), sophomore slumper Pete Alonso (1-1-5, 8 hits, 3 walks+42), and aging Ryan Braun (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks). Catching improved with the addition of a dynamic duo in a platoon: Kyle Higashioka (1-1-0-0, 10 hits, R+7) and Jacob Stallings (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+8).

The offense drops from that spot to pedestrian. Jackie Bradley is the best of the rest (1-6-6, 10 hits, 4 walks). Jon Berti (2 0s, 8 hits, 6 walks+42) will be an on base machine, but only for 105 games. Sam Haggerty will replace

Bogaerts, Alonso: Down from last season

Braun against lefties (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+4) and is interesting for 35 games. Not the scary offense Las Vegas had last season for certain. Practically disappearing from TBL are Josh Donaldson, Corey Dickerson, Kris Bryant, and Ronald Guzman. But they are still sitting on the Gambler bench. It's overall an inconsistent offense. There are guys who have power, guys who get on base, but very few who do both on a regular basis. Short of a record number of 66s, this is a flaw in the Vegas gamble.

Defense: 4.0
Another decline from 2020.

There is a slight drop off here from last season. LeMahieu and Donaldson dropped to 8 and 4 at their positions, and Bogaerts is still an 8 at SS. Higashioka (Th+6) and Stallings are both C-8s. Alonso still fiddles with a glove at first base. Duvall and Bradley are solid in left and center, and the Braun-Haggerty are both OF2s. Cano takes his clanking glove to the DH spot this season, and that is a good thing.

Bench: 3.0
Helpful.

While there is a bit of decline there are parts the Gamblers can use in key spots in games. Jeff Mathis is a solid C-8 Th+4 arm with 1-0-0 power. Roman Quinn is a good PR (35 SBA, Sp 20). Dickerson (1-6, 9 hits) and Taylor Ward (3 0s, 10 hits) can provide hits off the bench, while Bryant (3 0s), Matt Davidson (1-1-6), and Guzman (1-0-0) can possibly help. Guzman can also spell Alonso when the Gamblers actually want to catch the ball in the infield.

1st The Gamblers are clearly the class of the Aaron Division. The sum of the parts is good enough to win 90 to 100 games; the Gambler Goal is a berth in the TBL championship series. The team is not as strong at the plate and in the field as last year, but the starting pitching is solid. Five of the nine starters can throw

well enough to miss bats on a regular basis, and all of them keep the ball in the park. Defensively, they are good enough to make most of those fielding plays, although Guzman is going to have to spell Alonso to guarantee that crucial errors do not happen late in close games. Upon objective analysis from the *Annual* staff, the bullpen does not look as strong as Mr. Harrington thinks it is.

This is an older, veteran team. We will may witness a bounce season in 2022. There are going to have to be some breaks to make it to the Series, but we would never bet against the king of the Gamblers himself in 2021.

las vegas GAMBLERS

Ages of players on the Las Vegas roster, as of 07/01/2021:

41: R. Hill
38: Cano, Mathis
37: Braun
35: Donaldson, N. Jones, C. Martin
34: Drake, Hoyt
33: Britton, Loup
32: C. Dickerson, Duvall, LeMahieu
31: Berti, J. Bradley, Higashioka, T. Hill, Stallings
30: Armstrong
29: Brault, Brice, Bryant
28: Bogaerts, Quinn
27: Haggerty, Herget, T. Ward
26: Alonso, Alzolay, Giolito, Guzman, E. Hernandez, Mahle, Plesac, Sims, Speier
23: H. Castellanos

TQ: **29.0**

2020 kansas KOYOTES in review

Still lamenting dropping Liam Hendriks.

by Bill Schwartz

2020 in Review
Final Record: 86-76 (3rd, Aaron)

In the words of Yogi Berra, it was *déjà vu all over again.* Picked to win 79 games by the computer pre-play, the Koyotes again overachieved slightly to win 86. However, that 86-76 record was only good for third in the Aaron and fell four games short of the second wildcard spot. 2021's version will have similar expectations as last year. It will be interesting to see if last year's overachievement can be repeated.

What went right?

The new Big Three at the top of the rotation, Sonny Gray, Aaron Civale, and Max Scherzer posted 68 starts of a 37-20, 3.21 ERA, led by Scherzer's 16-6, 2.82, 260 Ks, whose 12.63 K/9 led the TBL and featured 14 double digit outings, including two 16 K efforts. Ken Giles posted 40 saves and a 1.64 ERA and had excellent support from Joakim Soria with a 1.59 ERA in 62 RIP in his setup role. Yimi Garcia and Rafael Montero chipped in with sub-2.45 ERA's in the pen.

Offensively, George Springer led the team with 35 HR and .509 slugging. The real offensive threat, though, was Michael Tauchman in his part-time role (.287 BA, .593 SA, 27 HR and 74 RBIs in 334 AB). The Koyotes slugged 251 HR, second most in team history, with 12 hitters in double figures.

What went wrong?

The starters other than the Big Three could only post a mediocre 28-38, 5.75 record.

Scherzer: K leader

Luis Severino's TJ injury not only produced no 2021 card, but also makes a 2022 card questionable.

An anemic .234 team batting average made for a lot of those 251 HRs being solo shots and no batter with more than 73 runs scored or 77 RBIs.

3 Things

1. Results of the draft. Despite dropping to the #14 spot, the Koyotes feel good about filling their holes. Prospect Cristian Javier was still there at #14. Jared Walsh in round 2 was a steal and was needed to replace long-time fan favorite, but Japan-bound, Justin Smoak. Relief help was added in Darren O'Day, Chasen Shreve, Jonathan Hernandez, and sleeper pick Nick Nelson. On base machine (6-14's) Andrew Knapp added a second catcher. Tyrone Taylor's 1-5-5-6-6 will add OF offense.

2. Bullpen Situation. With only 284 RIP returning (and only 228 above a Grade 9), drafting relief was a must. With that in mind, 262 innings of quality relief were added in O'Day, Shreve and Hernandez. The Koyotes are still lamenting dropping Liam Hendriks a couple of years ago. Brad Hand will be a reliable closer, but we can only wonder what a Grade 22 would look like with him?

3. What's up with Yasiel Puig? Puig has been a Koyote mainstay since he was drafted as a rookie, but a combination of COVID and his being blackballed by MLB has led to no card this year – and with no MLB job in sight. Hard to believe that someone can't use his bat, speed, and arm!

kansas KOYOTES

Bill Schwartz (14th year)

What if everything falls into place?

This is the Midwest version of baseball in the National Conference. Bill Schwartz, like the Guru, likes pitchers first, and he likes them with good peripherals. The offense usually lacks the power that other teams have, but it is always pesky, and the emphasis on pitching makes the Kansas Koyotes a team to be reckoned with from season to season. The overall TQ rating of 24.5 compares with last season's 24, which suggests that we should have similar expectations.

As we look back to last year's prognostication, then, it is safe to say that the Koyotes, in the skillful hands of Mr. Schwartz, can be expected to give Las Vegas a run for its money in the Aaron Division. Las Vegas has a stronger rotation, but its bullpen is wild. Kansas has a similar quality of bullpen grades but with much better control and fewer bad homerun peripherals. This is going to be a fun season to watch as the Koyotes try to push past the Gamblers.

Pitching: 10.0
Bullpen makes the difference.

A solid, competent rotation, strong bullpen with an ace closer, and lots of innings for those

SNT: Cristian Javier.

27 starts as a 15 is solid for a rookie pitcher. When that command improves, look out TBL!

starts that are manned by the rotation's weak links make this a formidable staff. Mr. Schwartz knows how to work this staff to his best advantage. Opponents will find it hard to score runs late in any game where the Koyotes lead. The race with the Gamblers may well be closer than the TQ numbers suggest. Paper is only paper, and that's why we play the games, folks!

ROTATION. The big three is on hand for 87 games. Lefty Dallas Keuchel is the ace once again (Grade 16 HR+54). Sonny Gray retains the second spot in the rotation, although his control takes a bit of a hit this season (Grade 14 C-32 HR+36). Rookie Cristian Javier will struggle a bit as a fly ball pitcher who yields homers despite great stuff (Grade 15 HR-32). That is definitely a cut below the big three in Vegas. Drew Smyly is a good fourth starter, but only available 14 times and can't go deep (Grade 13 HR+35, 18 fatigue). Then we drop off.

Keuchel: Big one of three

Max Scherzer has the name and is used to being an ace, but this season he will struggle (Grade 9, but a 25 fatigue). Brett Anderson is, well, Brett Anderson (Grade 6 C+34). Aaron Civale takes

Turnover Rate: 29%

Arrived: Jonathan Hernandez, Cristian Javier, Andrew Knapp, Mark Mathias, Nick Nelson, Darren O'Day, Chasen Shreve, Erik Swanson, Tyrone Taylor, Jared Walsh.

Departed: Tim Beckham, Taylor Cole, Ken Giles, Jose LeClerc, Mark Reynolds, C. C. Sabathia, Hector Velazquez.

the final two starts (Grade 5 C+33). As a whole, this is not a starting staff that should compete with Vegas.

kansas KOYOTES

BULLPEN. And yet the bullpen gives hope that the Koyotes can indeed compete. Brad Hand is a better closer (yes, yes, we know the consensus that you can't win with a lefty closer). His grade and peripherals are what you want on the hill in the ninth inning (Grade 20* C+35 HR+62). The three setup men are more than capable as well, although Chasen Shreve struggles with his control. Darren O'Day (Grade 16* C+41) and Yimi Garcia (Grade 15* HR+62) work from the right side while Shreve serves as the late lefty (Grade 15* C-41). Combined they are available for 158 innings on top of Hand's 59.

Hand: What you want

The next tier of bullpen guys is just what a team wants for the middle innings despite being all right handed. Joakim Soria (Grade 14* HR+51), Jonathan Hernandez (Grade 14* HR+41), and Rafael Montero (Grade 14* HR+21) chip in 199 workman-like innings.

There are 115 innings of the usual suspects for mop up situations in Nick Ramirez (Grade 9* HR-52, Nick Nelson (Grade 9* C-44 HR-22), and Luis Avilan (Grade 8* C-52 HR-32). They will likely see action only in games that are already (if you will pardon the expression) out of hand, with the role of pouring more gasoline on the fire. Every staff needs a couple of these guys!

Offense: 8.0
Smoke and mirrors.

Platoons exist everywhere in this offense. The Koyotes will mix and match on offense all season, taking advantage of hitting shifts to put its

best nine on the field. With no overwhelming offensive forces, this is still a capable offense on any given day.

Catching first — a platoon of half seasons of Yan Gomes (1-4-6, 11 hits, 2 walks) and Andrew Knapp (3 0s, 9 hits, 6 walks) looks plenty good. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde man first base in the really good Jared Walsh (1-1-1-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks) and the really bad Justin Smoak (1-5-6, 7 hits, 3 walks), again a half season of each. It takes three to fill the middle infield positions, with combinations of Chris Taylor (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks), Juan Segura (1-4, 9 hits, 4 walks), and Kike Hernandez (1-0-0-0, 9 hits). Taylor is also in the outfield platoon. Third base is going to be the weakest of the infield platoons as Mike Moustakas (1-1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks+42) and Jose Osuna (1-5-5, 8 hits, 2 walks) provide power but not much else offensively.

In addition to Chris Taylor in the outfield, the platooning includes left fielders Mike Tauchman (6-6, 9 hits, 4 walks) and Pat Valaika (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks). George Springer (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks) shares time in center and right with C. Taylor and Tyrone Taylor (1-5-5-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks). Ryan McBroom (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks) and Mark Mathias (6-6-6, 11 hits) serve as DH.

Springer: Sharing

In toto, it is a funky offense. There is no single great power source here, but there are lots of guys who can rip the ball and others who can get on base. This is a team that will sneak up on you.

Defense: 4.0
Declined.

All that platooning comes with a downside, however, and that is a general weakness on

defense. The catchers are both 7s, and Gomes has a Th-4 while Knapp is only a Th+0. Smoak is a 5 at 1B, but Walsh is only a 3. Hernandez and Segura are 8s at 2B, but ChrisTaylor is a 7. All three are 8s at SS. Moustakas is a 4 at 3B, but Osuna clanks with a 3 when he is in the field. Valaika is a 1 in left field, but the light-hitting Tauchman is a 3. Springer is also a 3, but both Taylors are 2s in the outfield. There is always a price to pay when you have to platoon this much.

Bench: 3.0
Depends on the lineup.

There are two ways to look at the bench. One way is that it is weak, with Ildemaro Vargas a 2B-8 (2 0s) and Francisco Mejia (C7 Th-4). So there is no late inning help at catcher or in the middle infield or third outfield spot. On the other hand, the platooning means there are lots of guys sitting on the bench who did not start or in the game who can be shifted, and they can enter the game as needed. This is a bench built for versatility, not game to game late-inning improvement. Again, this is the Midwest syndrome in effect. Are Bill and Darrell clones, or are they twin sons of different mothers, having grown up in neighboring South Dakota and Minnesota?

2nd Despite these anomalies, this is a team that we think will work better than the sum of its parts. There are lots of players who can help day to day. The starting pitching is good enough. The bullpen can hold a lead and shut down other teams in close games. The defense is not great, but it is not going to throw away too many leads either. The biggest drawback is that a move that might ice the game, a key pinch-hit or pinch run move, a defensive change — these things are not going to happen for the Koyotes.

Despite that, Mr. Schwartz is a very capable manager, and he will get every ounce of great-

ness out of the players he has on his roster. On paper, there is no way he should match Mr. Harrington's Gamblers.

And yet … What if everything falls into place? What if the dice get hot? What if the Koyotes play a little better than the *Annual* staff expects it to, and what if the Gamblers are just a tad behind the pace the paper implies? As stated earlier, sports fans, this is why we play the game. Kansas is a hard team to analyze as the season starts, but based on previous seasons, one can expect to be pleasantly surprised about the fight it puts up in 2021.

Ages of players on the Kansas roster, as of 07/01/2021:

38: O'Day
37: Soria
36: Scherzer
34: Smoak
33: B. Anderson, Gomes, Keuchel
32: Moustakas, Smyly
31: Avilan, Hand, S. Gray, N. Ramirez, J. Segura, Springer
30: Y. Garcia, Montero, Shreve, Tauchman, C. Taylor
29: K. Hernandez, Knapp, McBroom, I. Vargas
28: Jo. Osuna, Valaika
27: Swanson, T. Taylor, J. Walsh
26: Civale, Mathias, Nelson
25: F. Mejia

TQ: **24.0**

2020 calusa INDIANS in review

Without losers, where would the winners be? – Casey Stengel

by Gordon Rodell

2020 in Review
Final Record: 64-98 (4th, Aaron)

By all accounts, the 2020 Calusa season was a complete and utter failure.No preseason goals were attained and the hiring of Joe Boo was a disaster. This year's goal is "Set Lower Standards." An example: "Win A, Just A, Road Game." We only won 23 last season, so no use getting overly ambitious. Second goal: "Play Every Game on the Schedule." It's the least we can do.

What went right?

Freddy Freeman. *Still*! Despite a -10 BC vs LHP, he slashed .281/.358/.558. He clubbed 44 doubles, 41 home runs, and knocked in 105 runs. Not exactly MVP numbers, but those will come. Albert Pujols hit his 600th home run. He finished the season with 19, making his career total 613. SS Jose Iglesias hit .267 with 17 HR. Jonathan Villar added 43 doubles and 17 HR. Jack Flaherty won 16 games. Lefty Tommy Milone worked as both a starter and reliever and finished with a 3.19 ERA. Luke Weaver was a lights out closer with 17 saves and a 2.02 ERA.

Freeman: Tired of this pic?

What went wrong?

Pretty much everything else. You know, stuff like hitting, running, throwing, catching, scoring runs, and pitching. Stuff that wins games. The catching position remained a black hole. IND's three catchers combined to slash .173/.254/.252. Even though we played with the DH, we sorta didn't, since our DHs combined to hit .201. The team hit only 181 HR in the year of the homer. We had six pitchers finish with an ERA north of 6.00. 105 defensive errors. 4.95 team ERA. Add this all together and you get 98 losses. *Way to go, Guys!*

3 Things

1. Minions. Hairii Kareee, Rube Foster, and Frenchy Fry haven't been seen since December 2019. A memo found on the beach said something about going fishing and exploring the 10,000 islands. The organization is now leaderless, except for the Minions left behind to fend for themselves. Knowing nothing about baseball, they are now in charge. Consensus is they can't possibly do any work than the previous Chiefs. To save the team from complete chaos, Freeman agreed to become the player-manager.

2. 66's for Albert. Everyone loves Albert Pujols, right? Can we all agree he would be a much better number two on the career homerun list than the dastardly A-Rod? Albert needs 27 homers to accomplish this feat. So let's all jump on the bandwagon and pledge to throw a 66 for Albert in each road series. I'm sure he can get eight round trippers at home, and that would put him over the top. Come on guys, 66's for Albert!!

3. OMG! WE GOT THE FIRST PICK. Looo-IS, Looo-IS, oh baby we gotcha! Yeah, Yeah, Yeah! If Frenchy was still around his response would probably be, "So what?" Probably better he's gone.

calusa INDIANS

Gordon Rodell (7th year)

It's getting better; it always gets darkest before the dawn,

Sometimes paper rankings match what we expect to see in real life, and Gordon Rodell's Calusa Indians are a great example of that. The TQ says he is just a tad behind the Koyotes in the race for second place in the Aaron Division. Mr. Rodell knows better. As he writes in his instructions, "A fourth consecutive losing year looms on the horizon. Once bright optimism and brash confidence have been replaced by despair and pessimism."

