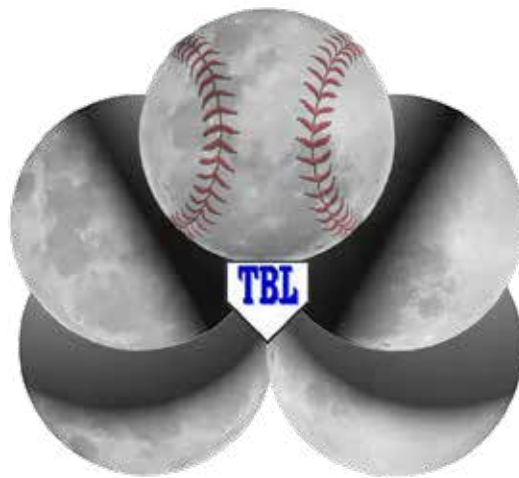# The TBL Baseball Annual

A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

Transitions

2023 Edition

Walter H. Hunt

Robert Jordan

Mark H. Bloom

Darrell Skogen

All 24 Teams Analyzed Using the T.Q. System

The TBL Baseball Annual

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by

Walter H. Hunt
Robert Jordan
Mark H. Bloom
Darrell Skogen

with contributions from TBL's managers

and extra help from Rich Meyer and Ray Murphy

the TBL baseball annual

Welcome to the 2023 *TBL Baseball Annual*. This is the twenty-ninth year of the *Annual* in the book format, and TBL's forty-second year – the fortieth that we have on record. Our editorial team from 2022 is back and excited to bring you lots of new content. We had a great World Series and a terrific, deep draft, though the loss of one of our long time managers (and former *Annual* contributor) gave us some pause.

We're trying out another way of describing the status of a team, and there is much musing on transitions – how we have changed, and are changing, as the world changes around us. We also present an excellent article in which the Sensei crunches some serious numbers about TBL pitching staffs – as the offenses cool off, pitching becomes more and more into view.

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

Enjoy the *Annual* and enjoy the season.

Walter, Robert, Mark, Darrell
May, 2023

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).

table of contents

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 2023; above the middle line is excess, while below means something's missing.
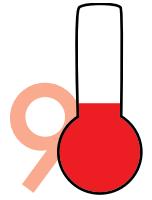
base

it's joe and paul's world, we just live in it

BROBDINGNAG. Four #1s (their own, Riverwoolf, Calusa, Melrose); five #2s; two #3s; four #4s. Needed a new graphic.

MUNICH. Four #1s (their own, Midwest, Northboro, Strong City), four #2s, #3. Needed a new graphic.

haves

HOBOKEN. A #1, two #2s, a #3.
VEGAS. Two #1s including their own and Rocky Mountain's. Two #3s.

KNOXVILLE. Two #1s, #2, #3.
MELROSE. Grand Cayman #1, two #2s, two #3s.

RIVERWOOLF. No #1, two #2s, three #3s.

COLUMBUS. #1, #2, two #3s.

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

balanced

NEW WESTMINSTER, **RYE**.
Their own drafts, with higher #1s.

GOTHAM CITY, **KANSAS**, **HUDSON**.
Their own drafts.

have nots

MARACAIBO. Missing their #2, two #3s.

WHITMAN, **ZION**. Missing their #2.
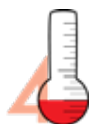
BLUE HILL. Their #1.
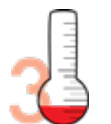
ROCKY MOUNTAIN. Their #2.

GRAND CAYMAN. Their #3.

all in

WARRENTON, **NORTHBORO**. Pick in the 4th.
STRONG CITY. Pick in the 5th.
CALUSA. Pick in the 6th.
MIDWEST. First pick is their #10.

t.q. summary

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL

The Cream of the Crop

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Kansas (Aaron)	8.0	5.5	15.0	3.0	31.5
Maracaibo (Mays)	7.5	5.5	13.0	3.5	29.5
Grand Cayman (Williams)	9.0	5.5	13.0	3.5	29.0
Midwest (Ruth)	7.5	4.0	13.5	3.0	28.0
Northboro (Williams)	9.5	4.0	11.0	2.5	27.0

The Solid Performers

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Columbus (Mantle)	7.0	5.0	12.0	2.0	26.0
Rocky Mountain (Mantle)	8.5	4.0	10.0	3.0	25.5
Calusa (Aaron)	8.5	6.5	8.5	2.0	25.5
Hoboken (Ruth)	9.0	4.0	9.0	3.0	25.0
Gotham City (Mays)	7.5	4.5	10.0	3.0	25.0

The Transitional Teams

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Zion (Williams)	7.0	4.5	9.0	2.5	23.0
Hudson (Mantle)	7.0	4.0	9.0	2.5	22.5
Warrenton (Williams)	8.5	5.0	7.0	2.0	22.0
Whitman (Clemente)	7.5	5.0	7.5	2.0	22.0
Blue Hill (Clemente)	7.5	4.5	7.0	2.5	21.5

The Rebuilders

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
Rye (Mays)	6.5	5.0	5.5	2.5	19.5
Munich (Mantle)	6.5	4.5	6.0	2.5	19.5
Strong City (Clemente)	6.5	5.0	6.5	1.5	19.5
Brobdingnag (Ruth)	8.0	3.5	5.5	1.5	18.5
Vegas (Aaron)	7.5	4.0	4.5	2.0	19.0
Melrose (Aaron)	7.5	4.0	4.5	2.5	18.5
Riverwoolf (Clemente)	7.0	4.0	4.0	2.5	17.5
Knoxville (Ruth)	5.5	4.0	5.0	2.5	17.0
New Westminster (Mays)	5.0	4.5	5.0	1.5	16.0

National	289.0 (24.1 average)	
International	259.0 (21.6 average)	

Division Totals

Williams (NC)	101.0	Mays (IC)	90.0
Aaron (NC)	94.5	Ruth (IC)	88.5
Mantle (NC)	93.5	Clemente (IC)	80.5

manager roll call

Team	Division	Manager	Year
Munich Marauders	Mantle Division	*Paul Montague*	40th year
Hudson Generals	Mantle Division	*Clay Beard*	39th year
Elders of Zion	Williams Division	*Richard Meyer*	39th year
Gotham City Batmen	Mays Division	*Anton Greenwald*	38th year
Knoxville Outlaws	Ruth Division	Pat Martin	37th year
Maracaibo Rumrunners	Mays Division	*Walter Hunt*	37th year
Brobdingnag Barbarians	Ruth Division	*Joe Auletta*	35th year
Hoboken Zephyrs	Ruth Division	Steve Powell	34th year
Grand Cayman Havens	Williams Division	Mark Bloom	33rd year
Melrose Avengers	Aaron Division	Mark Freedman	30th year
Blue Hill Mudslides	Clemente Division	Mark Ludwig	28th year
Whitman River Rats	Clemente Division	Brian Hanley	28th year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Robert Jordan	24th year
Midwest Mongrels	Ruth Division	Darrell Skogen	22nd year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Steve Stein	21st year
Strong City Statesmen	Clemente Division	Eric Sheffler	20th year
Rye Herons	Mays Division	Craig Musselman	19th year
New West Whiskeyjacks	Mays Division	Jim Jeatt	19th year
Columbus Jets	Mantle Division	Vic Vaughn	17th year
Kansas Koyotes	Aaron Division	Bill Schwartz	16th year
Warrenton Giants	Williams Division	Jack Chapman	15th year
Rocky Mountain Dragons	Mantle Division	Dave Jaskot	12th year
Calusa Indians	Aaron Division	Gordon Rodell	9th year
Riverwoolf Sharks	Clemente Division	Daniel Dumont	7th year
Vegas Gamblers	Aaron Division	Rob Skogen*	1st year

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

* We mark the loss this year of **Paul Harrington**, who was one of our managers for 26 years. See his memorial near the end of this book.

Hall of Fame managers in *Bold Italic*.

2023 computer pre-play   by Clay Beard

Kingfish Boudreau is still in the driver's seat for all 24 teams. But I still need to shop for another manager. Kingfish is a running fool.

Here's the setup again. 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.

While the bad managing tends to move teams toward the center, it looks like this may be one of our more competitive seasons. While there are a handful of doormats, there are no super teams. Only Grand Cayman projected to 100 wins and just barely. Only three teams made the playoffs in all ten seasons: Grand Cayman, Hoboken and Whitman. No one won their division every season.

In the International, the Mays has a reprise of their airtight '22 race minus New West, as the other three are virtually even. The Rumrunners get the nod with four more wins than Rye over the 10 seasons. Hoboken edges Midwest out in an excellent two-team race in the Ruth. Whitman looks relatively safe in the Clemente, but Strong City is in the thick of a very tight wild-card race.

In the National, every division is in play. The Havens look pretty safe, but Northboro won it in two seasons. Kansas and Calusa have an airtight race in the Aaron. Rocky Mountain has an edge over Columbus in the Mantle but it's close, And Hudson has a puncher's chance. There should be five teams vying for the wild-cards. I gave Calusa the second asterisk over Columbus, on the basis of a single win over the 10 seasons.