Here at the *Annual*, while we agree somewhat with that analysis, we can't match the gloomy, overly humble and incredibly realistic Mr. Rodell. Things are starting to fall into place. Yes, there is still work to do. But the team is getting younger and getting better. The TQ rose from 16.5 last season to 22.5 in the latest reckoning, and that rise is in three of the four categories, with the fourth holding relatively steady. A truer analysis would be a line from the Beatles: "we have to admit it's getting better, it's getting better all the time."

Pitching: 7.0
Lots of moving parts.

ROTATION. Eleven starters man the 162 games in Mr. Rodell's instructions, including eleven by Tejay Antone (Grade 21 C-34 HR+21), eight by

SNT: Luis Robert.

The consensus number one pick, Mr. Rodell traded up to take this young outfielder. He'll be happy with this choice for years to come.
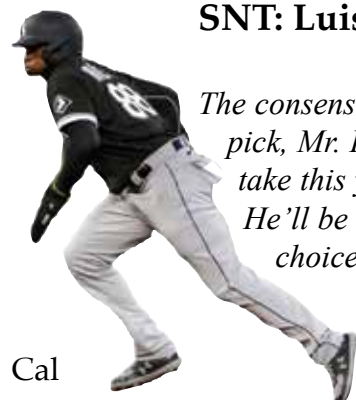
Cal

Quantrill (Grade 13 C+33),and one by lefty Brent Suter (Grade 11 C+42). All of these guys will really do most of their work in the bullpen.

There are some starters whose grades are in double digits: Tanner Houck (Grade 17 C-62), top pick lefty David Peterson (Grade 15 C-36), lefty Josh

Peterson: Top pick

Fleming (Grade 13 C+32), Matt Shoemaker (Grade 12 HR-55), and Jack Flaherty (Grade 10). Altogether that is 100 starts of 10 or higher.

And then along come the projects, starters who have great names but had bad years, worse than the one Flaherty had. These include Frankie Montas with 30 starts (Grade 5), David Porcello with 28 horrible starts (Grade 1 C+31 HR+34) and four starts of Seth Lugo (Grade 5 HR-31, fatigue 20). The mass usage of relievers to start cuts into the quality of relief; the bad starts cut into the number of wins to expect this season as this team will fall behind early and often. Mr. Rodell is counting on nice names like Shoemaker, Flaherty, Montas, Porcello, and Lugo to do better in the future. This year, it will be a major struggle.

Turnover Rate: 45%

Arrived: Tejay Antone, Daniel Bard, Peter Fairbanks, Josh Fleming, Austin Hedges, Tanner Houck, Pierce Johnson, Seth Lugo, Danny Mendick, Frankie Montas, Edward Olivares, David Peterson, David Phelps, Luis Robert, Joely Rodriguez, Josh Staumont, Brent Suter.

Departed: Jairo Diaz, Erick Fedde, Todd Frazier, Mike Freeman, Luke Jackson, Joe Jimenez, Ariel Jurado, Tommy Milone, Matt Thaiss, Lane Thomas, Adam Wainwright, Trey Wingenter.

BULLPEN. The pen is a mess of guys with bad control or the lethal combination of low grades and high negative HR ratings. Antone will close when available, supported by Pierce Johnson, who will double as a setup man (Grade 16* C-33). Two wild closers — can we say gasoline on a fire??

Then there are Peter Fairbanks for 66 innings (Grade 14* C-42 HR+36), lefty Joely Rodriguez for 35 innings (Grade 12* HR+62), and Josh Staumont for 72 innings (Grade 17* C-62 HR+36). Peterson will chip in 11 innings in this role as well. So that makes 294 innings of wild but homer-resistant late inning relief. There is a chance to win games here when the Indians are ahead.

But the 62 really bad starts mean that the rest of the relievers will have to see substantial time, and here it is a really mixed bag. The good: Daniel Bard (Grade 11* HR+34), Quantrill, and Fleming in a limited 18 innings. There is a good caddy in Suter and a good LOOGY in Alex Claudio (Grade 9*). And then the bad are truly awful: Lugo, Jon Holder (Grade 4* for 81 IP), and the almost unusable David Phelps (Grade 5* C+26 HR-62). If they fall behind early in those 62 starts, it could be well nigh impossible for the Indians to get back into the game.

Offense: 7.5
Still Freddie Freeman and his buddies.

It's getting better, but Freeman is still the straw that stirs a weak drink. Freeman is awesome again (1-5-5-6, 11 hits, 6 walks). While there no other studs in place on that level, there are some very nice offensive pieces to work with him.

Freeman: Straw man

Luis Robert is pretty good for a rookie (1-5-5, 9 hits, 3 walks, though the early-season injury has to hurt). JaCoby Jones is developing but limited to only half a season (1-0-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2

Jones: Developing

14s+42). Sophomore Trent Grisham is also coming along and looks like he will be a superstar soon (1-4-5, 9 hits, 5 walks). Albert Pujols (1-5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks) continues to decline, to the point that Mr. Rodell has called on the league to have everyone groove a pitch to him for a HR in each road series as he continues his chase to surpass the evil A-Rod on the TBL career HR leader board – he needs 27 to do it. Jose Iglesias looks to be ready for a career year in TBL (1-0-0-0, 14 hits, 1 walk+42). Jessie Winker is an on base machine (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks+42).

Jonathan Villar scares no one (2 0s, 9 hits) but will steal some bases if he makes it aboard. Garrett Hampson continues to develop slowly, unable to crack the lineup yet in Calusa (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 10 13s!). Journeymen Danny Mendick (3 0s, 9 hits) and Ed Olivares (1-4, 9 hit numbers) will likely see more playing time than Mr. Rodell would like them to have. Let's not talk about catchers not named Austin Barnes (2 0s, 8 hits), who is not terribly ferocious himself. This offense will score some runs when the OBP types get on base. But when the guys who can't get on base have to play more, Calusa will struggle to score.

Defense: 4.0
Serious leather.

Barnes is a C8, and Austin Hedges will replace him with his C9 Th+5 in late innings. Freddie is a 1B5, Wendle is a 2B8, 3B4, but unfortunately he will have to platoon at those two spots with Villar (2B-7) and Miguel Andujar (3B-3). Iglesias has his normal SS9. The outfield is strong with Winker a 2 but Robert, Jones, and Grisham all

flashing 3s. This team will generally catch the ball and not beat itself with defensive misplays.

Bench: 3.0
Depends who is in the lineup.

There are lots of options due to the number of platoons and shared positions, so Calusa has some moves it can make during the game. Other than players already discussed, there are a few remaining players on the roster.

Hedges is an upgrade late in the games defensively and Olivares provides a good bat off the bench. Hampson can pinch run (33 SSN) but he has not yet matured into the supersub who could play almost every day. Jason Castro has dropped off the face of the TBL earth. Mendick is a serviceable defensive replacement everywhere in the infield.

3rd Calusa is definitely headed in the right direction, but it is not there yet in 2021. The Indians feature some quality young players who will be better in the future — Robert, Jones, Grisham, Hampson. They have some arms who could come back and improve the pitching in the long run—Flaherty, Montas, Lugo, Porcello, Shoemaker. They have some enigmas, guys who have talent but have not shown it yet. They have too many players whose careers have been derailed by injury.

Mr. Rodell has drafted well (he still uses the Murphy book as his Secret Weapon, after all), but he has had bad luck with players who could have been more useful than they have been so far. He might be the poster boy for that old canard: "if it weren't for bad luck, I wouldn't have had any luck at all."

Iconic – and photogenic

The Minions are now running the team after Hairii Kareee, Rube Foster, Frenchy Fry, and Joe

Boo have been sent on their collective ways. They say that karma is a you-know-what. Perhaps the next move is to call the team the Calusa Baseball Club—you know, like the Cleveland baseball and Washington football teams have done, to try to change the mojo, say hey. Otherwise, here at the Annual, we have one recommendation for Mr. Rodell—stay the course. It's getting better, it always gets darkest before the dawn, things are never as bad as they look. All those golden oldie phrases come to mind as we counsel the Calusa brain trust to keep hoping. they can return this franchise to winning ways.
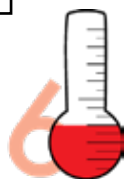
Just not in 2021.

TQ: **22.5**

2020 melrose AVENGERS in review

COVID. The pitching totally collapsed. Bounce?

by Mark Freedman

2020 in Review
Final Record: 97-65 (2nd, Aaron)

We can't say it was a successful season when expectations were more than a one and done in the playoffs. The team, like the season, suffered from a split personality, unable to win on the computer or the road. The inability to trade for a closer, and refusal to select a certain player certainly helped the team miss expectations.

What went right?

There isn't much to say about what went right. We finished second in the division with 97 wins. The road record didn't live up to our ability at home. The team hit 283 home runs and scored 976 runs, yet still seems like it could have done better. J.D. Martinez was a monster with 45 homers and 43 doubles. Matt Olson slugged 35 in 127 games. Anthony Rendon (.314, 33 HR, 48 doubles), Marcus Semien (31 HR, 45 doubles), Michael Conforto (32 HR, 103 RBI), and Michael Brantley (.362, 68 doubles, 26 HRs) all mashed the ball. The 976 runs were 304 more than the pitching staff gave up.

Martinez: Reprise

What went wrong?

No World Series bid. The pitching staff was average. The pen accounted for 20 losses. The inability to trade for a closer before the start of the season hurt. It wasn't an ideal season despite winning 97 games. Despite giving up only 672 runs, the staff could not be depended upon in the late innings, a crucial flaw come playoff time.

3 Things

1. COVID. I'm sure a lot of teams will mention this but the abbreviated season, spring training mess, and threat of disease made a mess of my team. Offensively, there will just not be great performance this season from Matt Olson, Marcus Semien, J.D. Martinez, and Shohei Ohtani.

2. The pitching totally collapsed. I'm not sure there is a pitcher worth having on the current roster. The rotation is a patchwork of short start pitchers with weak peripherals and low Grades – 9-7-6-4-3-1, with a 15 who has terrible control and only 11 starts. Marcus Stroman will be on the bench all season, hoping to come back in 2022. A little over 500 innings of relief from bullpen men with weak peripherals and only one Grade 20 among them is likely not enough to back up the weak starters. Reyes Moronta would fit in nicely here, but he is sitting out the season and hoping for a return in 2022 as well. Starters will often be stapled to the mound to take their lumps this year in games that are blowouts.

3. Bounce? Hope players rebound and some recent picks thrive and play a full season. We can hope the sudden decline of some players was the result of the mess of 2020 and not a decline in skill. Guys like Olson, Semien, Martinez, and Ohtani can't possibly perform this badly two years in a row, can they?

melrose AVENGERS

Mark Freedman (28th year)

Somehow, it should all come back to normal next season.

The late great Tom Petty passed away in 2017 from a drug overdose caused by pain medications. Last season MLB almost passed away due to COVID, working its way painfully through a 60 game season. Some players excelled; others failed miserably. All of our teams were impacted one way or another by this phenomenon, but the Melrose Avengers were hurt so badly, one can only think of the Petty tune in which he wails that he is free falling. It's an apt metaphor for the Melrose experience from last year to this. 31.5 TQ and a 97 win season. The powers that be rate this season as a 14 on the TQ scale. That's what we call free falling.

Melrose still has some great names. Matt Olson, Anthony Rendon, Marcus Semien, Rowdy Tellez, Michael Brantley, Michael Conforto, J. D. Martinez, Chris Paddack, Charlie Morton, James Paxton, Shohei Ohtani. Too many of them played as if they were the incredible shrinking men of TBL, and the ones who continued to excel were so few that manager Mark Freedman threw in the towel early in the winter and made two decisions: one, to stay the course with his players, hoping for a short term return to greatness in 2022; two, to draft for the future by going for a young new shortstop of the future in Anderson Tejeda. It's going to be ugly in 2021 for the Avengers. But Mr. Freedman is a veteran of the bounce process when players fall off the cliff and a whole new team has to be built over several years. This appears to him to be a blip on his radar, a minor annoyance to be waited out in hopes of a better season in 2022. Unlike Petty, neither Mr. Freedman nor any of his players expect to have the pain of this season become a life or death thing. All we can say is: "This too shall pass."

Pitching: Oh, my.   3.5

This is, in a word, horrible. How horrible, you ask? What about *20*, count them on two hands and two feet, 20 starts at or above grade 11? 72 starts of Grade 6 to 9. 70 starts of Grade 4 or lower, including 46 starts of Grade 1. Unwinnable. Mr. Freedman has his typical bullpen — wild, to be sure, but with good grades. He has 320 innings of Grade 13* or higher. He has 132 mop up innings of Grade 10*. There are even 71 innings of Grade 5* for real mop up situations and 60 of Grade 1*.

Gomber: No idea

Turnover Rate: 29%

Arrived: Zack Burdi, Carlos Hernandez, Vimael Machin, Charlie Morton, Johan Oviedo, Wandy Peralta, Cole Sulser, Anderson Tejeda, Cole Tucker, Kyle Wright, Tyler Zuber.

Departed: Steven Brault, Logan Forsythe, Jandel Gustave, Yoshihisa Hirano, Derek Holland, Chris Martin, Lucas Sims, Julio Teheran.

SNT: Anderson Tejeda.

The heir apparent to Marcus Semien, this youngster is the latest in the line of offensive picks by the Avenger brain trust.

melrose AVENGERS

And none of it will matter. This is a team that should be trailing early, often, and by large amounts, with an offense that is not likely to keep them in those games.

ROTATION. Those 20 starts at Grade 11 or higher? They are wild too, as both Austin Gomber (Grade 15 C-46) and Wade Miley (Grade 11 C-55) appear to have no idea where the strike zone is. The next group fares poorly as well. Kyle Wright (Grade 9 C-62) also lacks strike zone awareness. As for Carlos Hernandez (Grade 8 HR-41) and Chris Paddack (Grade 7 HR-41), they know where the plate is but throw the ball over it far too often. Rookie Johan Oviedo is a good hope for the future but this season will be rocky (Grade 6 HR+22), though it's better than some of the others' chances. Veteran Charlie Morton (Grade 4 C+26 HR+26), obtained via trade to eat innings, will do what all good innings eaters do: give up too many runs. The last two starters, James Paxton (Grade 1 HR-22) and Shohei Ohtani (Grade 1 C-62 HR+62) will flame out of games quickly.

BULLPEN. Tanner Scott (Grade 20* C-36 HR+46) is the prototypical Avenger closer – hard to hit but living on the edge one walk at a time. The four set up pitchers are also Avengers in spirit. Evan Marshall (Grade 15* C+15 HR+51) is the anomaly. The others buy into the regular program: Wandy Peralta (Grade 14* C-15), Tyler Zuber (Grade 14* C-61), and Matt Barnes (Grade 13* C-52). The middle men include former closer Blake Treinen (Grade 10* C+23 HR +52) and rookie Cole Sulser (Grade 10* C-62 HR+33). At the bottom of the barrel are Steve Cishek, Kyle Crick and Zack Burdi. The Avengers will give up plenty of runs this season.

Offense: 12.0
What happened to J. D. and pals?

The good news is that the Avengers are fielding an offense that for the most part can play all season. The bad news is that they can play all season. Michael Conforto (1-5-6, 11 hits, 4 walks+42) and Michael Brantley (4 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks). are both fine; Asdrubal Cabrera (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks) and Rowdy Tellez (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks) are both decent, though Tellez can only play 95 games. Anthony Rendon (1-5-6, 9 hits, 6 walks+42) is off his peak, but Ian Happ (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks) has a useful card, as does Curt Casali's half-season (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks+42). Then there are Marcus Semien (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks) and Matt Olson (1-1-0, 7 hits, 5 walks).

Conforto: Fine

That leaves some big names on the bench. Biggest of them all is Martinez (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks). Cameron Maybin dropped out of sight (4 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks). Jorge Alfaro gets the other half of the catching season (1-0, 9 hits, 1 walk+42). The Avengers are looking forward to ending the season with Tejeda at SS (1-0-0-0, 10 hits), showing how badly they expect Semien to play.

It's a very disappointing offense based on the names, with few options, and potentially many 1-2-3 innings. Hmmm — lots of runs given up, not many runs scoring—. It's going to be a very long season in Melrose.

Defense: 3.5
Some bright spots, but not many.

Rendon and Olson are stellar at the infield corners. The middle is weak, however, with Semien

Rendon, Olson: Stellar at the corners

an 8 at shortstop, Cabrera a 7 at second base, Happ a 2 in centerfield, and Casali an 8 Th-1 and Alfaro a C7 Th-1. Brantley is a 3 in left field, Conforto is a 2 in right. Usually it will be good enough, but there will be some bad moments, and the pitching staff will not be able to pitch around those errors with all those walks and home runs.

Bench: 2.0
Not really a bench.

A bench allows a team to better itself in the late innings of a game. This will not be happening in Melrose this season. Zack Collins is a C5 Th-4. Brandon Drury and Vimael Machin have lots of versatility; that does no good, however, when you are totally unable to put a batted ball in play and you do not increase the fielding grade of the player you would be replacing. Maybin does provide a solid glove with that OF3, and he is still somewhat of a force off the bench both hitting and running the bases. Cole Tucker will be seen in the dugout mouthing the famous mantra from the Reagan administration: "Just say no."