International Conference
TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Clemente	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
WHITMAN	96	66	--	107	88	9	1
STRONG CITY	85	77	11	93	75	1	4.5
BLUE HILL	77	85	19	86	60	0	2
RIVERWOOLF	61	101	35	82	55	0	0

Mays	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
MARACAIBO	87	75	--	93	69	4	2
RYE	87	75	--	98	76	3	1.5
GOTHAM CITY	86	76	1	98	77	3	2
NEW WESTMINSTER	50	112	37	56	45	0	0

Ruth	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
HOBOKEN	95	67	--	106	89	6	4
MIDWEST	93	69	2	101	83	4	3
BROBDINGNAG	68	94	27	81	59	0	0
KNOXVILLE	61	101	34	69	55	0	0

National Conference
TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Aaron	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
KANSAS	88	74	--	100	79	4	3
CALUSA	86	76	2	94	77	5	2
MELROSE	74	88	14	84	65	0	0
VEGAS	74	88	14	90	67	1	1

Mantle	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
ROCKY MOUNTAIN	90	72	--	101	81	6	2
COLUMBUS	86	76	4	100	79	3	1
HUDSON	80	82	10	94	72	1	0
MUNICH	68	94	22	77	61	0	0

Williams	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
GRAND CAYMAN	100	62	--	106	92	8	2
NORTHBORO	90	72	10	97	81	2	6
WARRENTON	82	80	18	88	77	0	3
ZION	80	82	20	84	74	0	0

fractions reflect ties. Also see the note above on the Wild Card in the National Conference.

* 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 2022

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.

Joe Mauer, C   *2005-2019*
Brobdingnag, Strong City

One of the star performers at catcher, Mauer was a hitting machine, recording 2,135 hits and 425 doubles in his career, with a lifetime average of .305. His best season was 2010, when he posted a .362-18-78 record, winning the batting title and ranking among league leaders in OBP and SLG. He also hit .397 in 2007, and hit over .300 during nine seasons.

Paul Molitor, 1B-DH   *2000-2014*
Zion

A consummate hitter, Molitor was a .303 lifetime hitter, with six seasons above .300. His best season was 1988, when he hit .377 with 41 doubles and 28 homers; in 1992 he hit .353, with 66 XBH and a league-leading 236 hits. He was a great contact hitter, striking out only 720 times in 6,399 at bats. His popularity has spiked in the last few years.

for your consideration

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 eleventh year of eligibility. He appeared on 10 ballots in 2022..

Cole Hamels, SP   *2007-2020*
Maracaibo

The ace of the Rumrunner rotation for his entire career, he was usually among the league leaders in starts, complete games and innings. He had an outstanding year in 2009, with an 18-7, 3.11 record. His best season was 2013, when he had a 19-3, 2.83 season with 5 CG. He struck out 2,816 in 2,786 innings, recording 200 ot more strikeouts in 7 seasons.

This is his second year of eligibility. He appeared on 3 ballots in 2022..

C. C. Sabathia, SP   *2002-2020*
Gumsville, New Westminster, Houston/ Detroit, Knoxville, Las Vegas, Kansas

A dominant lefthander, he had 100 CG in his career, leading the league in 2009 with 14. That was his best season; he went 18-10, 2.59, leading the league in innings, strikeouts (309) and ERA. In 2010 he won 20 games. He won 208 in his TBL career, with 3,394 strikeouts in 3,689 innings, often anchoring staffs of teams that were unsuccessful.

This is his second year of eligibility. He appeared on 3 ballots in 2022.

Albert Belle, OF   *1990-2001*
Brobdingnag, Zion

The dominant power hiter of his time, Albert hit 338 home runs and 410 doubles for Zion. His best season was 1995, when he hit .350-45-151; from 1994 to 1997, he drove in more than 150 runs each year. In 1999 he hit 51 homers, 64 doubles, and drove in 171.

This is his thirteenth year of eligibility. He appeared on 3 ballots in 2022..

Will Clark, 1B   *1987-2001*
Gotham City, Antioch/Greater Ohio, Melrose, Rochester

A great hitter and excellent fielder, Clark was a steady regular for most of his career. He was a hit and on-base machine (2,242 hits and 949 walks) with a lifetime .290/.367/483 slash line. His best season was 1990 with Gotham City, when he hit .327-29-115 with a .409 OBP. He recorded 309 homers in his career, topping 20 9 times and 30 twice.

This is his thirteenth year of eligibility. He appeared on 3 ballots in 2022.

Trevor Hoffman, RP   *2002-2020*
Munich, Brobdingnag, Rochester, Las Vegas, Portland

A closer for many teams and setup man for others, he was a lights-out reliever for most of his career, pitching for contenders. He recorded a sub-2.00 ERA five times, and recorded 30 or more saves three times. His best season was in 1998 for Munich, when he had 38 saves, a 1.40 ERA, and 78 Ks and only 13 walks in 71 innings.

This is his second year of eligibility. He appeared on 5 ballots in 2022.

Players with carryover votes: *Andy Pettitte 5, C. C. Sabathia 4, Trevor Hoffman 3, Dennis Eckersley 2, Don Mattingly 2, Roy Halladay 2, Tim Hudson 2, Jamie Moyer 2, Sammy Sosa 2, Juan Gonzalez 2, Jake Peavy 2, Will Clark 2, Cole Hamels 2, Troy Percival 2, thirty-three players with 1.*

transitions
by Walter Hunt

Welcome to the 2023 TBL *Annual*. As always, it is our pleasure to bring you a review of the season just past, and pretentious predictions about the season yet to come.

This year's theme is *transitions* – the insight, not terribly profound, that things change. Most change is gradual: a little less hair on the head, a few more aches and pains; young players are now guys born after 2000 (rather than, say, born in the 1970s or 1980s, as was true when some of us came into TBL). Some are abrupt: three days before the TBL winter meeting we lost one of our long time managers to the transition that no one can prevent. (This subject is dealt with in this year's editorial). We also heard of the death of Glenn Taylor, who has not been with us for a few years.

The biggest takeaway for all of us is that things change, like it or not; but more profoundly, things are the same until they become different. Every year has its share of new stories – rookies, retirements, injuries, emergence and disappearance of talent – that have different names attached but, truly, are largely the same: go look at the *Annual* from twenty years ago and see if you remember the names on your roster and the prize players taken in the draft. Maracaibo, for instance, had Edgardo Alfonso, Rafael Palmeiro and Steve Finley as critical parts of the lineup, and Kevin Appier, John Lackey, and Mariano Rivera on the pitching staff. Orlando Hudson, Lackey, Joe Crede and Rivera had all just arrived by draft or trade, and the team was young and looking forward to great things. (Spoiler alert: there were great things, including a championship a few years later.) Now it's Sal Perez, Starling Marte and Eloy Jimenez, with Dylan Cease, Sandy Alcantara and Alexis Diaz on the mound. We look forward to great things.

Each new season is a new challenge, and while

we age, the new arrivals are young with great expectations and great careers ahead of them. Only the names have changed.

This is not a lament. The shared experience and common love of the game is what brought us together and what keeps us together, despite time and distance. Two-thirds of our managers have been in TBL for twenty years or more, with two more set to join the 20-year club next season. Unfortunately, that also points up the obvious – that the majority of our managers are 60 years old or older, with a fair number in their 70s. This is unsustainable, of course; just as the names of the players change, the names of the managers will unavoidably change as well.

Every winter meeting could be the last one; every season could be a swan song. There is nothing permanent, nothing eternal; it could drive all of us into existential dread. It need not: as with every exquisite play on the field – a great catch, a tailor-made DP, a perfect swing – we can live in the moment, enjoy every pennant race and the mechanical skill of team building. We can watch with admiration as someone plays the draft like a concert violinist.

So prize those moments. Enjoy the company of your fellow managers in this remarkable league. Come to the draft in person if you can. Every contact is important. Your presence and your participation is valuable.

But Where Are We Going With This

Taking the idea of transition to the realm of analysis, it's interesting to consider how teams go through transitions. Looking back twenty years makes one realize how much time has passed, but doesn't really give a sense of the flow and change for a franchise.

We've tried a number of metaphors for this concept, most recently the "rebuilding clock" – which didn't really convey what we wanted to identify; that is, where the franchise was going. Therefore, this year, we've decided to represent transition using the idea of phases of the moon. The advantage of this paradigm is that it shows not only where a team is in its development, but the nature of the transition ahead. The moon phases are described below, and we'll be using them in the team writeups.

TBL is fortunate to be celebrating its 40th documented season; our stats, on which we rely for writeups (and bragging rights) are available due to the yeoman efforts of Steve Stein, whose fame is renowned throughout the APBA world. We still have managers on board from our earliest years, who continue to contribute not only as competitors, but as friends and fellow fans, and the door is slightly ajar for newcomers. This year we welcome Rob Skogen to the fraternity, our first new manager in some time; and as John Hancock says in *1776*, "we hope he will make the best of it." It's a challenging league, but also a welcoming one, and we all feel as if we're a little part of baseball history.