4th No one does the bounce better than Mr. Freedman. This drop off the cliff could not have been foreseen, but it is not to be feared by one of TBL's more aggressive managers. If we were talking the stock market, Mr. Freedman would be seeing a temporary market readjustment rather than the Great Depression.

There are too many good names, too many players in the prime of their careers, too many who should be expected to bounce back in

2022. So Mr. Freedman did the logical thing. He stayed the course, picked an offensive hope or two for the future in the draft, and didn't worry about his pitching. Somehow, it should all come back to normal next season. When it does, there will be vengeance wreaked upon the other members of the Aaron Division. For now, well . . .

Some assembly required

melrose AVENGERS

TQ: **14.5**

19

Low-Key Contention

This year will be a different sort of pennant race than in 2020. Last year we expected a dogfight between Detroit and Columbus for the division crown, with Munich on the outside looking in; instead, the Montague combination of skill and good luck rolled up 101 wins, beat the highly-regarded Gamblers and went to the World Series . . . where they were unceremoniously paved.

But this year – what a difference. The top of the heap is, or may be, *Clay Beard*'s **Hudson Generals**. Our predictions are notoriously unreliable for this club, so the Magic 8-Ball is well within reach . . . but early returns suggest that they are clearly the team to beat. The staff is solid, the offense is decent, and the management is top notch.

The second-place team – and by a good margin, we think – is the **Columbus Jets**. *Vic Vaughn*'s club still has some stars, and is still young overall, but there are a lot of things that would have to be added to make them any more than a Wild Card contender in this weird, scaled-up year. They could still manage .500, and in any reasonable estimation that would be a win for the team.

Moving out west might have been a practical decision for *Dave Jaskot*, but they'd best not be printing any playoff tickets for the **Rocky Mountain Dragons**. The pitching staff, especially the bullpen, is strong – better than any Mantle team other than Hudson – but the offense only has a few bats in it. Can't win games if you can't score runs, and the Dragons will be not scoring runs all summer.

Which brings us to the most topsy of turviness: the defending Mantle (and NC) champs, the **Munich Marauders**. In MLB, teams come apart for all kinds of reasons; in TBL, unless there's a total collapse – which does happen, mind you – it's often intentional, based on the notion that the team isn't good enough to contend and it's time to pack up the tent. This team is some of both, even despite some outstanding starters. The tent is already packed, and the #1 pick watch is on.

Mantle Division

A. J. Pollock, Hudson

1. **Hudson**   **24.5**
2. **Columbus**   **19.0**
3. **Rocky Mountain** **15.5**
4. **Munich**   **14.5**

2020 hudson GENERALS in review

COVID friendly?

by Clay Beard

2020 in Review
Final Record: 69-93 (4th, Mantle)

It was a strange year for the Generals. We knew up front that real-life injuries had made another playoff run nearly impossible. But whenever that occurs the Generals' goal always shifts to trying to be a thorn in the side of those who are in contention.

Hudson was on a path to 100 losses, including a team record 11-game home losing streak at one point. But then we had a strong last quarter with winning records in October and November to finish at 69-93. And November was against 4 play-off teams and one near-playoff team.

What went right?

Bryan Reynolds had a stellar rookie debut, slashing .305/.369/.469. Three players topped 30 homers with Max Muncy leading the way with 36. Grichuk and J.D. Davis hit 30 each. Wilson Ramos really stepped up too (28 HR, 90 RBI). Mike Clevinger was respectable at 9-7, 3.61, and had a team record 19 strikeout game at Northboro, but lost. The record could have been worse but we were 22-20 in one-run games.

What went wrong?

The pitching was bad. Historically bad. The worst staff in franchise history; even worse than the famed "bowling team". Team records were set for ERA 5.15, runs, homeruns allowed, hit batters and the fewest complete games and shutouts. Here's the ugly. While grade 21* Josh Hader collected 28 saves, he was 6-6, 3.91, giving up 16 homers. Quintana went 5-16, 6.94.

Gausman added 4-13, 7.64. And for the comically bad, Jeremy Jeffress as a Grade 6 garbage man took the title to heart with an 11.34 ERA. Kolby Allard's experiment of using a ping-pong paddle instead of a glove came to an end after committing 4 errors in 13 chances, including 3 errors in a two inning span. While there were some decent offensive performers, the team slash of .239/.302/.417 was underwhelming and not enough to overcome this.

3 Things

1. COVID friendly? The Generals roster was almost untouched by the pandemic. Welington Castillo sat it out and that ends an 8-year run of the Welington & Wilson show behind the plate. We came into the draft with a ready to play starting rotation and most of a bullpen. For the first time in memory, Hudson did not select a starting pitcher in the draft.

2. Waiver draft. What? Does this matter? Hudson came away with a Grade 23* reliever (Jeffress) and almost half a season of a .333/.426/.439 leadoff man (Luis Guillorme).

3. Hopes of contending. Hudson probably picked players a little ahead of where they should have. But there were very specific needs and in each case those players wouldn't been available come the next pick. The biggest need was at catcher. Hello Sean Murphy. The next were some players who could hit righties, especially at 2B. Jake Cronenworth and Darin Ruf, come on down! Will it be enough? Only thing left was to pad the bullpen up to 4 closing grades.

Ramos: Stepped up

hudson GENERALS

Clay Beard (37th year); Hall of Famer

Mr. Beard's reticence for going all in means that he might not go deep in the playoffs.

The *Annual* has been watching the Hudson club for more than two decades, and it's our impression that Clay Beard is not one of those managers who goes "all in." That's just not his style of play. It's not that he always has a foot out the door; he believes in building a solid core, not filling holes with temporary patches. Combined with relatively few trades, his players tend to stick around for a long time. He likes to draft his players, and there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, Hudson's SNT Sean Murphy is the heir apparent to Wilson Ramos, who's been a General since 2013, making him the longest-serving player on the roster.

The Generals are the *Annual*'s pick to win the Mantle Division in 2021: they have the talent, they have excellent management, and the current roster shows the results of good long term planning. But we are inclined to believe that reticence for going all in means that the club might not go deep in the playoffs.

Pitching: 10.5
Head and shoulders above.

If this were a normal season, the Generals would have a strong, deep rotation. It is deep, but it's not as strong compared to the best staffs in the league in this crazy COVID year. It is, however, head and shoulders above any of the other pitching staffs in the Mantle. The rotation is seven deep and bottoms out at a respectable Grade 8. The peripherals are mostly positive, especially for keeping the ball in the park. The starters will keep the team in most every game.

The bullpen features a wild, scary four-armed monster at the top. Two of those arms are righties and two are lefties for a perfect symmetry. A mixed-bag of a setup crew can start warming

SNT: Sean Murphy.

The Generals traded all the way up to pick 3 to nab this young catcher. He fits a big need on the roster.

Turnover Rate: 24%

Arrived: Jake Cronenworth, Phillip Evans, Victor Gonzalez, Hunter Harvey, Jonah Heim, Sean Murphy, Enoli Paredes, Darin Ruf, Andre Scrubb.

Departed: Austin Allen, Welington Castillo, Billy Hamilton, Zack Littell, Bryan Shaw, Devin Smeltzer.

up early, when the game's not on the line. And there are many, many innings of funky long men at the bottom, if they're needed. The top end relievers set the stage for snuffing out rallies as early as the sixth inning, as three of the four are active every month.

ROTATION. Brad Keller (Grade 16 HR+52) celebrates a breakout season. The question is: Is it a true breakout or a COVID-inspired short season sample size? For 2021, he's a bona fide ace. He has support from Mike Clevinger (Grade 14), and Freddy Peralta (Grade 13 HR+41, 15 fatigue) for three April starts. That's 69 starts, which is certainly good, but it isn't great.

The next level includes the rejuvenated Kevin Gausman (Grade

Keller: Bona fide ace

hudson GENERALS

12 C+24), Pablo Lopez (Grade 11 C+21 HR+41), lefty Justus Sheffield (Grade 10 HR+53), and lefty Andrew Heaney (Grade 8 C+24). They take the remaining starts. You'll notice the large, exclusively positive peripherals. This is a solid rotation, but while it's head and shoulders above the rest of the Mantle Division, it wouldn't be the best in any other division. (Good thing they're here.)

Jeffress: Top grade

BULLPEN. But a deep bullpen can make up for many things, and Hudson has one. At the top are four closers, and yes, any of them can close: righties Jeremy Jeffress (Grade 23* C-46 HR+46) and rookie Andre Scrubb (Grade 20* C-62 HR+52) and lefties rookie Victor Gonzalez (Grade 20* C+52 HR+62) and Josh Hader (Grade 19* C-52). That's an amazing 238 innings of duct tape: it'll stop just about anything.

The middle/setup crew is led by Raisel Iglesias (Grade 15* C+36 HR+46), who's a former closer himself. Peralta (Grade 13* HR+41) and Enoli Paredes (Grade 13* C-44 HR+46) keep the ball in the park, but like the high end of the pen, are bit light on control. They provide more than 250 innings. Mychal Givens (Grade 15* C-26 HR-34), Gausman, and Heaney serve as early relievers.

Mops include Hunter Harvey (Grade 8* C-32 HR-34) and Jose Quintana (Grade 7 HR+25). That leaves Kolby Allard (Grade 3 C-54 HR+23), Sean Doolittle (Grade 2* C+26 HR-62), and Carlos Martinez (Grade 1 HR-42) looking for a

fourth for a game of whist. If things go according to plan, they'll never have to show what they are capable of in an actual game.

Offense: 7.0
Hits, walks and decent power.

The Generals have many hits, lots of walks, and decent power. The best power belongs to A.J. Pollock (1-1-5-5, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+11 R-6). That monster gets to play every day. Didi Gregorius (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, 24 SSN for 15 attempts, L-9 R+2), Darin Ruf (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks), and funky Jake Cronenworth (6-6-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 11 attempts, L-13 R+4) add four-power-number cards to the lineup.

Pollock: Monster

There's more power with Randal Grichuk (1-5-5, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+6 R-4), Brian Anderson (1-5-5, 9 hits, 3 alks+42, no shift), and SNT Sean Murphy (1-5-5, 8 hits, 6 walks, 4 24s, L-4), who also adds on-base expertise. The other on-base hitters in the lineup include the exquisite Luis Guillorme (6-6-6, 11 hits, 5 walks, but 4 24s, L-9 R+2) for half a season and J.D. Davis (3 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks+42, but 3 24s) for a full season.

The rest of the regulars are a mix-and-match bunch. Hanser Alberto (5-6-6, 11 hits, 33 SSN for 8 attempts, L+10 R-4), gracefully aging Andrew McCutchen (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 12 attempts, L+8 R-5), Max Muncy (1-0-0, 7 hits, 5 walks+42, L+3 R-3), and Wilson Ramos (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L+3 R-3).

There's a little bit of everything, including speed, but there's not a lot of anything. There are teams with more power, more hits and more walks. But it's a nice collection of talent. How far it goes in the playoffs depends on how well the pieces fit together. Mr. Beard is a Hall-of-Fame manager, so the *Annual* won't bet against

a surprising showing, but we wonder how much better this offense could have been with one or two big additions.

Defense: 3.5
Two defensive weaknesses.

Pollock (OF3 with a 33 arm) is a two-way star. Both Cronenworth and Alberto are 2B8s. SNT Murphy (C8 Th+2) is solid, too. But that's end of the good news. The corner infielders and Gregorius (SS8) are just average, as is Grichuk in the outfield. Then come the problems: Davis (OF1, but with a 34 arm) spends every day in either LF (for board games) or RF (for computer games). Ramos (C6 Th-3) starts all the games on the computer and all the games on boards vs. lefties. It remains to be seen if Hudson is saving up to make a mid-season acquisition to address at least one of these weaknesses.

Bench: 3.5
Enough usage plus.

Because of the platoons, semi-regulars such as Alberto, Cronenworth, Guillorme, Muncy, Murphy, and Ruf have enough usage to come off the bench to cover for the platoon partner or whenever needed. But the Generals also have short-usage players available at least part of the time: rookie Phillip Evans (3 0s, 12 hits, 4 walks+42+22, L+4 R-4) and veteran C.J. Cron (1-1-0-0-0, 6 hits, 6 walks+42, but 4 24s, L-6 R+3). Johan Camargo (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks+22) offers some pop. Last year's SNT Bryan Reynolds (OF3, 1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks) could carry Davis' glove. Jonah Heim (C6, Th+2, 8 hits, 2 walks) and Abraham Toro (1-6, 6 hits, a walk+3 42s) are still learning the fine art of playing major league baseball.

It's going to be nearly impossible for anyone else to win this division – we should think about retiring our Magic 8-Ball. The Generals have enough to dominate the Mantle. The question becomes: Then what? Does this team have enough juice to go deep in the playoffs?

hudson GENERALS

As currently configured, the amateur experts at the *Annual* are a little dubious. Mr. Beard has destroyed prognostications in the past, though (so maybe we should keep the 8-Ball in reach). He's an experienced enough game manager to make all the right moves. But there are stronger teams in the Conference. Barring a mid-season acquisition, this team may bow out in December. But maybe the club will simply enjoy a winning season after losing 93 games in 2020.

Following tradition.

TQ: **24.5**
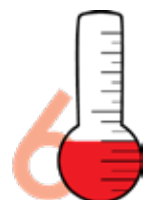
2020 columbus JETS in review

Playing 147 of 162 games with cards and dice.

by Vic Vaughn

2020 in Review
Final Record: 85-77 (3rd, Mantle)

The local fan base greeted the 2020 campaign with high hopes. We entered the season with the best collection of offensive cards we've had since the franchise moved from Rochester. However, the pitching and defense weren't quite up to the same standard, and as the season developed, those weaknesses haunted us. The hitting carried us to a winning record of 85-77, but that was only good enough for a distant third in the Mantle Division.

What went right?

Offensively, the team MVP was Eugenio Suarez, who anchored the offense with 41 home runs, 113 runs batted in, 103 runs scored and 310 total bases. Jorge Soler contributed 39 long balls and 103 RBI. Ketel Marte led the team in base hits with 166 with 33 taters. Part-timer Jay Bruce hit 24 doubles, 27 home runs and slugged .572 in 87 games. It's unlikely any of these will repeat their success in the 2021 TBL season.

On the mound, Masahiro Tanaka led the team with 17 wins and posted a respectable 3.88 ERA. The ever-perplexing Matt Boyd finished in the top 10 in strikeouts with 255, and Aaron Nola pitched through some tough luck, only managing a 9-10 record despite a 3.77 ERA. Closer Kevin Ginkel made the most of his limited availability posting 18 saves and a 1.23 ERA in 22 innings.

What went wrong?

The lack of bullpen depth turned out to be a major liability as we just weren't very good in close games, posting a 23-22 record in contests decided by one run, and 7-12 in those games that went extra innings. On the pitching side, both Matt Boyd and Merrill Kelly allowed more than 40 home runs each and Kelly, despite a record of 9-9, posted an ERA of 6.12.

There were several hitters who had disappointing seasons. Domingo Santana (.194/.281/.337), Joey Votto (.212/.308/.325), and Kevin Kiermaier (.182/.245/.333) were the main culprits. We were surprisingly poor defensively finishing the season with 129 errors resulting in 79 unearned runs. The left side of the infield contributed 51 of those miscues.

Surarez: Team MVP

3 Things

1. *Youth movement.* With many of our players receiving offers to obtain AARP memberships, there was a decided need to inject some youth into the roster. We spent our first and second draft picks on a pair of twenty-one-year-olds in Dylan Carlson and Andres Gimenez who we hope will be future building blocks.

2. *Scheduling quirk.* With division rivals Rocky Mountain and Hudson switching from the computer game to the board game and many of the computer players in the International Conference traveling to Columbus this season, we'll play a surprisingly high 147 of our 162 games using cards and dice. I'm not sure if that's good or bad, but it's unusual.

3. *The 2021 outlook isn't too promising.* The pitching staff is a little improved, but most of the hitters didn't fare well in the shortened season. We're hoping to contend for a wild card spot, but we'll need good fortune to achieve that.

columbus JETS

Vic Vaughn (15th year)

This team has some highs, some lows, but just not enough of either.

Mr. Vaughn almost always puts together a competitive team. Since joining TBL in 2006, he's won as many as 97 games (once) and lost as many than 100 (once). He's enjoyed seven winning seasons and suffered seven losing seasons. One year, he finished at .500. The Jets have made it to the Semi-Finals in the playoffs three times, but that's as far as they've gone.

It's possible that he just likes to play, or it's possible that he's never wanted to sell the future to win now. Either way, 2021 looks to continue the downward trend that began in 2018 with a high of 97 wins, followed by an 88-win season. Last season, they reached 85 wins. Reaching that number again isn't likely in the cards this year, although the Mantle Division as a whole is diminished in 2021, which may help the team pad its win total.

Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Austin Allen, Caleb Baragar, J. T. Brubaker, Dylan Carlson, Grant Dayton, Ross Detwiler, Andres Gimenez, Josh Lindblom, Jeffrey Springs, Nick Vincent, LaMonte Wade, Huascar Ynoa, Andy Young.

Departed: John Brebbia, Jay Bruce, Jimmy Cordero, Phillip Ervin, Kevin Ginkel, Mike Leake, Wade Leblanc, Ryan O'Hearn, Domingo Santana, Jacob Waguespack.

SNT: Dylan Carlson.