In our imagination, the players are still young, and the grass is always green. So pull up a chair, get those cards in order and keep the dice in reach. Have a great season.

Transitions: Moon Phases and their Meanings

NEW MOON. We don't see too many of these: a team that has reached the end of the line, or hasn't quite gotten to the starting blocks of its rebuild. Contention is far away.

WAXING CRESCENT. A rebuilding team that has some good talent on the roster, or some weight in the next draft, or (often) both. They may be a doormat now, but in a few years, watch out.

HALF MOON. For some teams this is a borderline contender: maybe a 90-win team in a weak division. For others, it's a team that's a year away.

FULL MOON. A juggernaut. It's likely to come apart due to inertia, but that might take a year or two to happen. In the meanwhile, they'll be looking to break some records.

THIRD QUARTER. These teams are frequently still quite good, but the roster's a little old, the next draft is a little thin, and it's unclear whether they'll go all in or bail out.

WANING CRESCENT. Maybe there wasn't enough draft to get into contention, or the club is hanging on for one more shot at the title. There may be a teardown ahead.

tbl apbametrics: 2023 pitching

by Rich Meyer

The tables and text below summarize the state of each TBL team's pitching for the 2023 season. The methodology used is fairly straightforward. Starting pitching stats are calculated based on each team's 162 best available starts (with non-split grade pitchers with less than five starts presumed to expend all of their innings in bullpen use). Each pitcher's contribution to his team's overall grade, control and HR rating, and fatigue is estimated by multiplying each numerical equivalent (a control of +16 equates to a +6, a HR rating of -33 equates to -15, and so on) by that pitcher's number of starts, and then the totals are divided by 162.

For relief pitchers, in response to the continually dropping average fatigue of starting pitchers, I have included the best 450 relief innings (up from 400 a year ago) for each team. Each pitcher's contribution to his team's overall grade, control and HR rating is estimated by multiplying each numerical equivalent by that pitcher's number of relief innings, and then those totals are divided by 450.

It should be noted that in reality, the number of real life starting pitcher innings that each TBL possesses is typically in the 875-950 IP range, suggesting that teams really need to have 500 or 550 relief innings available rather than 450. However, I would say that at least half of TBL teams are barely reaching the 450 IP limit, and would need to sub in Grade D starters to supply extra 'junk' innings. For that reason, the lower limit is in use in the stats presented here – but obviously those teams with deeper pens should have additional advantages over their opponents that will not be directly reflected here.

Starting Pitching

According to the statistical analysis, the average grade of the pitchers who will be making the 3,888 starts of the current season will be 9.5, with a control rating of +12, a HR rating of +11, and an average fatigue of 23.6 batters (likely to expire in most games prior to the end of the sixth inning). 72% of the league's starts will be by RHP, and 28% by lefties. Finally, only 3.2% of the league's starts will be made by pitchers with grades of 18 or more, with another 19.5% made by pitchers with Grades of 13 to 17. Compared to this combined total of 22.7% of Grade 13+ starts, over 31% of this year's starts will fall to pitchers with Grades from 1-7.

The attached table displays how each team's starters grade out. Compared to the grade 9.5 average, the highest rated team (Kansas) recorded an average starter grade of 13.4, with four starters (19-15-15-14, each starting between 19 and 25 times) leading the way. Midwest is second at 12.9, primarily on the strength of its unique 1-2 punch of Grade 19 Tony Gonsolin and Grade 18 Justin Verlander (the only Grade 18+ pair in the league in 2023). At the opposite end of the spectrum is our newest GM and fellow member of the Skogen clan's Vegas Gamblers, whose average starting grade is 5.9 thanks to nearly half a season of starts assigned to Grade 1's.

Although the average starter and control ratings are just slightly positive overall, sixteen of the league's 24 starting staffs have positive control against only six negatives. Three teams (Grand Cayman +24, Whitman +22, and Strong City +21) have control ratings higher than +16, and the worst team control rating is Hoboken at -15. Similarly, 13 TBL rotations recorded positive HR ratings, compared to nine with negative HRs.

2023 TBL STARTING PITCHING

	AVG. GRADE	CTL	HR	AVG. FATIGUE	STARTS BY Gr. 18+	Gr. 13-17	Gr. 8 -12	Gr. 1-7	STARTS BY RHP	LHP
National Conference										
Aaron Division										
CAL	8.4	+14	+13	23.1	0	0	120	42	143	19
KAN	**13.4**	-11	-11	21.5	25	67	60	10	140	22
LV	5.9	+14	-11	25.4	0	33	30	99	108	54
MEL	8.3	+11	+11	24.2	0	28	55	79	86	76
Div. Avg.	9.0	+12	+11	23.6	25	128	265	230	477	171
% of Total					3.9%	19.8%	40.9%	35.5%	73.6%	26.4%
Mantle Division										
COL	**11.4**	**+16**	**+16**	23.1	0	45	76	41	123	39
HUD	9.5	**+15**	+11	22.0	0	31	99	32	148	14
MUN	9.8	-14	-12	24.3	0	0	156	6	143	19
RCK	**11.8**	+11	-11	24.6	0	93	41	28	53	109
Div. Avg.	10.6	+12	+11	23.5	0	169	372	107	467	181
% of Total					0.0%	26.1%	57.4%	16.5%	72.1%	27.9%
Williams Division										
CAY	**11.5**	**+24**	**+23**	22.9	0	89	61	12	104	58
NBO	10.1	+14	"+13	22.6	0	39	67	56	146	16
WAR	9.7	+12	-16	24.4	0	63	52	47	110	52
ZIO	10.5	-11	**+15**	23.9	0	43	87	32	131	31
Div. Avg.	10.5	+14	+13	23.5	0	234	267	147	491	157
% of Total					0.0%	36.1%	41.2%	22.7%	75.8%	24.2%
International Conference										
Clemente Division										
BH	7.5	0	-12	22.9	0	8	102	52	130	32
RIV	6.8	-11	0	24.2	0	0	55	107	151	11
STM	7.5	**+21**	-21	24.3	0	26	61	75	137	25
WHT	10.4	**+22**	+13	23.1	0	46	98	18	116	46
Div. Avg.	8.1	+14	-12	23.6	0	80	316	252	534	114
% of Total					0.0%	12.3%	48.8%	38.9%	82.4%	17.6%
Mays Division										
GC	9.7	+11	-15	22.7	14	0	105	43	85	77
MAR	**12.4**	0	**+26**	24.8	32	32	76	22	98	64
NW	6.9	+12	+11	24.0	0	0	52	110	129	33
RYE	7.7	**+15**	0	24.8	0	0	103	59	145	17
Div. Avg.	9.2	+12	+12	24.1	46	32	336	234	457	191
% of Total					7.1%	4.9%	51.9%	36.1%	70.5%	29.5%
Ruth Division										
BRO	7.4	-11	+13	23.9	0	27	64	71	52	110
HOB	10.7	-15	**+16**	22.5	0	31	111	20	111	51
KNX	6.8	+11	-13	25.8	0	30	21	111	111	51
MID	**12.9**	+14	+13	22.5	52	28	41	41	108	54
Div. Avg.	9.5	0	+12	23.7	52	116	237	243	382	266
% of Total					8.0%	17.9%	36.6%	37.5%	59.0%	41.0%
Lg. Avg.	9.5	+12	+11	23.6	123	759	1793	1213	2808	1080
					3.2%	19.5%	46.1%	31.2%	72.2%	27.8%
BOLD - Top 6 rank in this stat										

Only two teams (Maracaibo at +26, and Grand Cayman at +23) have HR ratings higher than +16, and only one (the Statesmen, at -21) a rate below -16.

Average starter fatigue ratings range from a scarily low 21.5 (Kansas) to a high of 25.8 (Knoxville), but given our rating system a higher than average fatigue rating generally means that your starting staff sucks gradewise, and is getting fatigue adds to help compensate for lower performance levels. The two exceptions to this rule appear to be Maracaibo (average fatigue of 24.8, third highest in the league) and Rocky Mountain (24.6, 5th). The influence of Sandy Alcantara contributes significantly to the Rumrunners' stamina, and Framber Valdez plays the same horse role for the Dragons.

Considering the relative appeal of rotations division by division:

Mantle Division: This division has the highest average grade with a 10.6, just edging the Williams Division's 10.5. Rocky Mountain has the highest division starter grade at 11.8 (4th overall), but its peripherals are mediocre (+11/-11). Columbus has the 6th best TBL grade at 11.4, but its +16 CTL and HR rating go a long way toward equalizing these two starting staffs. Rocky Mountain has three full season starters at 16/16/13 for 93 starts, the most 13+ starts in the league, but will also send Mike Minor to the mound 18 times. Columbus counters with a 16/13/12 big three for 77 starts, but has less drop-off at the bottom end. Munich and Hudson have starting staffs at or just above the league average, contributing the division's top overall rating.

Williams Division: As of draft day, this division held the top average grade with all four teams reporting an average grade over 10.0, but Warrenton has taken a step back with its post-draft trading, shifting its sights toward the future. Grand Cayman now holds a clear

edge with a #5 average grade of 11.5, and a very solid big three of 16-13-13 (89 starts). Zion has the second best average grade at 10.5 (+8 overall), but its top two only make 43 starts between them. Third place Northboro has 39 starts of a pair of 16s, but also has a Grade 4 in its everyday rotation to even things out. Finally, Warrenton added Gerrit Cole but shipped out Corbin Burnes, and now is moving forward with two 5s as rotation regulars. Nonetheless, their overall 9.7 grade is still above league average.

Aaron Division: The third National Conference division has the league's top rotation in the Kansas Koyotes (13.4), and then an extremely wide gulf to the next three teams. Although all four of this team's top starters missed at least a few weeks of last season, they together pitch 92 starts of Grade 14+, backstopped by two additional Grade 12s. The group's peripherals are slightly below average, but that appears of little consequence when their closest competitors are Calusa (average grade 8.4, no starts of 13+) and Melrose (average grade 8.3, with only two way threat Shohei Ohtani to anchor the rotation). Meanwhile, Vegas (currently off to a well above .500 start) cannot sustain that pace for the season, given 75 starts by Grade 1s and another 24 by a Grade 6, and nowhere near enough bullpen to cover up for that.

Ruth Division: The jewel of the International Conference rotation-wise, the Ruth has the #2 rotation in Midwest, and a top ten starting staff in Hoboken (10.7), but winds up at the league average due to the division's other two members, Brobdingnag (7.4) and Knoxville (6.8). The wide gap suggests that one team has a fairly clear route to the division crown, the other a strong wild card edge, and two others looking for future gems.

Mays Division: Second verse, same as the first. One very strong performer (Maracaibo

at 12.4), one team with an average rotation (Gotham City, 9.7 with modest peripherals), and two teams not really trying for the present (Rye at 7.7, New Westminster at 6.9). Again, one club should be able to start selling postseason ducats early, another should have reasonable aspirations for post season play, and two others will be playing for draft position in 2024.

Clemente Division: The most starting pitching challenged division in TBL, with an overall average grade of only 8.1. Only Whitman has an above average rotation grade of 10.4, and above average peripherals which add a bit of extra value. It's a solid 'playoff contender' type of rotation, which due to its location in a division with three other weak rotations (averaging 7.5, 7.5, and 6.8) looks like a regular season giant. The only vaguely positive signs for a possible pennant race are that both Blue Hill and Strong City have bullpens that are a significant upgrade over their rotations, and may be able to close some of this perceived pitching gap.

Relief Pitching

According to the statistical analysis displayed in the attached table, the average grade of the TBL pitchers performing bullpen duty in 2023, rounds out to 13.4, or just about four points higher than the average starting grade. Relievers as a whole differ from starting pitchers, who have both control and HR ratings just above the league average. Relievers, on the other hand, are generically wild, but stingy with the longball.

11 of the 24 TBL relief staffs have net positive control – but none of them could muster a team average higher than +15. Conversely, the 13 relief staffs with negative control recorded team averages as low as -36, with four teams (Northboro, Kansas, Melrose, and Riverwoolf) managing teamwide averages of -31 or more. Consequently, the overall average control rating for relievers wound up at -13.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, 23 of 24 teams reported positive average reliever HR ratings, with the worst rating falling to New Westminster at 0. The highest teamwide HR rating, +43, went to Kansas, followed closely by Northboro (+35), Grand Cayman (+34), Strong City (+33), and Midwest (+31). The leaguewide HR rating for all relievers in 2023 was +23.

One statistic unique to the reliever chart is the grade differential between the average relief inning and the average starter inning. The average difference was just under 4.0 grade points. Those teams with the highest starter-reliever spread will gain the most advantage when these pitchers enter the game. Conversely, the lower this differential, the more likely it is that the back end of a team's staff will not be able to properly close out what its starters have begun. The largest starter relief spread in TBL in 2023 (6.9) is held by the Statesmen, whose 14.4 average bullpen is paired with a weak 7.5 point average rotation inning. This advantage is heightened in this case by the fact that the Statesmen are carrying another 100+ innings of relief that did not factor into the team's 450 best relief innings, but are still superior to the average starter. Northboro also has a 6.9 point reliever grade edge, and a similar surplus over the 450 inning minimum. Its one limiting factor is a team-wide reliever control issue (-36 average), which will likely come back to bite them on certain days.

Other teams with large relief to starter advantages are Gotham City (+5.8), Blue Hill (+5.7), Maracaibo (+5.5), and Calusa (+5.3). At the other end of the scale, Munich's bullpen has an average grade -1.3 points lower than its starting staff, meaning that on many days it will be of no help at all in securing a win from a late and close game. Other teams with comparatively weak bullpens include Kansas (+1.6 point relief differential) Warrenton (+1.2 differential), and to a lesser extent Whitman (+2.7 relief differential) and Brobdingnag (+2.9 differential).

2023 TBL RELIEF PITCHING

	AVG.			RELIEF INNINGS				Relief Gr,
	GRADE	CTL	HR	Gr. 18+	Gr. 13-17	Gr. 8 -12	Gr. 1-7	Advantage
National Conference								
Aaron Division								
CAL	13.7	-12	+21	61	116	273	0	**5.3**
KAN	15.0	-32	**+43**	**116**	174	100	0	1.6
LV	11.1	-13	+15	0	113	286	51	5.2
MEL	10.6	-32	+22	0	164	221	65	2.3
Div. Avg.	12.6	-22	+24	177	567	880	116	3.6
% of Total				9.8%	31.5%	48.9%	6.4%	
Mantle Division								
COL	**15.7**	+12	+16	87	255	108	0	4.3
HUD	13.7	-15	+23	44	223	183	0	4.2
MUN	8.5	-16	+12	0	58	186	206	-1.3
RCK	**15.9**	+11	+16	70	343	37	0	4.1
Div. Avg.	13.5	-12	+16	201	879	514	206	2.8
% of Total				11.2%	48.8%	28.6%	11.4%	
Williams Division								
CAY	**15.9**	+12	**+34**	88	290	72	0	4.4
NBO	**17.0**	-25	**+35**	**134**	300	16	0	6.9
WAR	10.9	-26	+13	55	30	271	94	1.2
ZIO	14.1	-11	_25	**89**	186	175	0	3.6
Div. Avg.	14.5	+14	+13	366	806	534	94	4.0
% of Total				20.3%	44.8%	29.7%	5.2%	
International Conference								
Clemente Division								
BH	13.2	-14	+25	66	205	179	0	**5.7**
RIV	11.2	-31	+15	0	98	342	10	4.4
STM	14.4	+12	**+33**	73	177	200	0	**6.9**
WHT	13.1	+11	+21	87	127	236	0	2.7
Div. Avg.	13.0	-14	+24	226	607	957	10	4.9
% of Total				12.6%	33.7%	53.2%	0.6%	
Mays Division								
GC	15.5	+11	+21	65	221	164	0	**5.8**
MAR	**17.9**	-24	+24	**143**	281	26	0	**5.5**
NW	10.8	**+15**	0	0	176	274	0	3.9
RYE	10.8	**+13**	+13	0	221	229	0	3.1
Div. Avg.	13.8	0	+15	208	899	693	0	4.6
% of Total				11.6%	49.9%	38.5%	0.0%	
Ruth Division								
BRO	10.3	**+15**	+25	0	176	179	95	2.9
HOB	15.1	-15	+23	**124**	108	179	39	4.4
KNX	11.4	+11	+16	0	246	108	96	4.6
MID	**16.1**	**+15**	**+31**	**120**	274	56	0	3.2
Div. Avg.	13.2	+12	+24	244	804	522	230	3.8
% of Total				13.6%	44.7%	29.0%	12.8%	
Lg. Avg.	13.4	-13	+23	1422	4562	4100	656	4.0
				13.2%	42.2%	38.0%	6.1%	
BOLD - Top 6 rank in this stat								

The top star bullpens, from one to ten –

1. Maracaibo
Average Grade 17.9, C-24 HR+24
Three co-closers (Alexis Diaz, Yency Almonte, and Ron Marinaccio) for 143 innings (2nd overall), and 424 total innings Grade 13 or higher (1st overall). The mega-grades of all three closers (27-27-24) increases the futility inflicted on opposing batters.

2. Northboro
Average Grade 17.0, C-36 HR+35.
Again, three co-closers (Bard, Karinchak, and Ferguson) provide 134 innings of Grade 18+ relief. Would it be even better if the top eight members of this bullpen did not have negative control? *Why, yes it would.* Of course, those bad walk numbers contribute to that high average relief grade, too. And on the other end, that HR+35 is going to keep a lot of milkshakes (and balls) in the yard.

3. Midwest
Average grade 16.1, C+15 HR+31.
Best control of any relief staff in TBL, solid HR+31 overall. 'Only' a 24-19-17 top end, but those three guys have essentially neutral control and HR ratings from +42 to +45.