It's not often that a prime prospect drops to #11 in the draft. Thanks to a deep draft, Mr. Vaughn was able to scoop up this future superstar.
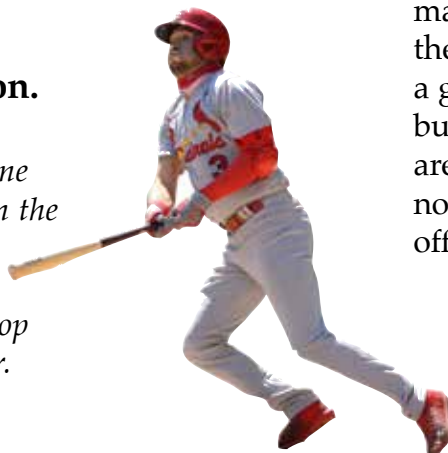
What *is* in the cards this year is a team with some highs, some lows, but just not enough of either to completely suck or to compete against the playoff-bound teams. Since the *Annual* is concerned only about the state of the team as presently configured, the overall age of the team doesn't play a factor, but it is a concern (in this, as in every team article, we note the players' ages in a box later on.) Whether Columbus adopts a Win-Now mentality or not, it's clear the core talent here is about ready to. They just need to play like it.

Pitching: 6.5
Not the right stuff.

While the rotation has a true ace in a normal year, this is anything but a normal year. When several teams have closer-grade starters at the top of their rotation, a normal ace looks rather … weak. And while Mr. Vaughn picked up a couple promising youngsters in the draft, the rotation is still rather shallow before bottoming out altogether. There are no Grade 1 starts needed, but there are only 46 double-digit starts all year. That's not enough. Not this year. Not any year, really.

The bullpen, by contrast, is deeper and well-matched to the rotation. There's a closer at the top, albeit one with control issues. There's a good mix of righties and lefties. It's a wild bunch, though, and in general, the peripherals aren't more than decent. The set-up crew may not have the right stuff to stop the high-powered offenses in the league this year. Overall, though, the bullpen will help. A lot.

ROTATION. Staff ace Aaron Nola (Grade 14) has been a dependable pitcher since 2018. He once again leads the staff with 32 starts.

Nola: Dependable

columbus JETS

Second-year man Merrill Kelly (Grade 14 C+45) contributes 14 more. Masahiro Tanaka (Grade 9 C+42 HR-23) brings his excellent control to the mound 27 times. Even counting Josh Lindblom (Grade 7), that's just 100.

The rest of the rotation arms, while mostly younger, are still developing, or in one case, hibernating. Sean Manaea (Grade 6 C+43), and rookies J.T. Brubaker (Grade 6) and Huascar Ynoa (Grade 5 C-43 HR+33, fatigue 16) cover the remaining starts. They'll get some learning opportunities while the bullpen gets lots of work. Matt Boyd (Grade 2 HR-35) is hibernating for the year, and Michael Fulmer (Grade 1 HR-42) is still coming back from multiple injuries.

BULLPEN. Since it doesn't appear that Matt Wisler (Grade 25* C-53 HR+35) will be making any of his 11 starts, he'll have 71 closer innings, although half of them come without the +5 bonus, not that it matters with that grade. He's set up by J.B. Wendelken (Grade 20* C-24 HR+34), Brandon Kintzler (Grade 15*), and lefty Grant Dayton (Grade 16*). They add 216 important innings. Note that the peripherals aren't as strong as they could be, but there aren't many big negatives, either.

Middle relief is a mixed bag, with lefties Caleb Baragar (Grade 12* C+31) and Ross Detwiler (Grade 10* C+34 HR+24), along with righty Daniel Hudson (Grade 10* C-42 HR-52). Ryan Brasier (Grade 9* HR+35) is also available. They're helped, if that's the right word, by Nick

Vincent (Grade 7* C+24 HR-35) and lefty Taylor Rogers (Grade 3* C+36 HR+31). Waiver wire pick Jeffrey Springs (Grade 1* C+25 HR-32) becomes the designated pin-setter on bowling nights. There are about 400 innings here. They can contribute if used effectively, but they won't dominate.

Offense: 6.0
May struggle to score.

The biggest bat in the lineup belongs to Lourdes Gurriel (1-5-5-6, 11 hits, 2 walks, 29 SSN for 11 SBA, L-3). He's out there every day. Ketel Marte (6-6-0, 11 hits, L+16 R-8) had a big year, except for the shift and the lack of stolen bases. Howie Kendrick (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, L-3) has a decent final card, although with four 24s. Rookie Andres Gimenez (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+2 42s, 34 SSN for 25 attempts) brings some speed to the lineup.

Gurriel: Biggest bat

But there's no one else on the team, no one in the lineup or on the bench, who has more than eight hits. That's not to say this team doesn't have power or on-base ability, but at some point, you need a base hit to drive in a run. Against teams with wild staffs, the Jets look fearsome. On days when the dice hit the power numbers, this team will be an Earl Weaver fantasy. But on most days, they'll struggle to score.

The best of the on-base cards is Rhys Hoskins (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 6 walks+42, but L+13 R-8). Joey Votto (1-5-5, 8 hits, 6 walks, L-5) and Aaron Hicks (1-4-6, 8 hits, 6 walks) have virtually identical cards. Jorge Soler (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, no shift) and part-timer Tyler Flowers (5-6-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42+22, L-3) are also very similar. Then there's Eugenio Suarez (1-1-0-0, 7 hits, 5 walks, L-3). With nine 13s, it's a trick-or-treat card. The final three regulars are Jason Kipnis (4 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-8), Kevin Kiermaier (3 0s, 8

hits, 4 walks, 34 SSN for 25 attempts, L-9), and Tucker Barnhart (1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks, L-8 R+3). Playing cards with seven hits and some walks can work for you if you're rolling the walks, but a whole lineup of these cards likely won't score runs in bunches.

Defense: 4.0
If they're lucky. . .

Marte: Holy highlight reel

There are some highlights. Hicks (OF3, 38 arm) and Kiermaier (OF3, 37 arm) are outstanding. Gurriel's defense (OF2, 35 arm) adds to his value.

Marte (2B9) is a highlight reel waiting to happen, while Gimenez (SS8) and Suarez (3B4) are just average. Votto (1B4) and Hoskins (1B3) share duties at first. Behind the dish, Barnhart (C9, Th+5) is about as good as it gets, while Flowers (C8, Th-4) at least catches the ball, even if he can't throw anyone out. If they're lucky, all the batted balls will go to the defensive whizzes. If not, Gimenez and his friends will put additional runners on.

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Ages of players on the Columbus
roster, as of 07/01/2021:

37: Votto
36: Kendrick, Kintzler
35: Detwiler, Flowers
34: Andrus, D. Hudson, Kipnis, Lindblom,
Vincent
33: Brasier, Dayton
32: M. Kelly, Tanaka
31: A. Hicks, Kiermaier
30: Barnhart, M. Boyd, Ta. Rogers
29: Manaea, Soler, E. Suarez
28: Fulmer, Hoskins, Aa. Nola, Springs,
Wendelken, Wisler
27: A. Allen, Barager, Brubaker, L. Gur-
riel, K. Marte, L. Wade, An. Young
23: H. Ynoa
22: Carlson, Gimenez
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Bench: 2.5
Just some guys.

There's a pinch-runner and occasional shortshop in Elvis "The King" Andrus (SS8, 29 SSN for 11 SBA), but he can't hit (3 0s, 7 hits, 3 walks, 4 24s). SNT Dylan Carlson (4 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks) and Andy Young (1-0-0-0, 6 hits, 4 walks+2 42s, L-8 R+7) have some power, but are mostly waiting for better seasons.

Waiver wire acquisitions OF LaMonte Wade (6-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-8 R+2) and C Austin Allen (1-6, 8 hits, 12 13s) are hoping they get another chance. While there's some flexibility, the bench players are just some guys who don't do anything that's different from the starters.

2nd Yes, second place. But it's more of a comment on the strength of the division than the strength of the team. This offense can beat up on teams with wild pitching, but it should not challenge for a Wild Card. It may struggle to reach .500, although that would be a victory for the club.

Despite the second-place predicted finish, this is a team with some structural issues. A core of talent is here, with Names We Like, but it needs to play up to expectations – still, it's a fairly young group (see inset left). This version of the team can be excused because of the awkward COVID-infected year, but 2022 will be a pivotal year for this group.

columbus JETS

TQ: **19.0**

2020 detroit DRAGONS in review

The franchise moved west to a more Dragon friendly environment.

by Dave Jaskot

2020 in Review
Final Record: 90-72 (2nd, Mantle)

The Dragons finished their last season as a Detroit franchise as a wildcard team, second place in the Mantle Division. Their won-loss record of 90-72 was very acceptable, as was their 4.01 ERA. A wildcard finish was a very enjoyable bonus for a rebuilding team.

What went right?

The Dragons finished with a 90-72 record, a 38 game win increase over 2019. Starters Mike Minor and Anthony DeSclafani led the pitching staff with 13 wins each and Dinelson Lamet was stupendous with his 11-1 record over only 14 starts. Minor, Lamet and Tyler Skaggs led all starters with almost identical ERAs of 3.81, 3.81 and 3.85. Julio Urias led the staff with 22 saves. Brad Wieck and Hansel Robles had the lowest relief ERAs of 2.12 and 2.36.

Dozier: Team MVP

The offense produced 829 runs. The team hit 266 HR, led by slugger Franmil Reyes with 41 and Joey Gallo with 38. Eight other batters hit home runs in double digits. Team MVP was Hunter Dozier with a .272 average, 28 HR, 82 RBI, 148 hits and 80 runs scored.

What went wrong?

Detroit's poor defense led to a total of 138 errors and 91 unearned runs this past season. The team offense also hit into 75 double plays. The Dragons struck out 1,489 times compared to drawing 492 walks. After our season ended, the franchise was moved west to a more Dragon friendly environment in the Rocky Mountains. No more secret Dragon flights over the Detroit River and Canada or perching atop the Ambassador Bridge. Mountain ridges, valleys and alpine lakes will be the new norm.

3 Things

1. *2021 will be a complete rebuild year for the Dragons.* Many of the newly drafted players will ride the bench or remain in the minors honing their skills for the 2022 season. The draft concentrated on youth and best available including future potential into the selection equation.

2. *New blood.* Newly acquired hitters Nate Lowe, Carter Kieboom, Sam Hilliard, Pavin Smith and D. J. Stewart will join the underperforming regulars such as Tommy Edman, Hunter Dozier, Franmill Reyes, Gleyber Torres, Gary Sanchez and Joey Gallo for the 2021 campaign but with all eyes looking forward to 2022 and beyond. Runs will be hard to come by!

3. *Starting pitching will be a struggle for the 2021 Dragons.* Several pitchers had impressive seasons and are worthy graded starters including Zac Gallen and Urias. RCK will have a couple average starters in Mike Minor and newly drafted Kris Bubic but will need to round out its staff with two Grade 1 starters in DeSclafani and prospect Ljay Newsome. Relievers will be an average group led by Tyler Duffey, Adam Kolerek and Tom Hatch. If the Dragons can score a few runs and get games to the bullpen, we may win more games than TBL projected forecast.

rocky mountain DRAGONS

Dave Jaskot (10th year)

The weather report for this year is rain, rain, rain, with only occasional sunshine.

There was a physical move for Mr. Jaskot, from Detroit to the Rocky Mountains, which is the reason for the team relocating this year. Maybe he discovered that Dragons just aren't allowed in Detroit. But in all honesty, the Rocky Mountains better reflect the peaks and valleys this team has endured. Last season saw a surge to a 90-win peak and second place in the Mantle. It was the team's best season since 2017. In between those years, though, were some deep, deep valleys.

In 2021, there's likely to be another dip. While there's some talent starting to build toward a critical mass, it hasn't come together yet. It's still in that bank of clouds on the horizon. One year, maybe soon, the clouds will part to reveal another contender. But the weather report for this year is rain, rain, rain, with only occasional sunshine.

Based on his off-season trades, Mr. Jaskot knows what he's got and what he's got to do. He's put

Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Kris Bubic, Chi Chi Gonzalez, Tom Hatch, Sam Hilliard, Carter Kieboom, Nate Lowe, Tyler Matzek, Anthony Misiewicz, Ljay Newsome, Pavin Smith, D. J. Stewart, Matt Strahm, Chad Wallach, Jake Woodford.

Departed: Ben Gamel, Shane Greene, Ryon Healy, Dinelson Lamet, Billy Mckinney, Brian McCann, David Phelps, Addison Russell, Tyler Skaggs, Neil Walker, Brad Wieck.

SNT: Javier Baez.

Trading for Baez was a bold move, especially with Gleyber Torres on the roster. But he's certainly a Guy We Like.

together a mostly young team that may fly with the dragons one day. Meanwhile, back on earth, the Dragons baseball team is in for a long haul in 2021.

Pitching: 9.0
Great when they're ahead.

The rotation is a tale of three thirds. Together, they make one full season, but each third is as different as they come. The top third of the rotation is as solid as almost any other team's. The middle third is as mediocre as it gets. And the bottom third is just plain ugly. They'll perform all season long like the Rocky Mountains themselves: sometimes high, more often low, but always looking for a new angle.

Fortunately, there's a strong bullpen to back up the starters. The top end is excellent, there's a good mix of righties and lefties, and the peripherals are generally positive. But these arms will only help if the lower end of the rotation hasn't already blown the game sky-high. The lower end of the bullpen isn't deep enough to help the bad starters. So, as a result, the pitching may be great when they're ahead, but weak when they're behind.

ROTATION. Zac Gallen (Grade 15) pitched out of the bullpen in his rookie year last year. This season, he moves to the head of the rotation. He's a true ace for 32 starts. Julio Urias (Grade 13 HR+31, 20 fatigue) brings his googly-eyes to the mound for 27 starts. That's about a third of an excellent season. But the rest of the rotation kind of fell off a Rocky Mountain cliff.

Gallen: Bona fide

rocky mountain DRAGONS

The instructions for the rest of the starters call for a quick hook in the 4th inning. For Kris Bubic (Grade 8) and Mike Minor (Grade 8 HR-24), the middle third of the rotation, it may work. But whenever Anthony DeSclafani (Grade 1 C-22 HR-22) and Ljay Newsome (Grade 1 C+56 HR-42, 17 fatigue) are on the mound, the 4th inning may not come soon enough. Bubic and Minor will climb their share of hills, but DeSclafani and Newsome are likely to skid all the way down to the bottom. The rest of the guys — waiver pickup Chi Chi Gonzalez (Grade 1 C-32), Eric Lauer (Grade 1 C-62), Tanner Roark (Grade 1 C-24 HR-46), and Jordan Yamamoto (Grade 1 C-24 HR-62) — can stay out in the bullpen all year, playing bridge. Or Risk. Or APBA.

BULLPEN. Mr. Jaskot obviously likes closer Tyler Duffey (Grade 23* C+24 HR+31) since he traded for him at the

Duffey: Likeable

mid-season deadline last year. He's set up by lefty Adam Kolarek (Grade 19* C+31 HR+44), who can also close, and righty Tom Hatch (Grade 17* C-42 HR+35). That's 185 solid innings. But there's more good news.

Lefties Matt Strahm (Grade 16 C+34) and Tyler Matzek (Grade 14* HR+53) provide an additional 137 innings. Middle relief falls to righty Wander Suero (Grade 11* HR+52) and lefty Anthony Misiewicz (Grade 8* C+25 HR+25). They bring the total of usable innings to 446, which isn't likely enough. So enter Jake Woodford (Grade 7* C+26 HR+62) and Hansel Robles (Grade 1* C-45 HR+31). There'll be games when these two get lots of work.

Offense: 4.0
There are many outs.

If you're looking for highlights, you have to set the bar unseasonably low. This team has exactly one player with four power numbers, but that's pretty much all he has. Michael Taylor (1-5-5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks+22, no shift for 103 games) is the bomber on the Dragons. There's also another player worth mentioning as a highlight: Franmil Reyes (1-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks, L-5). He plays every day.
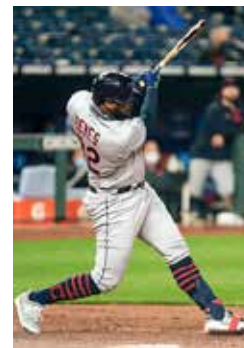
Reyes: Highlight

The first step down includes Tommy Edman (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+4 R-3) and Chad Wallach (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+11 R-11 for 41 games). Notice anything? Yes, we're dropping down the number of hits at each level. While these four players may fit somewhere in many lineups, we're not done yet. Take a breath. Take a deep breath.

The best on-base cards include: Cavan Biggio (1-6-6, 8 hits, 6 walks+22, 35 SSN for 17 attempts, L+5 R-4), ageless Brett Gardner (1-0-0, 8 hits, 6 walks, L-9), Hunter Dozier (1-4, 8 hits, 5 walks, 34 SSN for 11 attempts), who bats second every day, and Victor Robles (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+2 42s, 31 SSN for 14 attempts, L+9 R-6).

The rest of the Dragon regulars include Sam Hilliard (1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-10 R+3), SNT Javier Baez (1-5-6, 8 hits, a walk+22, but 10 13s and 3 24s, 33 SSN for 8 attempts), Joey Gallo (1-0-0, 6 hits, 4 walks+42, 11 13s, L-6), and Gary Sanchez (1-0-0, 6 hits, 4 walks+42, 10 13s, 3 24s, but no shift). The walks may help, the power may appear in spurts, but there are many outs — and many strikeouts — on these cards.

Defense: 4.0
Not bad.