4. Grand Cayman
Average grade 15.9, C+12 HR+34.
Very similar makeup to the Midwest relief staff, with only concern at the very top end where one of two 18+ arms has C-62. The 17-17-16 trio behind the closers may wind up with a lot of the team's saves.

5. Rocky Mountain
Average grade 15.9, C+11 HR+16.
Single closer (Bass, Grade 19 C+14 HR+23), followed by solid and very deep 17-17-16-15-15-14 setup crew. 413 innings in all over Grade 13.

6. Columbus
Average grade 15.6, C+12 HR+16.
Adam (25, C+21 HR+23) and Feyereisen (24 for 24 innings) close. Only two guys at next level down (68 innings combined at Grade 16-17), but they are followed by another four guys Grade 13-14.

7. Gotham City
Average grade 15.5, C+11 HR+21.
Helsley (65 innings of Grade 29, C+0 HR+14) elevates the value of this bullpen, which is otherwise anchored by several Grade 13-15s.

8. Hoboken
Average grade 15.1, C-15 HR+23.
Gotham City times two, with two mighty top end guys (Phillips 63 IP, Grade 29 C+23 HR+51; Devin Williams 61 IP, Grade 24 C-53 HR+52), but a limited 7th and 8th inning setup crew.

9. Kansas
Average grade 15.0, C-32 HR+43.
Three Grade 18-19 closers with 176 innings between them. Only Swanson has both good C and HR, but the top five bullpen men all steal a ton of longballs.

10. Strong City
Average grade 14.4 C+12 HR+33.
Clase is a great closer, set-up crew has only 177 additional innings, but very deep middle-man group will rescue the bad starters in a lot of games. Well below 1-9 above, but still a big salve for the mediocre rotation.

Also above league average:
  Zion 14.1 -11 +25;
  Calusa 13.7 -12 +21;
  Hudson 13.7 -15 +23.
The best of the rest.

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 2023.

Blue Hill Mudslides:	Felix Bautista, P	*Columbus Jets:*	Spencer Strider, P
Brobdingnag Barbarians:	Luis Campusano, C	*Gotham City Batmen:*	Hunter Greene, P
Calusa Indians:	Carlos Correa, SS	*Grand Cayman Havens:*	Matt Olson, 1B

Hoboken Zephyrs:	William Contreras, C	*Knoxville Blue Thunder:*	Seby Zavala, C
Hudson Generals:	Riley Greene, OF	*Las Vegas Gamblers:*	Trea Turner, IF
Kansas Koyotes:	Jeremy Pena, SS	*Maracaibo Rumrunners:*	Alexis Diaz, P

Melrose Avengers:	Vaughn Grissom, IF	*New West. Whiskeyjacks:*	Oneil Cruz, IF
Midwest Mongrels:	Julio Rodriguez, OF	*Northboro Phoenix:*	Jose Altuve, 2B
Munich Marauders:	Corbin Carroll, OF	*Riverwoolf Sharks:*	Michael Harris, OF

Rocky Mountain Dragons:	Framber Valdez, P	*Warrenton Giants:*	Adley Rutschman, C
Rye Herons:	C. J. Abrams, SS	*Whitman River Rats:*	Alex Verdugo, OF
Strong City Statesmen:	Reynaldo Lopez, P	*Elders of Zion:*	Gunnar Henderson, 3B

commissioner's report

by Ray Murphy

In this annual message, I like to strike a "rah rah, this league is so special" kind of tone, but it doesn't feel right this year. Don't get me wrong, what we have here remains plenty special, but this year the "rah rah" attitude seems kind of dissonant.

That is, of course, because we lost two longtime friends earlier this year. Paul Harrington and Glenn Taylor combined for more than 40 years of TBL play. They were both tough competitors, with distinctive styles of team-building. They were fixtures at the annual draft meetings, and of course they were first and foremost our friends. We miss them both.

Turning the page, though, we are very happy to welcome Rob Skogen into our ranks as the new steward of the Vegas franchise. Because of all things, what this league needed was clearly a doubling of our Skogen quotient! (Although it remains to be seen if Rob shares his uncle's love of bad puns.)

Rob is already proving to be a strong addition, and I took particular note of his very first decision as a league member: deciding to not relocate the franchise from its longtime Las Vegas home. That was all class, and raised my expectations even higher for Rob's TBL tenure.

Speaking of that ownership transition, the timing of the transfer allowed me to participate in the annual draft for the first time since I gave up the Portland franchise (amazingly, almost 10 years ago). I enjoyed that experience immensely, and think I did a decent enough job: I think I handed Rob some good pieces for his future, and someone shared that they thought the outcome was representative of what Paul would have done on draft day; feedback I definitely appreciated.

This was also a good "scratch the itch" moment for me, as I will admit to a growing desire to get back into the league as a full participant, rather than my current non-playing commissioner role. As my kids get older, the concept of "my own time" to pursue hobbies like TBL is becoming less theoretical. With Rob having been in our backup manager queue for a long time, I was very happy to offer him the Vegas franchise.

But, with our backup manager queue currently empty, I'm not ruling out nominating myself for the next opening in the league. But please, let's find a different reason for openings than league members passing away!

Before I go, I would be remiss if I didn't congratulate Joe and Clay on there titanic World Series battle that resolved the 2022 season. That was one of the great showdowns in league history, between two of our longest-tenured and most successful players. It doesn't get much better than that.

Looking ahead, while I can't promise that I'm going to be able to get to Phoenix for the 2024 draft, I fully endorse that trip: Building draft weekend around spring training games might be the only possible way to make the best weekend of the year even better.

Good luck to all in 2023. Play hard, stay healthy, and have fun!

– Commish

Same Old, Just Less Of It

We called the division for Strong City last year, but the **Whitman River Rats** continued to do what they so often do, and we think *Brian Hanley* will do it again. They're not as good as in the past, but that's true all over and especially here in the Clemente. But the Rats still have that Kershaw kid, and that Goldy kid. The question is how much longer this edition of the team can last before a rebuild is necessary.

Though the weight of history is in Whitman's favor, it's by no means a done deal. We think that the **Blue Hill Mudslides** have a shot at this thing as well. Their offense is more solid, but their pitching is a step behind. But *Mark Ludwig* is taking the idea seriously and has hired a top notch closer to keep them in games.

Is there enough to ward off Whitman and the still highly competitive boys from Strong City? It should be a good race all summer.

Speaking of the **Strong City Statesmen**: *Eric Sheffler* has decided to put some more chips on the table, giving up on the draft for this year and next year to paste a team together. There's some good stuff on the field but there is great fragility as well. If they're on a roll, they have a chance to win this pennant or to sneak into the playoffs – but if they're mired in the middle, there may be no joy in Mudville, er, Strong City.

Daniel Dumont's **Riverwoolf Sharks** are going to lose a fair number of games this year as well; we keep saying that, but we are in earnest in believing that it won't be true much longer. Mr. Dumont has a great fondness for making trades; we think it might happen a little too often. When the trading stops, they might be quite good.

Clemente Division

Paul Goldschmidt,
Whitman

1. Whitman	**22.0**
2. Blue Hill	**21.5**
3. Strong City	**19.5**
4. Riverwoolf	**17.5**

2022 whitman RIVER RATS in review

You can't complain about much.

by Robert Jordan

2022 in Review
Final Record: 108-54 (1st, Clemente)

Brian Hanley's Whitman River Rats spent the entire 2022 season frustrating the Strong City Statesmen - the latest in a long series of threats to their decade long Clemente Division dominance. First, Mr. Hanley won the division by 5 games, winning 108 along the way. The Statesmen won 103, and crushed Knoxville 4 games to 1 to set up a mano-a-mano series in the second round of the playoffs. It went seven games with both excellent clubs trading wins and clutch performances through the first six. In the third inning of Game 7, Grade 14* Luis Cessa came in to face the fearsome Yuli Gurriel. Gurriel rolled a '7' on 55 – which was stolen by Cessa. The Statemen bats went dead, and Whitman won the series on a combined shutout 3-0.

Kershaw: That guy

That was the high point. Whitman faced their bête noire – the Brobdingnag Barbarians in the International Conference championship and came up short against the eventual TBL Champions.

What went right?

The Whitman River Rats' pitching staff was spectacular last season, with team ERA of 3.04, good for 3rd in TBL. The starters led the way with 55 wins from Blake Snell, Adam Wainwright, Lance Lynn and Clayton Kershaw. Swingman Drew Rasmussen went 9-1, 1.55, allowing a miserly 47 hits in 104 innings.

Kendall Graveman was amazing – 4-0, 46 saves in 56 appearances. Graveman led TBL in saves, and allowed only 21 hits in 56 innings. On the hitting side Paul Goldschmidt hit 30 homers and Avisail Garcia hit 32 to lead the team. Tim Anderson hit .316 – fourth in the league and scored 90 runs. Shortstop Nicky Lopez scored 100.

Whitman's fielders made a big contribution to their fine year. The Rats committed only 74 errors all year – fewest in TBL.

What went wrong?

You can't complain about much when you win 108 and take a run at the Conference Championship. The offense was rather ordinary for a team that won so many games, scoring 766 runs. Mostly, the downside came against the Brobdingnag juggernaut. After winning the regular season series against the Barbarians 5 games to 4, Whitman got flattened 4 games to 1.

3 Things

1. No mortgaging the future.
Whitman is a club that has traditionally built through the draft. #1s from 2009, 2012, 2017, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2023 are all right here. That steady infusion of youth might explai why they've been so good for so long.

2. Time marches backwards. 20 players on this club are 30+. They include stalwarts like Kershaw (35) and the ageless wonder Paul Goldschmidt (35). MJ Melendez (age 24) and Alex Verdugo (age 26) have arrived to replace aging parts.

3. Timing is Everything. Whitman is due for a down year this year. But that coincides with their two most determined rivals – Blue Hill and Strong City – having down years as well. They are, once again, favored to win the Clemente.

whitman RIVER RATS

Brian Hanley (28th year)

Mr. Hanley has seen off a lot of challengers.

The Whitman River Rats have been the most consistently successful team in TBL for the last 13 years. In 2009, they drafted a young lefthanded Dodgers starter named Clayton Kershaw. That was a pretty good pick. Clayton has won 234 games for Whitman. In 2014, he went 28-2 with a 1.81 ERA – one of the best seasons a starter has ever had in our league.

With Kershaw as the cornerstone of the rotation, Whitman has been on an astonishing roll. They won the 2019 TBL Championship. They have won the Clemente division 10 times in 13 years. They have won over 100 games 9 times, including 108 wins last year. No other team has come close to this level of consistency.

And this year, the *Annual* is picking them again to win their division.

Pitching: 7.5
This should work.

ROTATION. It starts with that man again - Clayton Kershaw (Grade 15 C+33 HR+25, 22 starts, 22 Fatigue). Only two thirds of a season for the future Hall of Famer, but he has help. Blake Snell (Grade 13 C-24 HR+24, 24 starts) and Drew Rasmussen (Grade 12 C+26 HR+22, 28 starts) are outstanding. 74 excellent starts in season and 6 starts in the play-offs – it doesn't get too much better than this.
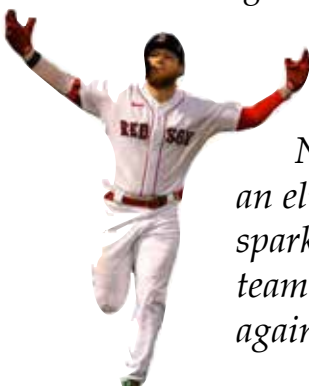
SNT: Alex Verdugo.

Nice hitting card, and an elite defender. He brings a spark of youth to this aging team. He will play every day against all sorts of pitching.

Third Quarter. Despite the addition of players such as Mountcastle and Verdugo, this team is aging and will have to regroup sometime. Meanwhile they'll likely just keep on winning.

Turnover Rate: 25%

Arrived: Alex Call, Harold Castro, Ian Gibaut, Jimmy Herget, Seth Martinez, M.J. Melendez, Matt Strahm, Robert Suarez, Alex Verdugo.

Departed: Jason Castro, Tyler Clippard, Cam Gallagher, Darwinzon Hernandez, Chad Kuhl, Nicky Lopez, Chris Owings, Max Schrock, Drew Steckenrider.

Snell: Outstanding

The rest of the rotation is very solid as well. Adam Wainwright (Grade 8 C+16 HR+25, 32 starts) is still effective at age 40. Jose Urquidy (Grade 9 C+25 HR-25, 28 starts) and Lance Lynn (Grade 7 C+41 HR+21, 21 starts) are workhorses at the back of the rotation. Luis Cessa (Grade 8/7* HR-25, 10 starts, 37 IP) eats up the last 7 starts.

The staff is even better than that, because the lesser starters will be on a short leash thanks to the overstuffed bullpen. This is once again a team strength.

BULLPEN. We have two closers. Robert Suarez (Grade 20* C-42 HR+24, 48 IP)

and Seth Martinez (Grade 18* HR+26, 39 IP) will handle the 9th inning duties, with Martinez getting the nod most of the year. There are 87 innings of intimidation here.

Suarez and Peripherals Master Jimmy Herget (Grade 15* C+33 HR+35, 69 IP) are the regular setup men. Matt Strahm (Grade 11* C-13 HR+13, 45 IP) gets also some seventh and eighth inning work as a lefty killer.

In the middle innings, Liam Hendriks (Grade 14* C+21, 58 IP) and Griffin Jax (Grade 12* C+23 HR+15, 72 IP) do the heavy lifting when it's close. That's 331 innings of high-quality relief. These guys will help the start-ers.

The rest of the pen has Kendall Graveman (Grade 9*, C-14 HR+32, 65 IP), Jacob Diekman (Grade 8* C-62 HR-14, 58 IP), Emilio Pagan (Grade 8*) and Jordan Weems (Grade 7*). Luis Cessa also helps out here. That's another 226 innings.

All told, there are 590 relief innings that will be used aggressively to maximize the effective-ness of the staff. There are better bullpens in the league, but this should work.

Offense: 7.5
Good and solid.

Whitman has one and only one monster in their lineup this season. Paul Goldschmidt (1-5-5-6, 11 hits, 4 walks, L+14 R-5) con-tinues to deliver beautiful cards year after year. Goldy will be 36 in September, but with a .317/.404/.578 slash line in St. Louis last year, he seems to have plenty left in the tank.

Goldschmidt: Monster

There are some nice pieces around Goldschmidt. Jose Ramirez (1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-8 R+1) might be the best third baseman in the American League. Tim Anderson (2 0s, 12 hits, 1 walk, L+10, 35 SSN for 13 attempts, 79 games) has emerged as one of the most dynamic middle infielders in the majors. He only has half a season and he doesn't walk, but he does everything else – and he crushes lefties. That's important on this team because overall, the Rats have some issues with lefthanded pitching.

Ramirez: Best in AL?

Ryan Mountcastle (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks) is a great young hitter just starting to hit his stride at the age of 26. Outfielder Alex Verdugo (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks) and Kolten Wong (1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L-16 R+2) lengthen the lineups against righties. Wong leads off in most of the righthanded lineups. 25 year old M.J. Melendez (1-4-6, 8 hits, 4 walks) is the regular catcher because Yadier Molina (2 0s, 8 hits) is cashing Social Security checks. Two other regulars – Tyler Naquin (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-10) and the very versatile Harold Castro (3 0s, 11 hits) make appearances against all sort of pitching.

The hitters are a good, solid, productive unit. They will not blow teams away but the lineup is deep and Brian Hanley can cleverly use platoons to hide some of the more savage lefty shifts. This last draft added some much-needed youth to the lineup. They will need to run because there is not an overabundance of power here. This offense will need good management but they should be close to the best in the division.

Defense: 5.0
Very solid.

Whitman is really good defensively. Paul Goldschmidt (1B5) and Jose Ramirez (3B5) are almost as good with gloves as they are with

bats. Kolten Wong (2B8) is rock solid, and Miguel Rojas (SS9) – who plays half the time – will handle everything that rolls his way. Tim Anderson (SS8) is the guy

Rojas: Handles everything

Whitman would play if he had the choice, but mainly because of his bat. Yadier Molina (C9 Th+3) is spectacular defensively, but the everyday catcher is rookie M.J. Melendez (C7 Th+1).

The outfielders are as good as you're going to see. Aristedes Aquino (OF3, 39 arm) is not Roberto Clemente out there, but he's pretty close. That arm will snuff out rallies against teams stupid enough to run on him. Avisail Garcia (OF2, 36 arm) also has a terrific arm. Unfortunately, both of those players are benchies.

The guys that actually play are Alex Verdugo (OF3, 35 arm), super utility dude Harold Castro (1B3, 2B7, SS7, 3B3, OF2, 32 arm), and Tyler Naquin (OF2, 36 arm). Tragically, Alex Call (OF2, 29 arm) and Jesse Winker (OF1, 30 arm) also run around out there. They'll throttle the defense up and down, depending on the game situation. This remains one of the best defensive teams in TBL.

Bench: 2.0
Almost everyone plays.

Almost everyone starts in one lineup or another. If you look at Whitman's instructions, 13 players are listed as starters. Aristedes Aquino (1-5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks, 80 games) will play a lot of defense, subbing in for Alex Call (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, R+3, 47 games) and Jesse Winker (2 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks, L+2). Winker will be brought in to torture control-challenged late relievers.

Yadier Molina (C9, Th+3) is also a defensive replacement who will be on the field in

close and late situations. (A Closer Catcher, as described in the instructions.)
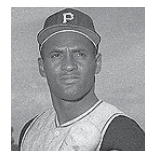
There's no big hitting toy, but everyone plays on this team except Riley Adams (1-6, 7 hits, 3 walks).

1st First in the Clemente. Just barely: Blue Hill and the Statesmen are right behind them in the TQ ratings. But Mr. Hanley has seen off a lot of challengers in the last decade. The call here is that he will do it once again in 2023.