Baez (SS9) and Biggio (2B8) play every day, solidifying the middle infield. There are three OF3s on the roster, but they don't all play at the same time. Hilliard and Taylor (OF2s) take up the slack. All but Gardner have plus arms, too. Edman (3B4) and Dozier (1B3) are average at the corners. That leaves the catching platoon. Wallach (C7, Th+4) is the better defender, but Sanchez (C6, Th+2) at least has the arm to throw out base stealers, but that fielding rating is certain to rack up errors and dropped throws. All in all, though, it's not bad at all.

Bench: 2.0
A few options.

The bench has a couple new hitters in rookie Pavin Smith (2 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks, for 32 games) and Nate Lowe (1-5-5, 8 hits, 4 walks, 11 13s, L-10 R+3). Gleyber Torres (3 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks) covers missing middle infield games. DJ Stewart (1-1-6, 6 hits, 6 walks+42, 11 13s, L-9) is a power-prone bearded lady who may at least provide an interesting late-inning pinch-hitting option for Rocky Mountain. The less said about the cards of youngsters Carter Kieboom, Reese McGuire, and Josh VanMeter, the better. Yes, there are a few options here, especially considering the starting lineups, but the offense itself, you first have to lower your expectations.

Smith: Rookie

3rd The Mantle Division is experiencing a race to the bottom. The Dragons offense is comparable to Munich's, but given that the *Annual* is picking the Marauders to finish last in the division, that's not necessarily a good thing.

The top end of the rotation (all two of those starting pitchers) and the deep bullpen are the strengths of this team. If they can (somehow) carry a lead into the middle innings, they have a fair chance to win.

Getting to that point, though, will be Mr. Jaskot's challenge all season long. Given the plethora of low-hit cards, even good dice won't necessarily save this team.

Ages of players on the
Rocky Mountain roster, as of
07/01/2021:

37: Gardner
34: Roark
33: Minor
32: Kolarek
31: DeSclefani
30: Duffey, Matzek, H. Robles, M. Taylor
29: H. Dozier, C. Gonzalez, Strahm, Suero, Wallach
28: J. Baez, G. Sanchez
27: Gallo, Hilliard, D. Stewart
26: Biggio, Edman, Hatch, Lauer, McGuire, Misiewicz, VanMeter
25: Gallen, Lowe, F. Reyes, P. Smith, Yamamoto
24: Newsome, V. Robles, G. Torres, Urias, Woodford
23: Bubic, Kieboom

TQ: **15.5**

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2020 munich MARAUDERS in review

Not a "bounce" thing.

by Paul Montague

2020 in Review
Final Record: 101-61 (1st, Mantle)

It was hard to get a good pre-season 'read' on the 2020 Marauders. They had decent offense, although not as much on-base capability as a typical Munich contending team. Good pitching staff – but a lot of the value was in peripherals rather than grades, especially for the bullpen. Would the team dial it up when the games mattered? Or would this be another year with a disappointing late-season swoon? As it turned out, 2020 was better than expected in Munich.

What went right?

When the dust had settled, Munich had won 101 games to lead the National Conference (by one game over the Las Vegas Gamblers). This was five to ten games better than the front office had expected going into the season. The Marauders muscled up on offense, scoring 814 runs – 50 more than the 102-win 2019 squad – powered by 269 home runs. On defense, they gave up only 642 runs.

 "Balance" was the watchword on both sides of the ball. Eleven hitters appeared in over 100 games, with nine of them hitting double digits in homers (led by Kyle Schwarber's 47 and Austin Meadows' 45) and nine exceeding 40 RBIs (led again by Schwarber and Meadows with 118 and 116 respectively). The five-man pitching rotation saw all five start at least 29 games and win at least 12 each. Zach Greinke led the team in wins (18), IP (243.2) and ERA (2.44), while Jake deGrom notched 272 strikeouts to lead that category.

Meadows: Big numbers

What went wrong?

Not much. True, Munich was swept by Brobdingnag in the World Series. But, the Barbarians were prohibitive favorites going into the series, and the Marauders extended them in every game. So it's hard to say that went "wrong".

3 Things

1. That 'closer grade' thing. For a second year in a row, the Marauders had no relief grades of 18* or more. For a second year in a row, they won over 100 games despite this 'weakness'. A balanced roster and active in-game management can be a cost-effective way of winning in TBL, even without any closer grade relievers.

2. All good things. . . A combination of injuries, off-years, and the general weirdness of the MLB 2020 season caused a perfect storm of badness for Munich. Most of the hitters suffered loss of playing time *and* loss of effectiveness in real life. The bullpen simply imploded. Only the starting rotation held fast. As a result, a third 100-win season in a row is a pipedream.

3. Not a 'bounce' thing. Some observers concluded that Munich must be "bouncing down" in 2021. Rather, faced with a draft in which they owned only one pick (a third rounder) before the late fifth round, Munich spent the off-season trying to find the best possible future values while patching playing-time holes. This included gathering extra picks for the 2022 draft. So, this was simply a concession to circumstances – with the sincere hope that by the next off-season, things will be back to normal for all, including Munich.

munich MARAUDERS

Paul Montague (38th year); Hall of Famer

This team is a combination of the past and of the future.

Last year, Munich surprised the prognosticators at the *Annual*, who had predicted a third-place finish. Undaunted, Mr. Montague rode a solid rotation (73-39) and a power-packed lineup (269 homers) to the Mantle Division crown and the best record in the National Conference. After a tough series vs. the Elders of Zion, the Marauders dispatched a strong Las Vegas club to earn the right to be trampled by the monster in Brobdingnag.

Despite the World Series appearance, Mr. Montague has chosen a different direction for his club in 2021. While the rotation's Big Four remain, the bullpen has been stripped down. The offense suffered from the shortened MLB season, and the regulars are just a shadow of their former greatness. And of course, there wasn't much help at all from the rookie draft just passed. As a result, the Marauders will take a giant tumble back toward mediocrity.

Pitching: 5.5
Jekyll and Hyde.

Any other year, all the Big Four in the rotation would only need a little bit of help to be one of the best in the league. This year, however, as good as these four are, there are much stronger rotations elsewhere. Add in the fact that the little bit of help was not forthcoming, and what you have are four guys pitching their hearts out, but knowing they have to go at least eight innings every time out. And that ain't likely to happen, especially in a year with reduced fatigue numbers.

The reason for the pressure to pitch eight or more innings is, of course, the bullpen. While it

SNT: Nico Hoerner.

In a post-draft trade, Mr. Montague snagged this young infielder/outfielder from his favorite MLB team. Just 23, Hoerner could develop into a versatile hitter and fielder.
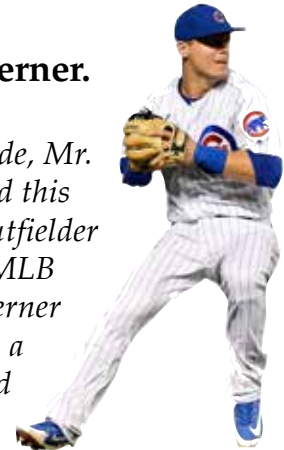
Turnover Rate: **32%**

Arrived: Rony Garcia, Nico Hoerner, Spencer Howard, Jorge Mateo, Dee Strange-Gordon, Robert Stock, Stephen Tarpley, Lane Thomas, Yoshi Tsutsugo, Duane Jr. Underwood, Logan Webb, Shun Yamaguchi.

Departed: Jesse Chavez, Sam Dyson, Carlos Gomez, Tommy Kahnle, Francisco Liriano, Martin Maldonado, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Justin Turner, Ben Zobrist.

does have a closer and a shaky set-up reliever, there's very little left in the tank after those two. The rotation and the bullpen resemble each other the same way Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

DeGrom, Darvish: Jekyll

resemble each other. They're on the same team. Otherwise, they're leagues apart.

ROTATION. The Big Four starts, as it always seems to, with ace Jacob DeGrom (Grade 17 C+23 HR+23). He's joined by Yu Darvish (Grade 16 C+36 HR+41). These are both ace-quality starters, both in terms of grade, peripherals, and number of starts (32 each). The next level includes Kyle Hendricks (Grade 12 C+53) and Zack Greinke (Grade 7 C+45 HR+31), who makes up for his grade with excellent peripherals. Together, these four provide 128 quality starts.

That leaves 30 starts for the youngster Logan Webb (Grade 3 HR+41) and four starts from veteran Luke Weaver (Grade 1), who's hoping for better days ahead. Rookie prospect Spencer Howard (Grade 1 HR-34) gets to spend the entire year throwing batting practice and reading books about the great pitchers he hopes to emulate one day. The bottom tier of the rotation doesn't help the Big Four, the bullpen, or the team. But they're all young and have a chance to contribute in the future.

BULLPEN. Normally, you'd look to the bullpen to help out the rotation. But it isn't quite in the cards this year. The closer is John Gant (Grade 15* C-35 HR+62), who is at least adept at keeping the ball in the park. He also has only 46 innings. There's a 'situational' lefty in Amir Garrett (Grade 18* C-22 HR+42), and a setup man, perhaps in name only: Buck Farmer (Grade 10* C+31). They add about 115 more innings.

That's obviously not enough, so the rest include Kyle "Lit Incendiary Device" Ryan (Grade 7* HR+62), who's the other lefty, waiver pickup Robert Stock (Grade 4* C-62 HR+62), Craig

Stammen (Grade 2* C+43 HR+34), and some 1*s including waiver acquisition Rony Garcia (Grade 1* HR-62). This group will be called on to somehow get some outs.

Offense: 3.0
The worst in the league.

From the World Series to … *this?* Many of the names are the same since the recent draft brought little help, but the cards have somehow transformed themselves into a team from a different era: let's say 1968, the Year of the Pitcher. The only player on the team with more than nine hits is Andrelton Simmons (6-6, 11 hits, 2 walks, but 4 24s, L-4), and he bats ninth every day.

The only player on the team with four power numbers is Adam Eaton (4 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, 33 SSN for 9 attempts, L-13 R+3), who's hardly what anyone would call a monster. The next

Eaton: Non-monster

level down features Jason Heyward (1-0-0, 9 hits, 6 walks+22, L-12 R+3), Miguel Cabrera (1-5, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+12 R-5), and part-timer Victor Caratini (6-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+3 R-4). From the World Series to this? Munich's vaunted offense is now rated the worst in the league.

Erstwhile slugger Anthony Rizzo (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, 29 SSN for 11 attempts, L-5) and part-timer Willson Contreras (1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+2 42s, L-9) can pop one over the fence now and then. The same power comes from Kyle Schwarber (1-0-0, 7 hits, 5 walks+22, L-6) and rookie Yoshi Tsutsugo (1-0-0, 7 hits, 5 walks, L-3). The walks are nice and will help against those control-challenged staffs, but they'll need luck to score lots of runs.

That leaves diminutive Jose Altuve (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-6), who experienced his version of

the Decline of the Roman Empire. He didn't even steal bases successfully. Every batter on the team could use more hits. By rights, they should *have* more hits. Instead, they all took a year off. Maybe next year, they'll be better. This year, this lineup will be generating lots of outs, no matter how good the dice are.

Defense: 4.0
Strong up the middle.

Heyward (OF3, 33 arm) is a vacuum in center-field. The double-play combination of Simmons (SS9) and Altuve (2B8) gives the fans something to cheer about. And Contreras (C8 Th+4) is excellence personified. Rizzo (1B5) provides his usual steadying influence, too. So they're strong up the middle. Caratini (C7, Th-1) plays against lefties and is far from the worst catcher, although he's a couple steps down from Contreras. Eaton (OF2, 32 arm) is the definition of average.

Bench: 2.5
Some choices, but . . . zzz.

Chad Pinder (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, but 5 24s, L-6 R+4) is the best of the bench bats. He can cover three positions, too. Alex Avila (2 0,s 6 hits, 6 walks+42, L-6) is a true bearded lady, but useful on defense (C8, Th+2). SNT Nico Hoerner (6, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, 24 SSN for 14 attempts) has lots of usage. Eric Sogard (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, with an unusual L-2 R-2 shift) may see a lot of action off the bench, as might Austin Meadows (6-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks+22, 26 SSN for 8 attempts, L-11 R+3) and Dee Strange-Gordon (24 SSN for 14 attempts) as a PR.

4th What a fall from grace. This team has some elements that made them true Marauders in the past: some power, some good on-base ability, very little speed, and quite a few Cubs. But the difference between a winning Munich team and this version can be summed up by the missing hits and the missing bullpen arms. The Big Four in the rotation will need to pitch deep into every game. The walks, walks, and homers will have to follow that pattern to give any hope of scoring enough runs to win a few games.

Simmons: We *really* like this picture

This team is a combination of the past and of the future, because there is very little present outside of the Big Four in the rotation.

TQ: **14.5**

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Making It Happen

There's probably only one reasonable outcome in this division, and it should not be hard to achieve: a pennant for the **Northboro Phoenix**. The management team of *Robert Jordan* and *Steve Stein* appear to be on the same page and have the same agenda: the draft and the trading has been aimed at building the team on the field.

It's really quite solid, with plenty of pitching, piles of power, and . . . well, alliteration has its limits. They should win handily, and their principal opponents are likely in the post-season, and in the Aaron Division.

The team the *Annual* considers the best of the also-rans is *Mark Bloom*'s **Grand Cayman Havens**. After two years of bottom dwelling, the club is looking forward to a little more respectability. The top end of the rotation is pretty good, there are some arms in the bullpen, and some serious cards on offense. Is it enough for a Wild Card? We don't think so, but it will be lots more fun to watch – and for Boomer to play.

And then there's the club in **Warrenton**. The *Giants* are hard to predict: the offense is very solid, but the pitching is suspect. Still, Trader *Jack Chapman* is sitting on a huge pile of 2022 picks, and if they're close enough he might well pull the trigger. (We think it's in his nature, and of course it's in his nickname, so you make the call.) They also might fade in the stretch and draft better next year.

As for our take on *Rich Meyer*'s **Elders of Zion**: never count them out of anything. This team has its flaws, but so do the other two division rivals that don't play in Northboro. Overall the pitching is better, the lineup is better, but there's only so much you can do. And the clock is ticking on the roster, which may soon need a major overhaul. But with the right dice at the right time . . .
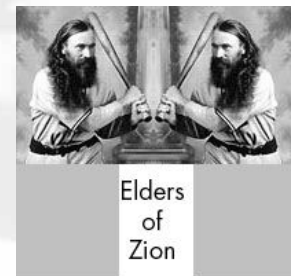
Williams Division

Brandon Belt,
Northboro

1. Northboro   **31.0**
2. Grand Cayman 21.0
3. Warrenton   **20.0**
4. Zion   **17.0**

2020 northboro PHOENIX in review

Now is the time.

by Steve Stein

2020 in Review
Final Record: 65-97 (2nd, Williams)

The last rebuild began in 2013. After the decidedly mediocre 2018 season, it was clear that our 5-year plan had failed. The outlook for the 2020 season was bleak, owing to a combination of injuries and key draft choices performing poorly. We were 100 starts short of legal, and an emerging hole at catcher joined perennial holes at second and third base. We went with a limited build-down, trading Brett Gardner to the Dragons for three pitchers who gave us 100 bad starts. That gave us the flexibility to draft young talent, instead of spending our draft on starting pitchers.

And it worked! Will Smith fills the catcher hole quite nicely. Yandy Diaz may be the answer at third – we'll see. Pitching injuries were still problematic, though, so Jake Odorizzi was sent to Strong City for the younger, albeit less talented, Antonio Senzatela. That will work well for 2021, which is shaping up very nicely.

What went right?

We lost 97 games, so not much went right. Joc Pederson had a pretty good season, slugging .529 with 29 HRs. First-round pick Will Smith hit 16 HRs in 52 games and slugged .541. Yandy Diaz managed 11 HRs in 77 games, and was the only other Phoenix with an OPS over 750.

On the pitching side, nothing went right except for 25 sterling innings of 2-run baseball from Cody Stashak.

Pederson: Pretty good

One bright spot is Dansby Swanson, who plays every day, and has established himself as the worthy heir to J. J. Hardy at shortstop.

What went wrong?

Did I mention we lost 97 games? We gave up over 900 runs for only the second time in 12 years. Odorizzi was the only starter with an ERA under 5 (just barely)! We had trouble getting people on base, and trouble scoring runs. But the main thing that went wrong is 97 losses didn't even get in the top 5 of the draft!

3 Things

1. Holes. We have filled the catcher slot with Will Smith and the shortstop hole with Dansby Swanson. We may have filled the 3B slot with Yandy Diaz, although that is much less certain. A solution at second base still eludes us – Aledmys Diaz would be great if he played more, but Derek Dietrich will play a lot of games as a 2B-6.

2. Finally! A lot of our guys had really good offensive years – Will Smith, Teoscar Hernandez and Brandon Belt have scary cards. And we had enough usage that we could draft a lot of pitching. We expect to contend.

3. Now is the time. 2020 produced some very strong cards, and we have a lot of them both on the mound and at the bat. Pitching is still a mystery. If the arms we acquired pan out and stay healthy, this will be a good team for a long time. If not, this will be a brief shining moment.

northboro PHOENIX

Bob Jordan (22nd year) / Steve Stein (19th year)

*You've got what you need. Go out and win.*

The circumstances of the upcoming season, the moves made by the two-headed management team in Northboro, and the name of the team commit us to a certain reference to what might be called obligatory symbolism. Here they are, risen from the ashes (65-97, after 78-84, after a fairly disappointing 86-76) . . . though it seems, if the reader will pardon the *Annual*'s equally obligatory wordplay, to be an awfully slow burn.