TQ: **22.0**

2022 blue hill MUDSLIDES in review

Their day will come.

2022 in Review
Final Record: 82-80 (3rd, Clemente)

For a long time, the Blue Hill story was somewhat fraught, a tale of missed opportunities and diminished expectations. But this hasn't been the case lately: the biggest problem for the franchise has been its location – in a division where there were too many other contenders. Before 2022, they'd won 97, 91, 98 and 100 games, and made playoff appearances – including conference championship turns in 2018 and 2020. This has been a good team for a while, and has gone to the next level – just not to the *next* next level. Last season's performance is a bit of a letdown from recent ones, but shouldn't overshadow the facts on the ground: this is a good team, with some excellent talent and good management. Their day will come.

Harper: High point

What went right?

82-80 suggests a combination of high and low points. A terrific high point was the performance of Bryce Harper. He had a career year (.292/.364/.627, 45 homers, 96 extra-base hits). He received 7 intentional walks, which is Barry Bonds territory these days. Trevor Story hit 31 homers and drove in 110, while Rafael Devers hit 33 and drove in 93. Blue Hill got in the way of a lot of pitches (108, leading the league); three players got plunked 15 or more times.

Aroldis Chapman saved 34 games, striking out 68 in 55 innings; James Kaprelian went 8-5, Lance McCullers 11-6, and the bullpen worked hard.

What went wrong?

The 241 team homers came with 1,383 strikeouts. Six players struck out more than 100 times, including the extremely futile Bobby Bradley (263 at bats, 104 strikeouts). Harper went down 158 times to lead the team. The Mudslides hit .236 as a team.

11 wins was the team lead. Chapman saved 34 but had a 3.11 ERA and walked 38 in his 55 innings. The pitching staff had many ineffective performers and recorded a team WHIP of 1.35.

3 Things

1. Harper. He's been the dominant guy since he joined the team 10 years ago. The injury relegates him, at least this year, to the DH spot, but the lineup is still built around him. For long term success, he needs to have a healthy season.

2. Pitching is critical. Felix Bautista is a welcome change – a lights out closer at the end of games. But they need more help in the rotation too. The club needs to draft, or trade for, a starter who has staying power.

3. You gotta believe. Mr. Ludwig has made a lot of great moves over the years, and there's no reason to expect any change. There's a championship coming, when things break right.

blue hill MUDSLIDES

Mark Ludwig (28th year)

They have a shot.

Mark Ludwig's Blue Hill Mudslides recorded their fifth consecutive winning season in 2022 – an 82-80 mark, good for third place in the Clemente Division. That's exactly where the *Annual* expected them to finish, although Mr. Ludwig played better than expectations with the winning mark.

This year, getting over .500 may be a little more challenging. There are two very strong teams in the division – Whitman and Strong City. Riverwoolf – dare we say this? – is improving. And though the offense here is very good, they will be missing Bryce Harper - their centerpiece - for three months.

Pitching: 7.0
Two-thirds competitive.

ROTATION. The instructions count 104 starts of Grade 9 or better. What is not enumerated is that of those 104 starts, 85 are, in fact, Grade 9.

The best grade on the staff belongs to Lance McCullers (Grade 16 C-44 HR+24, 8 starts). Austin Voth (Grade 11 C+14, 17 starts) will pitch capably for about 3 months.

McCullers: Best grade

Then comes the Grade 9 parade. Dean Kremer (Grade 9 C+16 HR+23, 21 starts) has the best peripherals in this group. James Kaprelian (Grade 9 C-33, 26 starts) will be up most of the year and has a nice 24 fatigue. (That's a good number these days.) Beau Brieske (Grade 9 HR-24, 15 starts) and Tyler Mahle (Grade 9 C-14 HR-13, 23 starts) slot in here as well. After the cluster of 9s, Will

SNT: Felix Bautista.

A bit of a late bloomer, he's an intimidating figure at 6'8", 285. He's been blowing batters away and should rack up plenty of saves.
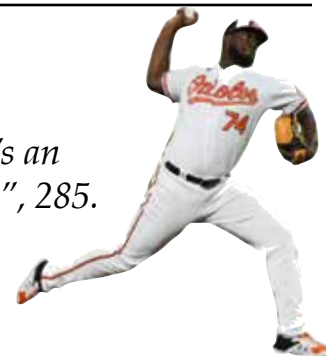
Turnover Rate: 31%

Arrived: Felix Bautista, Beau Brieske, Jonathan Davis, Trevor Gott, Joey Krehbiel, Steven Kwan, D.J. Lemahieu, Justin Turner, Andrew Velazquez, Will Vest, Connor Wong.

Departed: Bobby Bradley, Daz Cameron, Aroldis Chapman, Alex Dickerson, Kelvin Gutierrez, Kwang Hyun Kim, Mike Mayers, Jace Peterson, Manuel Pina, Blake Taylor, Eli White.

Vest (Grade 8* HR+22, 63 IP, 2 starts) take his two turns on the hill. That gives Blue Hill 112 starts of folks that steal hits without help. The other 50 starts come from the likes of Marco Gonzales (Grade 6 C+22 HR-22, 32 starts), Jose Urena (Grade 4 C-31 HR+14, 15 starts), and "The Machine" - Jose Berrios (Grade 2 C+23 HR-22, 27 fatigue, 3 starts). This machine burns a bit of oil and spits nuts and bolts all over the infield, but we digress.

For two thirds of the season, Blue Hill will complete. It's not overwhelming, but they do have bullpen help.

Half Moon. There's a good concentration of talent but it simply hasn't come together yet. Injuries are a part of it, but in order to contend in an increasingly competitive Clemente, they'll have to make a move.

This bullpen needed a closer and Mr. Ludwig drafted a beast in the second round of the 2023 draft - Felix Bautista (Grade 20* C-15, 66 IP). He throws in the high 90s consistently, and was lights-out all year for the Orioles. He's not a kid – he turns 28 in June – but he plugs a hole in this pitching staff very nicely.

Blue Hill has three setup men to bridge to the closer. Jorge Lopez (Grade 15* C-16 HR+41, 71 IP) will pitch in leveraged situations all year. Gregory Soto (Grade 13* C-56 HR+52, 60 IP) and Dillon Tate (Grade 13* C+32 HR+24, 74 IP) will also get the call in the seventh and eighth innings. That's 200 innings exactly of guys who steal 8s.

There are four middle relievers. Trevor Gott (Grade 11* C+21 HR-26, 46 IP) and Hector Neris (Grade 11* C+21 HR+44, 65 IP) will be very important for the Mudslides this year as they try to keep Blue Hill in the game and hand the ball to the better grades late. Joey Krehbiel (Grade 9* C+14 HR-21, 58 IP) and Yohan Ramirez (Grade 9 C-45 HR+16, 37 IP) are here as well. That's 206 innings in the middle, and 406 innings of relievers that steal hits. Careful handling is required. There are some mopup innings also.

Blue Hill has some challenges in the pitching staff this year, and they are clearly a few steps behind Whitman here.

Offense: 7.5
Lineup goes seven deep.

For the last few years, this has been the Bryce and Yelich show, but things have changed. Bryce Harper (1-5-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, 28 SSN for 15 attempts, R+1) played last year with a sore elbow, and is limited to 99 games this season. The power is still there, and it's still a good card, but he's off his highs from a year ago. Christian Yelich (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, 18 speed, 33 SSN for 22 attempts)

McNeil: Stud

Devers: Special

has gone from perennial MVP candidate to an outfielder with good speed but limited power. Still, there are some serious studs in this lineup.

Jeff McNeil (3 0s, 12 hits, 2 walks+42, 148 games) will get on base all day. Trevor Story (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 16 speed, 35 SSN for 13 attempts) plays both second and shortstop for Blue Hill. Rafael Devers (1-5-6-6, 11 hits, 3 walks) is just special. Slugger Justin Turner (4 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks) – now a Red Sox hitter along with Story and Devers – will mostly DH. Rookie Steve Kwan (3 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks, 31 SSN for 24 attempts, 147 games), Blue Hill's first pick in the 2023 TBL draft, is the everyday leadoff man. DJ LeMahieu (2 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks) used to play second base a few years ago, but he's moved to first base here in Blue Hill.

The only regulars who do not seriously rake are shortstop Andrew ìSquidî Velazquez (1-6, 8 hits, 2 walks, 35 SSN for 18 attempts, 125 games), and whoever is catching. Austin Nola (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks) not completely embarrassing, but Kurt Suzuki (1-6, 7 Hits, 3 walks) wears his catcher's mitt while hitting.

This is a good TBL lineup. They go 7 deep every day against all pitching. They get on base consistently and they have enough speed to manufacture runs when the power is absent. They should do better than the 745 runs they scored last year.

Defense: 5.0
Can catch the ball.