So there's quite a bit of new pitching to go with the largely held over position players; and it was a great year to be drafting pitchers. So everything is in place for the Northboro club to drive to the World Series. Note that Mr. Jordan and Mr. Stein hate it when the *Annual* says stuff like that: but in a year where there is only one team with a higher TQ than Northboro, we really have no choice. 10 points of offense (no one

Turnover Rate: 32%

Arrived: Ian Anderson, Anthony Bemboom, Brandon Bielak, Daniel Castano, Kyle Cody, Justin Dunn, Matt Foster, Jedd Gyorko, Geoff Hartlieb, James Karinchak, Ryan Thompson, Eric Yardley.

Departed: Chris Devenski, David Hess, Chris Iannetta, Ian Kennedy, Corey Knebel, Jorge Lopez, Mike Montgomery, Jordan Zimmermann.
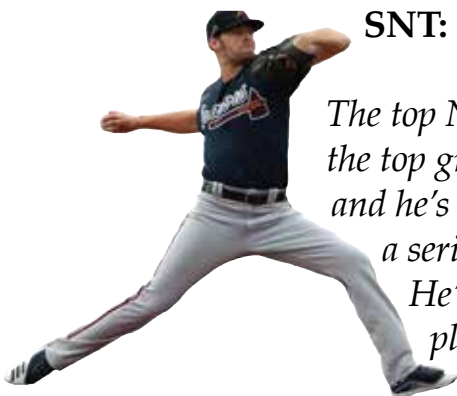
SNT: Ian Anderson.

The top Northboro pick has the top grade in the rotation, and he's a great addition to a serious pitching staff. He'll look good in the playoffs too.

has a higher rating); 13 points of pitching (only two teams exceed it); a decent defense; a good bench; and even a 2022 draft to fill in any possible deficiency.

We've said it before, and we're saying it again. *You've got what you need. Go out and win.*

Pitching: 13.0
Dominate the division.

As noted in our lead, there's a whole new pitching staff in town. Indeed, there are a remarkable 22 pitchers on the roster (compared to only 16 position players), and they're very good and very deep.

ROTATION. Start with 52 starts an ace grade. Second year man Dakota Hudson gets it done (Grade 19 C-13) for 22 starts; rookie Ian Anderson goes to the mound 16; and Kyle Cody gets 14 (though admittedly he has only a 15 fatigue, making him most often a three to four inning opener.) That's a pretty good top end.

Hudson: Gets it done

There are 102 starts in the next tier. Rookie Justin Dunn (Grade 15 C-62 HR+32) and veterans Antonio Senzatela (Grade 10 C+26 HR+15) and Garrett Richards (Grade 10 C+14) each get a full season, while Daniel Castano (Grade 10 HR+25, 17 fatigue) adds 16 more starts. The last handful will be started by the most modern of innovations, openers Matt Foster and Caleb Ferguson

northboro PHOENIX

(who will mostly have jobs in the very deep bullpen). This crew won't overall go very deep into games, but that's the same as every other team in this strange year.

BULLPEN. My goodness, isn't there a lot of relief pitching on this team. It starts with brand new closer Matt Foster (Grade 21* HR+35) and rookie hard thrower James Karinchak (Grade 23* C-62 HR+52). There's also another rookie, Eric Yardley (Grade 19* C-23 HR+33). There are more than 200 innings of Grade 18* or above.

Then there's a flotilla of additional relievers. There are two lefties: Jace Fry (Grade 14* C-44) and Caleb Ferguson (Grade 13* C+42 HR-34); and three righties: Noe Ramirez (Grade 15* HR+25), Cody Stashak (Grade 15* C+33) and Geoff Hartlieb (Grade 14* C-62 HR+52). These guys add up to 267 additional innings. For surrender innings, there are two Grade 6*s (Ryan Thompson, Jose Alvarado) and a really solid Grade 5* (Adam Cimber, C+41 HR+33). They'll

Karinchak: Throws really hard

get used over the course of a season, especially if the starter gets knocked out early.

This pitching staff isn't as good as the best we've seen, and isn't as deep as some others in TBL, but it's really quite good, and plenty good enough to dominate the division. The arms in Warrenton, Grand Cayman and Zion don't really compare.

Offense: 10.0
Interesting, powerful. No mocking.

In the past we've occasionally mocked the Northboro offense, but we'll not be doing that this year.

Hernandez: Big card

Let us begin with the biggest card in the stack: Teoscar Hernandez, who came out of obscurity to put up a power/speed combo (1-1-5-5, 10 hits, 3 walks, 33 SSN for 19 SBA) that will be in the middle of the Northboro lineup all year. Add 100 games of second-year catcher Will Smith (1-1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 5 walks+22) and a full season of Brandon Belt (1-0-0-0-0, 9 hits, 6 walks, L-15 R+3), and a nice Dansby Swanson (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, 33 SSN for 14 SBA, L-11 R+1). A good run of die rolls is a bad day for any opponent's pitching.

After that things get a little weird. There is quite a bit of power in a set of cards that are flawed in one way or another. Jesus Aguilar (1-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks, L+5 R-4) is a nice alternative when lefties pitch; Kole Calhoun (1-1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, L-6) is a textbook example of the three true outcomes, as is, to an even greater extent, Derek Dietrich (1-1-5, 7 hits, 4 walks+ 2 42s). Jedd Gyorko (1-1-5, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, L+7 R-8) and Aledmys Diaz (1-0-0-0-0, 9 hits, L-7 R+4) are situationally useful. Ramon Laureano (3 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks+2 42s) will play a lot.

There are also a few guys who have more hits and less power. Yandy Diaz (2 0s, 10 hits, 5 walks+22) and Jurickson Profar (1-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, 34 SSN for 22 SBA) get on base and have no shift penalties.

This is an interesting offense that will be very dangerous, especially against bad staffs.

Defense: 4.5
Some bright spots.

There are three real bright spots on defense. Brandon Belt (1B5) is as good as it gets, and Dansby Swanson (SS9) is a Fielding One performer. Ramon Laureano (OF3, 37 arm) has the same cannon arm, and will help out on defense even though his bat won't do much. He has another OF3 friend (Kole Calhoun, 31 arm); the rest of the outfielders are OF2s – Hernandez, Pederson, Profar – with average arms.

In the infield, all sorts of people play second and third base. Aledmys Diaz (2B8, 3B4, 1B4) and Jedd Gyorko (3B4, 1B3) are the best gloves, while Yandy Diaz (3B3), Derek Dietrich (2B6, 3B3), Profar (2B7), Aguilar (1B3), and Marwin Gonzalez (2B7, 3B3, 1B4) are less reliable. Behind the plate, Will Smith (C7 Th-1) is only adequate, but Mike Zunino (C8 Th+2) and Anthony Bemboom (C7 Th+6) are better.

This defense will help keep the team in the game most days.

Ages of players on the Northboro roster, as of 07/01/2021:

35: Kluber
33: Belt, Calhoun, Richards
32: Gyorko, M. Gonzalez
31: Aguilar, Bemboom, Chatwood, Dietrich, N. Ramirez
30: Cimber, A. Diaz, Yardley, Zunino
29: Y. Diaz, Pederson, R. Thompson
28: M. Feliz, T. Hernandez, Profar
27: J. Fry, Hartlieb, Stashak, D. Swanson
26: Alvarado, Castano, Cody, Foster, Dak. Hudson, Laureano, Senzatela, W. D. Smith
25: Bielak, Dunn, Karinchak
24: Ferguson
23: I. Anderson

Laureano: Cannon arm

Bench: 3.5
Lots of choices.

There are only 16 hitters, but they all have roles. Bemboom has the Th+6, and a little power (1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks+42, L-10 R+5); Joc Pederson has all of the true outcomes (1-5-5, 7 hits, 3 walks+42+22); Marwin Gonzalez (2 0s, 8 hits) has lots of usage and plays everywhere. Every day there can be a different lineup, and that's a good thing. We like this bench.

1st The pitching and the power should carry the Northboro club a long way. In TBL we believe in power and walks; it's really how APBA works; even if your pitchers steal homers, they steal them to doubles. If your pitchers have good control, they'll only stop so many walks. Power and on base percentage takes days off, but rarely checks out completely.

The fatigue ratings are low, same as everywhere. The bullpen is deep but is a little wild – also not uncommon. There'll be off days but we're pretty sure there will be many more days where they take the opponent apart.

TQ: **31.0**

2020 grand cayman HAVENS in review

This is a very young team.

by Mark Bloom

2020 in Review
Final Record: 52-110 (4th, Williams)

Despite winning one more game than the year before, this was another ugly campaign. While the offense improved pretty much across the board, the pitching staff surrendered 1005 runs, which was too much to overcome. Still, there were signs of growth from a team that became noticeably younger.

What went right?

Yordan Alvarez had a promising rookie season, hitting .272 with a team-leading 25 home runs in just 87 games. Amed Rosario (42 doubles, 24 stolen bases) led most other categories, although Brian Dozier, in his final TBL season, led the team with 69 RBI and 57 walks. Josh James totaled 28 saves for a team that won only 52. Griffin Canning (6-8, 4.22) had a decent rookie season, and A.J. Minter (3.32) had the best season I've ever seen from a Grade 1* reliever.

Alvarez: Promising

What went wrong?

The pitching staff, "led" by Reynaldo Lopez, was awful. A combination of low grades and a thin bullpen triggered franchise-worst results. While Lopez pitched a team-leading 202.7 innings, he allowed 341 baserunners and a team record (by seven) 49 homers. In addition, the defense committed more errors than games played, led by Rosario's alarming 33, giving him 79 in the past two seasons.

3 Things

1. Continuing the youth movement. Even counting the trades for several older players like Nick Ahmed and Felix Pena, the team's batters average just 26 years old. Ten are 25 or younger. Similarly, the team's pitchers are, on average, 27 years old, including five that are 25 or younger. There are only seven players on the entire roster who are 30 or older. This is a very young team.

2. A focus on starting pitching. After drafting primarily hitters in previous years' drafts (with the exception of Round 2 in 2020), the team turned its attention to pitching. Originally, the goal was to draft a slew of starting pitchers, even to pitch out of the bullpen, but a late trade with Las Vegas supplied extra bullpen arms. The team still has 11 potential starting pitchers on its roster, from Tyler Anderson to Alex Wood.

3. Getting better organically. Boomer Wells didn't trade for any impact players; his eyes are on the future, not the present. Most of the improvement expected from the 2021 team will come from homegrown talent and rookies. Ke'Bryan Hayes will be a joy to watch. Dom Smith has become an enviable offensive force. Brandon Lowe will hit a few out. The pitching staff is also much improved, with Max Fried, Minter, and Mitch Keller becoming dominant. And this team still has a few impact players waiting to blossom, like Alvarez and Gavin Lux.

grand cayman HAVENS

Mark Bloom (31st year)

They may be very good very soon.

There are about 110 good reasons for Havens management wanting to be better. There were 111 reasons last year, and the team ticked only one game closer to respectability. We have said this many times, and it's still true: *winning is more fun, and losing sucks.* No one goes out of their way to have a consistently bad team; even if the build (especially build-from-scratch) is fun, there is a limit to that enjoyment.

On the one hand: this year's team is *significantly* better than either of the previous two editions. This team might not even draft in the top ten in 2022. Three quarters of the starts are capable; there's a closer and at least some bullpen innings; there are some excellent cards in the lineup (including two with six – *six!* power numbers); and a majority of the players on the roster are in their early to mid 20s.

On the other: there's way too little bullpen; some of the regulars aren't all that exciting (even though they're young); and it's still a work in progress. But there'll be much more *fun* this year, and a lot less *sucks.* And that's a good thing.

Pitching: 6.5
Better than before.

To be a true rebuilder, it's necessary to shed the good pitching and fall short enough to draft high. That's at least part in the past now. The TQ assigned to the Cayman staff doesn't look like much, but there are more than ten teams in

SNT: Ke'Bryan Hayes.

He's the complete package – power, some speed, and a serious bat. He will be manning third base here for some time to come.

Turnover Rate: 32%

Arrived: Nick Ahmed, Jorge Alcala, Dane Dunning, Deivi Garcia, Kevin Ginkel, Ke'bryan Hayes, Jake Newberry, Felix Pena, Trevor Rogers, Jordan Romano, Caleb Smith, Daulton Varsho.

Departed: Ty Buttrey, Brian Dozier, Reynaldo Lopez, Daniel Mengden, Tyler Naquin, Nick Pivetta, Gregory Polanco, Myles Straw, Hunter Wood.

TBL with a worse one. There's a terrific one-two punch at the top of the rotation, and the oldest of the eight starters is an elderly 31. There is some (though not enough) bullpen, so the team will be in games fairly often if the offense provides.

Keller, Fried: One, two

grand cayman HAVENS

ROTATION. The two-headed ace this year consists of Mitch Keller (Grade 21 C-62 HR-23) and Max Fried (Grade 16 C+12 HR+53). Fried has a complete season and better peripherals; Keller has the higher base grade, but only 14 starts. Still, they are a nice top of the rotation.

There's more. There are 79 starts of Dane Dunning (Grade 13 HR+21), Griffin Canning (Grade 10 C-15) and the elderly 31-year-old lefty Tyler Anderson (Grade 8 C-15 HR+34). Deivi Garcia (Grade 6 C+41) has 16 starts and an excellent 27 fatigue. After that, though, it's not as bright, and the light bullpen will force some of the lesser guys to pitch more than might be comfortable. Caleb Smith (Grade 12 C-62 HR-31) makes 11 starts with only a 14 fatigue; and Trevor Rogers (Grade 2 C-21) will have to go a dozen times, and is expected to go 4 innings unless pounded out (though he has a caddy in Miguel Castro).

BULLPEN. There's a closer. A. J. Minter (Grade 21* HR+46) is very fine, though he will have to be used carefully. His setup crew includes Jordan Romano (Grade 14*), Jorge Alcala (Grade 14* HR+13) and Jake Newberry (Grade 11* C-51). Closer plus setup guys add up to 230 innings. Felix Pena (Grade 8* C+22 HR+36) and Miguel Castro (Grade 8* C-34) add another 140 innings, and Anderson and Smith will get bullpen innings after their starts are done – there will likely be some left. Josh James (Grade 4* C-62 HR-25) leads a small flotilla of innocuous pitchers that will go when the game is out of control.

With the good top starters and the decent innings, this staff is a lot better than before. Carefully used, they'll be able to keep the Havens in the game.

Offense: 8.0
Lots of walks, and some power.

The short season has produced a lot of strange cards – both good and bad. Four power numbers seem to be common, five not completely unusual. But six? Boy howdy, that's amazing, especially for a mostly full time player. Dominic Smith is that kind

Smith: Boy howdy

of amazing (1-0-0-0-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks+42, L-7). He may sit out against some lefties, but getting a 0 on 55. What's more, there's an even better card to go with it: SNT Ke'Bryan Hayes, who has 65 games of this: 1-0-0-0-0-0, 13 hits, 3 walks+22, L+4 R-5). He might even be a little undercarded for his .376 average. The third best card in the lineup is pretty good too: Brandon Lowe plays every day at either first and second (1-1-4-6, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, 33 SSN for 8 SBA). Robbie Grossman (1-4-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, 34 SSN for 25 SBA) has an interesting combination of power and speed.

The next tier of players is not quite as scary. Nick Solak (2 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 22 SBA) is a good speed guy; Nick Ahmed (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 11 SBA) is dependable; Kyle Seager (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, L-8 R+2) will get on base some, as will Clint Frazier (1-5-5, 8 hits, 6 walks+42, 33 SSN for 9 SBA).

Luis Urias (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks is just a Guy, and the catchers – Danny Jansen (6 hits, 5 walks, L-10 R+4) and Chance Cisco (1-6, 7 hits, 5 walks+2 42s) are basically just ballast.

There is some good power in the lineup, and a bunch of walks; it's likely to be good some days and struggling on others – especially against good pitching staffs. They'll be more competent than in recent years, and will likely get past 700 runs, but shouldn't reach 800.

Defense: 4.0
Won't extend innings.

The infield positions are the strong parts of the defense. Nick Ahmed (SS9) is a top glove, relegating Amed Rosario (SS8) to the bench; Brandon Lowe is a fine 2B8, though he'll play some games as a 1B3; and Kyle Seager, the senior man on the roster at age 33, still gets it as a 3B5 (so we'll not see much of Ke'Bryan Hayes' 3B4 in the field). Urias and Solak, if needed, are 2B7s; and everyone else at first base is also a 1B3.

Seager: Still gets it

The outfielders are mostly OF2s with decent arms, though Grossman is only a 26. Tyler O'Neill is an OF3, so he has a reason to be on the roster from time to time. Jansen is a C8 Th-2; Sisco is a C7. Daulton Varsho is a C6 if needed.

The defense isn't going to extend innings, which is good for the pitching staff.

Ages of players on the Grand Cayman roster, as of 07/01/2021:

33: K. Seager
31: Ahmed, T. Anderson, Grossman, F. Pena
30: A. Wood
29: C. Smith
28: J. Cruz, Romano
27: Fried, Ginkel, Ludlow, Minter
26: M. Castro, F. Cordero, Dunning, Frazier, D. Jansen, Lowe, Newberry, O'Neill, Senzel, Sisco, Do. Smith, Solak
25: Alcala, Canning, M. Keller, Rosario
24: Alvarez, Hayes, Urias, Varsho
23: Lux, T. J. Rogers
22: De. Garcia

Bench: 2.5
Real options.

For most rebuilding teams, the team on the field is usually the best players without too much on the bench. But Grand Cayman has some real options. Amed Rosario (1-4, 10 hits, L+6 R-6) is situationally useful, as are Nick Senzel (4 0s, 7 hits, L-10 R+7) and Daulton Varsho (3 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks+42, 29 SSN for 11 SBA. O'Neill is an OF3 with 1-0-0 power and not much else; Franchy Cordero has some power (1-5-5-6) and a little usage; while Jordan Luplow, Gavin Lux and the tiny bit of Yordan Alvarez are part of the future.

Along with the variety of players that will start some games, the Havens will be able to push buttons in close games.

2nd They're a long way from first place, and a Wild Card berth is most likely out of reach. This isn't the year for Mr. Bloom and the Grand Cayman Havens. To be fair, he knows it: Mitch Keller, Max Fried, Dominic Smith, Ke'Bryan Hayes and others are here not because they're the best people to help the club contend: there isn't that kind of talent at all positions. The offense will make outs; the starters will fall short; the bullpen will be strapped. They'll likely win 70, and may approach 80, but it's still a work in progress.

But not one to be completely ignored. Given the youth of the roster, and the road ahead, they may be very good very soon.

grand cayman HAVENS

TQ: **21.0**

Lux: Future prize

2020 warrenton GIANTS in review

There are only 46 grade D starts required.

by Jack Chapman

2020 in Review
Final Record: 55-107 (3rd, Williams)

When you lose 107 games you expect to have the first pick in the draft. But Warrenton only had the third pick after a season that included some really tough performances. Rather than use this draft to fix all that he could, Trader Jack adopted a plan to trade for more picks next year and players who could help make things better this year. He wheeled and dealed before, during, and after the draft to create good hope for better draft position in 2022. For this year, it's a holding pattern, hoping for the best and waiting watchfully to see where all those draft picks will fall.

What went right?

Not very much, as a 55-107 record would indicate; but at least 2 teams were worse. The games were still fun to play.

Trout: The center

What went wrong?

We lost 107 games and still only drafted third. (Did that get mentioned before?) The offense centered around Mike Trout (130 games and .301/.442/.643 slash line), Buster Posey (101 games and .288/.365/.410 slash line), and Mike Yastrzemski (99 games and .309/.381/.545 slash line). Matt Adams and Edwin Encarnacion combined for 47 dingers in a first base platoon.

The pitching staff was pathetic. Only one starter had an ERA under 5 (Tyler Mahle with a 4.86). From there you go downhill until you reach Gregory Soto with an ERA of 8.01.The bullpen

did have one pitcher with an ERA under 3, Sam Coonrod at 2.57 in 21 innings. The pitching staff did manage to avoid giving up 300 home runs. They allowed only 295.

3 Things

1. *Improved offense and pitching.* The offense in 2021 should be much improved with possibly the best outfield (Trout, Tucker, Yastrzemski, and Adam Engel) in the league.They have also acquired a first baseman (Christian Walker) who hits for average and power with good defense. The other corner will be ably manned by a platoon of Evan Longoria and Justin Turner providing both pop and defense. The pitching should be much improved. Admittedly that is not a high bar to achieve, but there are only 46 grade D starts required and the bullpen has several closers.

2. *The rebuild continues.* In the draft of 2022, the Giants are looking to the future for more help. They have 20 picks in the 2022 draft: 15 picks in the first 5 rounds 10 of which are in the first three rounds including three in the first round alone. Hopefully we will be able to meet in person for that draft.

3. *How will 2021 play affect draft position?* I look forward to playing the games and seeing how well my draft position in 2022 plays out. This season's version of the Giants should win more than 55 games; how many more, well, that remains to be seen.

warrenton GIANTS

Jack Chapman (13th year)

Youneverknow.

It's often a little hard to figure out where Jack Chapman – Captain Jack – Trader Jack – is taking his club in any given year. There are a few exceptions, usually when the team is reaping the whirlwind from previous contending years. Then it's easy: they're tanking for the year, in hopes of getting better in subsequent drafts.

At first blush, this team isn't one of those teams. There are some very fine cards on the roster: Mike Trout, of course, and Christian Walker, and Justin Turner, and Mike Yastrzemski, and Max Stassi, and Kyle Tucker, and Adam Engel; Jose Urquidy, Alex Colome, Jarlin Garcia, John Curtiss on the pitching staff. Trout and Yaz and Tucker were here, but the others were drafted or traded for. These are not the moves a bottom feeder makes.

But then there's the thermometer. We had to make a new graphic to insert the number '29': Auletta has never had so much in the early draft. Really. Holy Bill Veeck! Warrenton #1, Strong City #1, Midwest #1, Warrenton #2, Knoxville #2, Warrenton #3, Strong City #3, Knoxville #3, Midwest #3, Brobdingnag #3, Riverwoolf #4, Warrenton #4, Las Vegas #4, Warrenton #5, Blue Hill #5 . . . they can draft a whole new team, or move some of those picks during the trading period to give this roster a makeover.

Does that make them a contender? Hard to tell. Depends on what Mr. Chapman wants to do. The smart money says that this group, even if improved in September, probably can't get further than a Wild Card spot. But Warrenton is always working hard to win games because, well, youneverknow. So – in or out? We say out, but . . . youneverknow.

Pitching: 5.0
Too much, and not enough.

Every year, there's a different cast. The Giants use a lot of different players to fill roles this year, and a good number of them just got here (and are likely to be somewhere else next year – best not to buy in Warrenton; rent instead).

There are a few good starts and some bad starts; there are actually quite a few good relievers, and they'll be needed since Warrenton does not use the DH – ergo, pinch hitting will be in play. But overall, this is a team with adequate, but not outstanding, pitching: too much for a rebuilder, not enough for a contender.

Turnover Rate: 45%

Arrived: Madison Bumgarner, Ryan Castellani, Alex Colome, John Curtiss, Greg Garcia, Jarlin Garcia, Tyler Heineman, Tzu-Wei Lin, Jack Mayfield, Tyler Naquin, Anibal Sanchez, Max Stassi, Chadwick Tromp, Justin Turner, Jose Urquidy, Stephen Vogt, Christian Walker.

Departed: Matt Adams, Kyle Barraclough, Buddy Boshers, Seth Brown, Yoenis Cespedes, Sam Coonrod, Ryan Cordell, Juan Lagares, Peter Lambert, Tyler Mahle, Jeff Mathis, Harold Ramirez, Dee Strange-Gordon, Anthony Swarzak.

SNT: Christian Walker.

He came over in one of two big ticket trades with Las Vegas in the offseason. It's a nice card right now, and there should be some good future cards as well.
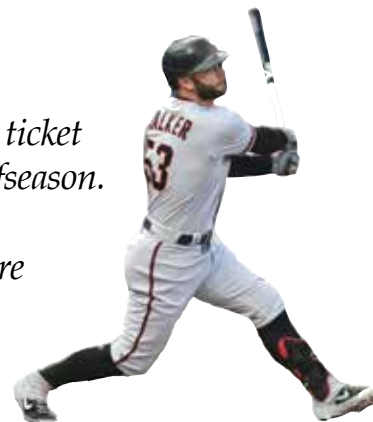
warrenton GIANTS

ROTATION. Nine pitchers get to start games this year in Warrenton, with the best grade belonging to rookie Jose Urquidy (Grade 15 C+22), who gets to go 14 times. He's backed up by half a season of Guys Who Steal 9s: Taylor Clarke (Grade 12 C-24 HR-22), Martin Perez (10 lefty C-26), Yusei Kikuch (Grade 8 C-23 HR+42), and the scary Ryan Castellani (Grade 10 C-62 HR-46). That covers 92 starts. There are also 8 starts of control specialist John Curtiss (Grade 16 C+46 HR-15). So far so good.

Then not so good. The remaining 48 trips to the hill belong to Madison Bumgarner (yes, he's back here again; he must have a summer place in Minnesota and a winter one in Oregon – but he's a Grade 2 C+26 HR-55); Zack Godley (Grade 1 HR-46) and Trent Thornton (Grade 1 HR-62). All of these guys are stapled to the mound until forced to leave.

BULLPEN. This crew is distinctly stronger. There's a fine closer in Alex Colome (Grade 22* HR+62) and a nice setup crew: Jarlin Garcia (Grade 18* HR+62) from the left side, and John Curtiss (Grade 16* C+46) and Tyler Kinley (Grade 16* C-45 HR+32) from the right. Closer and setup crew have almost 240 innings.

The middlemen are pretty good as well. Rookie Gregory Soto (Grade 14* C-54 HR+53) is a solid lefty; Jeurys Familia (Grade 14* C-62 HR+36) is a wild righty; and Taylor Clarke (Grade 12* C-24 HR-22), Chris Stratton (Grade 11* C-23 HR+26) and Scott Barlow (Grade 9* C+31) fill out middle innings. These five pitchers have roughly 370 IP between them. Mr. Chapman provides very little guidance on their use; if they're well handled, it could make a real difference.

Urquidy: Top grade

Offense: 9.0
Team strength.

This is where the Giants shine: on offense. There are a number of good cards that have plenty of playing time. Of course we start with Mike Trout, who had a little bit of an off year so he's just stellar (1-1-4-5, 10 hits, 5 walks+22, but L-11 R+2, 6 13s, and no real running game). But he has some friends: Kyle Tucker (1-3-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-9 R+2, 34 SSN for 25 SBA) really blossomed this year, Christian Walker (1-6-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22) is a nice trade addition, and Mike Yastrzemski (1-0-0-0-0, 10 hits, 5 walks+22, 26 SSN for 8 SBA) can mash the ball.

Adam Engel (1-0-0-0) is the only card with 11 hits. Max Stassi, who's here because Ryan Jeffers went off to Knoxville, is pretty good (1-1-1-5, 10 hits, 4 walks), though only for half a season – the rest of the games will belong to Stephen Vogt (2 0s, 6 walks). Brandon Crawford (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L-6), Evan Longoria (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L+5 R-4), Justin Turner (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks+42+22, L-6) will get in the lineup regularly, as will Joe Panik (3 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks+22 – he might be learning to bunt with that card).

Trout: This is an off year

There are some gaps in the lineup, but overall they should score some runs. Some good pitching staffs may shut them down, and there are plenty of strikeouts that may create empty innings.

Defense: 4.0
A mixed bag.

There is a very strong outfield: Trout, Tucker and Engel are all OF3s, with decent arms. Yastrzemski is an OF2 and will get lots of time in left. In

the infield, it can be Fielding One at least some of the time, especially at the corners. Walker is a 1B4 and Longoria's strong glove (3B5) are very solid.

Longoria: Strong glove

Turner is only a 3B4, and will play some games there. In the middle, Crawford has declined to an SS8, as is Erik Gonzalez, and Panik is still a 2B8 – but a third of the season it'll be someone else. Behind the plate, Stassi is a C8 but only a Th-3, while Vogt is a C7 Th-2. Tyler Heineman has a Th+6 but is only a C6, and has no offense. It's overall a real mixed bag.

Ages of players on the Warrenton roster, as of 07/01/2021:

38: Encarnacion
37: A. Sanchez
36: J. Turner, Vogt
35: Longoria
34: Crawford, P. Sandoval
32: Colome
31: Familia, G. Garcia, Godley
30: Heineman, Kikuchi, Kinley, Mayfield, Naquin, Panik, M. Perez, Stassi, Stratton, C. Walker, Yastrzemski
29: Engel, E. Gonzalez, Trout
28: Barlow, Clarke, Curtiss, Jar. Garcia
27: Lin, Thornton
26: G. Soto, Tromp, Urquidy
25: Castellani
24: K. Tucker

Bench: 2.0
A little thin.

The lack of games at some positions makes the bench a little thin. The bottom fell out on Edwin Encarnacion (1-1-6, 6 hits, 3 walks); Erik Gonzalez (4 0s, 9 hits) has a little pop but not much else; the same is true of Tyler Naquin (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, L-17 R+4). Sandoval, Garcia, Lin and Mayfield are just basically Guys.

3rd They could probably finish ahead of Grand Cayman, with a more powerful lineup at least some of the time, and a deeper, more capable bullpen. What's more, our predictions go pear-shaped if Trader Jack lives up to his nickname in September. Which he could certainly do: the amount of stuff he has in the 2022 draft, even in the middle rounds, could bring in a middle starter or a middle infielder.

A lot depends on where the Giants are halfway through the 2021 campaign. If they're 30-50, there's a nice glide path toward a dominant draft, while Captain Jack still gets to move bullpen pieces around and roll the dice for Trout and Tucker and Walker. But if they're 45-35, maybe they make a move to go 52-30 down the stretch and take their chances in the playoffs.

It's hard to tell what will happen, or what he might do, or where the line is. As we said at the outset . . . *youneverknow*.

Warrenton GIANTS

TQ: **20.0**

29

2020 ELDERS of zion in review

Stay the course.

by Darrell Skogen

2020 in Review
Final Record: 84-78 (1st, Williams)

The Sensei usually has teams that feature solid hitting, speed on the bases, lights out starting pitching, and the ace in the pen to close things out. That's a great formula for winning six of the eight TBL World Series in which your team participates. This was a very un-Sensei-like team. And yet, the Williams struggled so badly in 2020 that *someone* had to win it —and those conditions produced a division title once again for our legendary HOF manager.

What went right?

These guys could *hit*. Trey Mancini was incredible (.322, 40 doubles, 40 HR, 131 RBI). Corey Seager (.298/42 doubles/19 HR), Charlie Blackmon (.290/37/32 and 121 RBI), and Andrew Benintendi (.280/53/18 and 89 RBI) helped lead the team to 237 HR and 894 runs scored. Keston Hiura excelled in his rookie season in part time play (.354/28/20, 60 RBI) over 83 games. Trevor Bauer won 15, but lost 13 games and labored with a 3.94 ERA. Four more starters (Jon Gray, Dylan Bundy, Miles Mikolas, and Steven Matz) won in double digits, although all were just at or just under .500 for the season. Kenley Jansen and Rowan Wick combined for 23 saves in a closer by committee approach. What went most right, of course, was inclusion in the Williams Division, which featured three other teams that were still rebuilding.

What went wrong?

Pitching is the easy answer. Those five starters in double digits totaled 58 wins against 54 losses. Jansen was the next highest winner at eight

Mancini: Incredible

to go along with his seven saves, and that was just enough to win in a weak division. Despite that, in a battle of HOF managers the semifinal battle with Munich Marauder manager Paul Montague ended in a seven game series that Monty told TBL he was happy to have survived. Imagine that—it turns out that with good hitting you can challenge in this league if you know how to play the game — and the Sensei still knows how to play the game very well.

3 Things

1. Rebuilding. Mr. Meyer came to the draft knowing it would be a tough year as the Williams improved and his looked to be falling off the cliff. Time to bring in some youth and play for the future. Draft choices like Jesus Luzardo, Genesis Cabrera, and A.J. Cole will provide both immediate and long term help. Others, like Leody Taveras, Magneuris Sierra, and Jacob Nottingham are future hopes for sure.

2. Hoping for comebacks. COVID hit this team as it did others in TBL. Gray, Matz, and Johnny Cueto are all capable of better years in the future. Seager, Benintendi, and Hiura should bounce back and become studs again. Austin Hays and Oscar Mercado are still developing. This is a solid core that will give instant strength to the Elders if they perform up to standard in MLB in 2021.

3. Stay the course. Meyer is a careful trader and drafter. He does not panic, he does not worry, even as his team is projected to finish last in the Williams. He just plans. And then he wins. *Again*.

ELDERS of zion

Rich Meyer (37th year); Hall of Famer

Plan on being surprised.

Trevor Bauer has left town, which is a signal that the team has turned the page – but it's clear from the roster, and from the draft, and from the Sensei's general inclination, that this is a team that would like to compete in 2021. They're in a division where there's room for upward mobility – Northboro is good, but Warrenton and Grand Cayman are flawed – and so is Zion, honestly: but experience and wily skill sometimes beats out on field and good looks, especially in short series. We're not the least bit wedded to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th positions in the Williams Division, and truly any of the three teams could finish in any of the three places.

The question is whether it matters in terms of the post season (the answer is probably *no*): The *second* question is whether any of these three teams (or the other dozen teams that aren't one of the top-rated clubs in TBL) would want to take a chance to contend right now, especially if it costs something down the road. The *third* question is whether entropy will overwhelm any or all of these teams before they can return to glory (definition: two solid winning seasons in a row.) If that's the case, then, what the hell: why not give it a shot. We think that Captain Jack is inclined in this direction, though Uncle Boomer is not – and are moved to wonder whether the Sensei feels inclined one way or the other.

Plan on being surprised.

Pitching: 6.0
Solid, not impressive.

The Zion pitching staff is an interesting mix of talent and resigned tolerance. There are good starts for 80% of the season, and then there's Jon

SNT:
Jesus Luzardo.

Acquiring a young, talented starter is a step back toward the Zion the Sensei – and TBL – is used to.

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Genesis Cabrera, Luis Castillo, A.J. Cole, Johnny Cueto, Travis D'Arnaud, Austin Hays, Brock Holt, Jesus Luzardo, Jacob Nottingham, Renato Nunez, Magneuris Sierra, Leody Taveras, Jordan Weems.

Departed: Greg Allen, Luke Bard, Trevor Bauer, Steven Duggar, Scooter Gennett, Kelvin Herrera, Josh Phegley, Colin Poche, Josh Taylor, Asher Wojciechowski.

Gray, who's a 1. There is a closer, and one sort-of setup man, and a whole lot of middle innings that are improvements on the starters. It's a competent pitching staff, but not overwhelming.

ROTATION. There is a solid 1-2 punch at the top of the starting staff: Dylan Bundy (Grade 13 C+26 HR+35) and Luis Castillo (Grade 12 HR+36).

Bundy, Castillo: #1 and #2
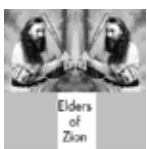
ELDERS of zion

They each have 30 starts, and importantly they each have a 24 fatigue. In an interesting parallel, the next two starters are very similar: righty Alex Cobb (Grade 8 C+14) and lefty Jesus Luzardo (Grade 8 C+24), both with a 23 fatigue. Add Johnny Cueto's 32 starts (Grade 7 C-13, 26 fatigue), returned from a long exile somewhere, and Michael Lorenzen goes five times as a Grade 10; and that brings Zion to 150 decent starts. The remaining ones fall to Jon Gray (Grade 1 C+24). Like most teams with one deficient starter and enough innings to cover, he has a caddy – Lorenzen will bail him out after a few innings.

Cabrera: A closer

This is a pretty solid crew, though not extremely impressive overall – it'll keep the team in games.

BULLPEN. Zion drafted a closer: Genesis Cabrera (Grade 22* C-62 HR+14). He has the good grade and the bad control that will thrill and exasperate management. His setup crew is decent: lefty Tony Watson (Grade 16* C+41 HR-15) and righty Jose Cisnero (Grade 14* HR+54), and to a lesser extent A. J. Cole (Grade 14* C+15) and Jordan Weems (Grade 14* C-43 HR+36). Closer and quartet add up to 308 good innings, all of which are better than all of the starters.

The middle group has almost 200 innings. Former closer Kenley Jansen (Grade 13* HR+54) is the best of the group, and Dylan Floro (Grade 11* C+45 HR+51) is excellent due to his peripherals. Michael Lorenzen (Grade 10* C-31 HR+33) and Rowan Wick (Grade 9* C+22 HR+44) will get lots of chance to work. Mr. Meyer is the best in the business at handling a bullpen, and will do well with this one.

Offense: 6.0
Some good cards; some problems.

Now, at last, the card that Mr. Meyer has been waiting for: the dominant one for Corey Seager (1-1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks, L-6 R+1) that is around for the whole season. He is joined by the pretty good Charlie Blackmon (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks, L+6 R-6, 26 SSN for 8 SBA). Along with Jeimer Candelario (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks) they're the centerpiece of the offense.

In addition, there's a good card for Travis d'Arnaud (1-5-5, 12 hits, 3 walks+22, L-13 R+3) for three-quarters of the season, and a power surge for Renato Nunez (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-6).

Blackmon: Pretty good
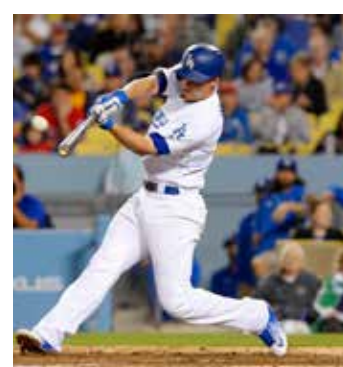
Seager: Dominant

Then there are some problems. Shin-Soo Choo (1-5, 8 hits, 4 walks+2 22s, 29 SSN for 22 SBA, L-8 R+2) is a bit of a bearded lady, and his platoon partner Jacob "the Sherriff of" Nottingham (1-1-5, 7 hits, 3 walks+42, L+8 R-8) is even more so. Leody Taveras (1-4-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, 35 SSN for 22 SBA) and Magneuris Sierra (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, 31 SSN for 14 SBA) add speed, but of course you can't steal first. Keston Hiura (1-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks+2 42s, 24 SSN for 14 SBA) has to play a lot, yielding only occasionally to someone like Ehire Adrianza (6-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks+42+22). When d'Arnaud isn't available, there are outs to be had with Roberto Perez (0, 6 hits, 4 walks+42), who is really here for his glove.

Defense:
Mostly Fielding Two.   **3.0**

There's only one real standout on defense: Roberto Perez (C9 Th+6). As noted above, he isn't here for his bat. Both Blackmon and Sierra are OF3s, with arms of 29 and 33; the rest of the outfielders are all OF2s with average arms. The infield is universally Fielding Two: 1B3s

Perez: Standout, again

for Nunez and Candelario, 2B7 for Hiura, SS8 for Seager, 3B4 for Candelario and Farmer. D'Arnaud is a C7 with a dismal Th-4.

This group is not going to shorten most innings, and may actually cause the pitching staff to do some extra work.

Bench: **2.0**
Not a lot of help.

A traditional strength of good Zion teams is a strong bench, with the ability to mix and match

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Ages of players on the Zion roster, as of 07/01/2021:

38: Choo
36: T. Watson
35: Blackmon, Cueto
33: Cobb, Holt, K. Jansen
32: Cisnero, D'Arnaud, R. Perez
31: Adrianza
30: Floro, K. Farmer, Matz
29: A. Cole, J. Gray, Lorenzen
28: Bundy, L. Castillo, Weems, Wick
27: Candelario, Nunez, C. Seager
26: Benintendi, Hays, Mercado, Munoz, Nottingham
25: M. Baez, Sierra
24: G. Cabrera, Hiura
23: Luzardo
22: Taveras

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against different opponents. The extra players on this year's edition are somewhat helpful, but usage restrictions probably limits them. In addition to the platoons listed above, there are partial seasons for Austin Hays (1-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+22) and Oscar Mercado (mumble, 33 SSN for 8 SBA), and an excellent pinch hitter in Yairo Munoz (5 0s, 13 hits, 0 walks, L-5 R+2). Benintendi is a no show and Brock Holt, claimed off waivers, is here to drive the team bus.

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4th Maybe. We think so. They could win 60; they could win 80. We think the likely yield is somewhere in between – say 72 wins, which could get second place in the Williams, depending on what others do. What we *don't* expect is the notion floated in the Warrenton article: using some of next year's draft for a big push to get to a Wild Card spot this year. There's some talent here but not really enough to get far enough to make it worthwhile.

There's also the age factor. Looking at the roster inset, there are a fair number of key players – Blackmon, Choo, Jansen, D'Arnaud, Perez – who are over 30. There are others, such as Seager, Candelario, Benintendi (finding himself again, it's hoped), Sierra, Bundy, Castillo – who are in their prime or even younger, and a few true youngsters – Luzardo, Hiura, Taveras, Cabrera – who have bright futures. Tick off another year, and there'll be work to be done.

Zion is in transition now, and a lot depends on 2021 performances. Watch this space.

TQ: **17.0**

breakthrough

There are fringe players on TBL rosters right now who might be important players on rosters in 2021. Some of those names appear in the list below. Some won't make it, but last year's list included Dylan Cease, Bo Bichette, Mitch Keller, Kyle Tucker, Austin Riley, Corbin Burnes, and Trent Grisham: a pretty good list.

1 Shohei Ohtani, P/DH, Melrose.

Injuries have forced this immense two-way talent onto the sidelines, but he's poised to show that he has a lot still to offer, both at the plate and on the mound.

2 Trevor Rogers, P, Grand Cayman.

A strikeout artist with control problems looks like he finally found the key to hitting the strike zone enough to become an effective starter if he can keep it up.

3 Nate Lowe, 1B, Rocky Mountain.

Given a chance at regular playing time, this slugger is showing what an RBI-generating machine he can be. He's got just what the Dragons need.

4 Carson Kelly, C, Brobdingnag.

In general, catchers develop offensively more slowly than players at other positions. This young backstop looks like he's finally catching up with his bat.

5 Huascar Ynoa, P, Columbus.

Young pitchers usually develop over time, but every once in a while, one explodes onto the scene, taking the league by storm. Here is one such example.

6 Jazz Chisholm, 2B, New Westminster.

In addition to a cool name, this middle infielder has an exciting power/speed combination that any team would love to have. But the 'Jacks got him.

7 Dylan Carlson, OF, Columbus.

This young slugger started slow in the majors, but he's come on strong and should be a force to be reckoned with for years to come in the Jets' lineup.

8 Nico Hoerner, IF, Munich.

Young middle infielders who can hit are valuable, but add a splash of speed and patience, and you have the makings of a future lineup mainstay.

9 Luis Patino, P. Brobdingnag.

One of the premier pitching prospects in baseball got a cup of coffee, but suffered in his first taste of MLB hitting. Chances are, he won't struggle for long.

10 Cedric Mullins, OF, Riverwoolf.

This outfielder finally put things together. He's already had plus speed to steal bases, but now he's added muscle and taken his game to the next level.

Honorable mention: Jo Adell, OF, Strong City; Joey Bart, C, Brobdingnag; J.T. Brubaker, Columbus; Willie Calhoun, OF, New Westminster; Zack Collins, C, Melrose; Deivi Garcia, P, Grand Cayman; Jose Garcia, SS, Gotham City; Andres Gimenez, IF, Columbus; Monte Harrison, OF, New Westminster; Spencer Howard, P, Munich; Carter Kieboom, IF, Rocky Mountain; Andrew Knizner, C, Calusa; Ramon Laureano, OF, Northboro; Gavin Lux, 2B, Grand Cayman; Francisco Mejia, C, Kansas; Casey Mize, P, Riverwoolf; Josh Naylor, 1B, Hoboken; Tyler O'Neill, OF, Grand Cayman; Johan Oviedo, P, Melrose; Isaac Paredes, IF, Strong City; Freddy Peralta, Hudson; Brendon Rodgers, IF, Brobdingnag; Josh Rojas, IF/OF, Munich; Nick Senzel, OF, Grand Cayman; Tarik Skubal, P, Knoxville; Pavin Smith, 1B/OF, Rocky Mountain; Leody Taveras, OF, Zion; Anderson Tejeda, IF, Melrose; Luis Torrens, C, Riverwoolf; Daulton Varsho, OF, Grand Cayman; Chad Wallach, C, Rocky Mountain; Logan Webb, P, Munich; Evan White, 1B, Riverwoolf.

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. Six of our top ten last year were top 2021 choices, including four of the top five. Five of our honorable mentions made it to round 1 as well. You be the judge.

1 **Wander Franco, SS, Tampa Bay.**

The consensus Number One Prospect in all baseball, he's been on this list since 2019. He can hit, run, and field. Is this the year he finally surfaces?

2 **Jarred Kelenic, OF, Seattle.**

Once traded for Robinson Cano, this 21-year-old outfielder has 20-20 potential. He may join Kyle Lewis and Mitch Haniger in a potent Mariners OF.

3 **Bobby Witt, Jr., Kansas City.**

Witt hit .289 with three homers in 2021 Spring Training, but was still sent down. He won't be down for long. Kansas City has started him out in AA.

4 **Alex Kiriloff, OF-1B, Minnesota.**

Kiriloff is a solid hitter with pop. He hit .317 over three minor league seasons. After not playing at all in 2020, he's already enjoying MLB at bats.

5 **Andrew Vaughn, OF-1B, Chicago (A).**

Blessed with good plate judgment, Vaughn sailed through the minor leagues to reach the White Sox in the spring. And he'll get a chance in The Show.

6 **Daniel Lynch, P, Kansas City.**

A 97-mile-an-hour fastball is part of a four-pitch toolbox for this young lefty. He's expected to make his MLB debut in 2021, either in the rotation or the bullpen.

7 **Nolan Jones, 3B, Cleveland.**

Power and patience gives this hitter an attractive package. Don't think he's blocked by Jose Ramirez, since he's athletic enough to move to corner outfield spot.

8 **Nate Pearson, P, Toronto.**

Pearson was an honorable mention on last year's list. He's a strikeout power pitcher with triple-digit velocity on his fastball. Control is the last barrier to greatness.

9 **Michael Kopech, P, Chicago (A).**

One of the most anticipated pitching prospects in baseball, Kopech has a repertoire reminiscent of Noah Syndegaard. He has nothing left to prove in the minors.

10 **Adley Rutschman, C, Baltimore.**

If he can make it to the majors from AA in 2021, he'll be the most promising catching prospect in the draft, with plus skills at bat and behind the dish.

Honorable mention: : J.J. Bleday, OF, Florida; Vidal Brujan, 2B, Tampa Bay; Luis Campusano, C, San Diego; Oneil Cruz, IF, Pittsburgh; Lewin Diaz, 1B, Florida; Jeter Downs, IF, Boston; Logan Gilbert, P, Seattle; MacKenzie Gore, P, San Diego; Nolan Gorman, IF, St. Louis; Sam Huff, C, Texas; Jonathan India, IF, Cincinnati; Josh Jung, 3B, Texas; Ha-Seong Kim, IF, San Diego; Alejandro Kirk, C, Toronto; Jackson Kowar, P, Kansas City; Royce Lewis, SS, Minnesota; Matt Manning, P, Detroit; Brandon Marsh, OF, Los Angeles (A); Shane McClanahan, P, Tampa Bay; Brendan McKay, P, Tampa Bay; Sheldon Neuse, IF, Oakland; Cristian Pache, OF, Atlanta; A.J. Puk, P, Oakland; Heliot Ramos, OF, San Francisco; Keibert Ruiz, C, Los Angeles (N); Tyler Stephenson, C, Cincinnati; Spencer Torkelson, 3B, Detroit; Drew Waters, OF, Atlanta.

memorials

by Walter Hunt

2020 was a tough year for baseball all around, but it was a particularly difficult year for fans of a certain age, who had to say goodbye to players they'd seen in action, and who were the great stars of their day. People pass on to the eternal Field of Dreams every year, it's true: but it seemed especially hard in 2020.

The top loss for me was the pitcher I most admired growing up: Bob Gibson, the hero of the great Cardinals teams of the 1960s. His stats are remarkable (251 wins, 2.91 lifetime ERA, 56 shutouts, 3,117 lifetime strikeouts, only 257 homers in 3,884 innings over 17 seasons; Hall of Famer 1981); but they don't tell the whole story. He was a great Black pitcher before there were that many of them. Read Halberstam's *October 1964* to really understand his impact.

Then there's Gibson's teammate, the great Lou Brock, who had a 19-year career, almost all with the Redbirds. He stole 938 bases and had over 3,000 hits, and was enshrined in the Hall of Fame in 1985. He and Maury Wills revolutionized the speed game, paving the way for players like Henderson and Raines.

Joe Morgan left us in 2020 as well. Fans a little younger than me knew him only as a broadcaster, but for a period in the mid 1970s he was the best player on the field: a true five tool guy at bat, on the bases, and fielding a slick second base. He went to the Hall in 1990.

And for fans a little older than me, there are few names on the mound as magical as Whitey Ford. He was a top starter on a dynasty club, the Yankees of the 1950s and 1960s. He was a big game pitcher too: 10 World Series wins including three shutouts, winning two games in 1955, 1960 and 1961. Pitching for a dominant team helped him to a lifetime 236-106 record, but he was truly an outstanding pitcher, and reached the Hall in 1974.

Tom Seaver was one of the most dominant pitchers of his era, leading the Mets into respectability in the late 1960s, and then moving over to the Reds in the late 70s when his original club had fallen out of contention. He was still winning games for the White Sox at 40 and 41 years old, and joined the Red Sox for their 1986 pennant chase. He entered the Hall in 1992.

The ageless knuckleballer Phil Niekro played 24 years in the major leagues, starting 716 games and winning 318 of them. Unlike Ford, Niekro pitched for many bad teams; in his remarkable 1979 season he started 44 times, pitched 342 innings, had 23 complete games, and both won and lost 20 games (he finished 21-20). At age 46 he won 16 games for the Yankees, and went to the Hall in 1997.

There are a number of other easily-recognizable names listed on the page opposite, who were part of our baseball experience, and of course there were many others, too numerous to mention, who will be missed by

fans and family. A few of them were in our league, but most played in earlier eras. A few names you might know are listed below.

- Glenn Beckert
- Frank Bolling
- Horace Clarke
- Damaso Garcia
- Matt Keough
- Mike McCormick
- Lindy McDaniel
- Denis Menke
- Ron Perranoski
- Tony Taylor
- Bob Watson
- Claudell Washington
- Jim Wynn

We will offer a memorial to the sublime Henry Aaron in next year's *Annual*.

TBL as a microcosm of the sport we love gives us the same highs and lows, the same sort of career arc in the form of small cards with numbers on them. Sometimes players are no more than those numbers – *cardboard*, who are here for a season and then gone, sometimes coming back at some other time for some other team. But others play for us for many years, and we imagine them as coaches or managers, still a part of the team even though they don't go in the stats.

Watching such players arrive as rookies, progress to regular play and sometimes stardom, and then fall away or pass into a long career twilight, is part of the bitter-sweet experience of a continuous management league like TBL. It is something that I find endearing, something that a purely stats-based experience like Rotisserie simply doesn't reach. We are better for it, I think.

Game Called.
Across the field of play
  the dusk has come, the hour is late.
The fight is done and lost or won,
  the player files out through the gate.
The tumult dies, the cheer is hushed,
  the stands are bare, the park is still.
But through the night there shines the light,
  home beyond the silent hill.

Game Called.
Where in the golden light
the bugle rolled the reveille.
The shadows creep
  where night falls deep,
  and 'Taps' has called the end of play.
The game is done, the score is in,
  the final cheer and jeer have passed.
But in the night, beyond the fight,
  the player finds his rest at last.

Game Called.
Upon the field of life
  the darkness gathers far and wide,
  the dream is done, the score is spun
  that stands forever in the *Guide*.
Nor victory, nor yet defeat
  is chalked against the player's name.
But down the roll, the final scroll,
  shows only how he played the game.

Grantland Rice, 1956

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 forty-first 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.