This is a better hitting team than Whitman. Blue Hill can catch the ball. Throwing, however, is not a thing this year.
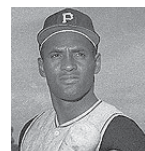
Up the middle, the Mudslides look solid. The starters behind the plate are Kurt Suzuki (C8, TH-4) and Austin Nola (C8, TH-4). In the middle of the infield, Andrew Valasquez (SS9) is rock solid with the glove, and second sackers Jeff McNeil (2B8) and Trevor Story (2B8) will get it done. Steven Kwan (OF3, 29 arm) was drafted to play center and lead off – and he'll catch everything in his vicinity.

At the corners, Rafael Devers (3B4) and Justin Turner (3B4) are pretty good at third, while DJ LeMahieu (3B4, 1B4, 2B7) will get most of the starts at first. Christian Yelich (OF3, 31 arm) is a very good right fielder despite the light arm rating. In left, there's a bit of an issue when Bryce Harper (OF1, 23 arm) plays – his arm injury really affected his throwing. Jeff McNeil (OF2, 29 arm) is better out there, but not an asset as a defender.

The lack of throwing arms in every position will cost Blue Hill some runs, but the defenders should limit the number of free base runners throughout the year. This is a decent defensive team.

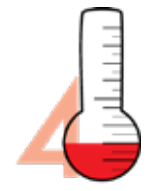## Bench: 2.0
Not many options.

Blue Hill has a nice little hitting toy against lefthanded pitching - Jonathan Davis (0, 8 hits, 6 walks, L+5, 76 AB). He'll get his chances to cause havoc when a lefthanded reliever shows up in a close game.

Beyond Davis, there just isn't much in the way of bench help. Gavin Sheets (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) has a little power. There are no good defensive options, but someone has to go help replace Bryce Harper in close games. Not many options here.

2nd But the distance between the top 3 teams in the Clemente is so small that this division will probably be decided

Story: Second and short

in the head-to-head contests.

It would be quite a managing feat for Mark to win the Clemente with Harper – typically the team's best hitter – missing for 60 games.

It might require some September moves, since two other teams are looking at the same opportunity. But they have a shot.

Ages of players on the Blue Hill roster, as of 07/01/2023:

39: K. Suzuki, J. Turner
35: Y. Hernandez
34: LeMahieu, Neris, Romine
33: A. Nola
32: Voit, Voth
31: J. R. Davis, Gonzales, McNeil, Urena, Yelich
30: Gott, Harper, Krehbiel, J. Lopez, R. Stephenson, Story
29: Berrios, Kaprelian, McCullers, Tate
28: Bautista, Mahle, Y. Ramirez, G. Soto, A. Velazquez, Vest
27: Kremer, Sheets
26: Devers
25: Brieske, Kwan, B. Wilson

blue hill MUDSLIDES

TQ: **21.5**

2022 strong city STATESMEN in review

Still a lot to like.

by Eric Sheffler

2022 in Review
Final Record: 103-59 (2nd, Clemente)

A year ago, the year in review stated with some certainty that the team was "built to last." The key players were in their mid 20s, and that management took second place to no one when it came to "Wheelin' and dealin'." The result: 103 wins, and a prediction by the *Annual* that this was the time for the Statesmen to win the Clemente Division.

It didn't quite happen. Strong City won 103, got past Knoxville, and then went down to division rival Whitman in a tough seven game series. Was management deterred? No! There was no draft this year, and there'll be a very thin one in 2024. But hope springs eternal.

What went right?

The opener strategy went very well. The three low-grade starters – Grades 2, 3 and 6 – went 14-17 in 61 starts, and there was a considerable amount of medium grade bullpen to caddy for them. Overall the pitching was excellent. Chris Bassitt was tremendous (19-5, 2.24, 6 CG) and Zack Wheeler was also excellent (16-7, 3.01, 220 Ks in 224 innings). Emmanuel Clase had 44 saves and a tiny 0.70 ERA. Trevor Bauer arrived during the trading period and went 4-1, 1.76 in 8 starts; Jonathan Loaisiga, also added in September, was nearly untouchable (12 hits in 18 innings, 0.98 ERA).

The offense really delivered. The team hit .265 and slugged .456 with 233 homers. Vlad Guerrero led the team in runs (107), hits (185), walks (81), total bases (371), homers (50), and

Bassitt: Tremendous

RBI (144). His slash line was .300/.386/.602. Nick Castellanos delivered 38 homers and 44 doubles with 103 RBI. Bo Bichette hit 21 homers and stole 18 bases.

What went wrong?

Nolan Arenado hit 30 homers, but had a slash line of .206/.275/.407. Bichette made 27 errors at SS, which clearly cost the team some games. These are nitpicks, of course: the thing that most went wrong for Strong City was Whitman.

The Statesmen did not achieve their goals of winning the International Conference and World Series but they did reach their primary goal which was make the playoffs. If you don't make the playoffs you can't achieve the ultimate goal.

3 Things

1. It can't be fixed. With no draft in 2023, it took trades – including some deep cuts in the 2024 draft – to put a team on the field. What you see is what you get, also for next year.

2. Fearless. That being said, a chance at contention may put the wheelin' and dealin' back on the table. Shouldn't pass up an opportunity, especially given the relative weakness in the division and the conference.

3. The bulk of the offense remains intact for 2023. The pitching staff remains the weakness of the team, but scoring runs wins games. There's still a lot to like here.

strong city STATESMEN

Eric Sheffler (20th year)

What you see is what you get this year.

Eric Sheffler enters his third decade as a TBL owner having just missed a division title in 2022. Strong City won 103 games last season, then fell to division rival Whitman in five games in the playoffs.

In the process, Mr. Sheffler traded away every draft pick in the 2023 draft and all but 2 picks in the 2024 draft. So - what you see is what you get this year. What's here is a team that – by Eric's evaluation - may chase a wild card berth if everything falls exactly right. Playoffs or no, this is an older team headed for a deep rebuild.

Pitching: 6.5
Not quite what it was.

Last year's club had a formidable staff, that only got better with moves at the trading period. This one is not quite what it was, and there are some bandaids and temporary fixes.

ROTATION. Zack Wheeler (Grade 13 C+25 HR+23, 26 starts) is the staff leader. Wheeler was 16-7 last season for Strong City, and he's set up to have another solid year. Chris Bassitt (Grade 11 C+16 HR+14, 30 starts) and the ageless Charlie Morton (Grade 9 C-15 HR-22, 31 starts) give The Statesmen 87 starts competitive starts. Add in 4 starts of opener Tanner Houck (Grade 12* HR+43, 60 IP) and you have 91 good starts. This is short of the top end rotation that Whitman will roll out but comparable to Blue Hill.

Then, the bottom drops out. The last 71 starts are absorbed by Ryan Yarbrough (Grade 6/3*, HR+22 HR-14, 9 starts, 69 IP) and Carlos Carrasco (Grade 6 C+22 HR+13, 29 starts) on the

Wheeler: Solid

SNT: Reynaldo Lopez.

Lopez will play a key role in the Strong City bullpen this year, helping rescue the back part of the rotation. The HR+61 is particularly interesting.

Turnover Rate: 36%

Arrived: Steve Cishek, Willson Contreras, Buck Farmer, Cam Gallagher, Spencer Howard, Reynaldo Lopez, Nick Madrigal, Anthony Misiewicz, Charlie Morton, Adam Ottavino, Carlos Santana, Ryan Yarbrough, Bruce Zimmermann.

Departed: Tejay Antone, Trevor Bauer, Yasmani Grandal, Luke Jackson, Keynan Middleton, Spencer Patton, Michael Pineda, Kevin Plawecki, Phillips Valdez, Austin Wynns.

good days. Spencer Howard (Grade 1 HR-62, 8 starts) and Bruce Zimmerman (Grade 1 C+41 HR-56, 25 starts) will take the ball on days that will not be fit for family viewing.

The division is not a strong one this year, so Strong City may find a way to stay with Blue Hill and Whitman, but it will be a struggle with this rotation.

Third Quarter. If entropy is more powerful than luck, this team will be going into deep rebuild mode at this time next year. The good news is that there'll be some pieces to trade – to begin the cycle again.

strong city STATESMEN

BULLPEN. The Statesmen boast one of the best closers in TBL - Emmanuel Clase (Grade 22* C+44 HR+44, 73 IP). In the past two seasons, the Cleveland Guardians closer has posted ERAs of 1.29 and 1.36 with 66 saves. He'll slam the door all season unless someone makes Eric a amazing offer in September.

Clase: Be best

There are five good setup men. Adam Ottavino (Grade 16* C+25 HR+21, 66 IP) is rock solid as the eighth inning guy. Brad Boxberger (Grade 14* C-26 HR+22, 64 IP), Buck Farmer (Grade 13* C-56 HR+45, 47 IP), offseason trade acquisition Reynaldo Lopez (Grade 12* C+36 HR+61, 65 IP), and Mr. Everything Tanner Houck (Grade 12* HR+43, 4 starts, 60 IP) will be in charge of protecting leads for this club. The top-tier relief has 375 innings.

Will Smith (Grade 8* C-14 HR-15, 59 IP) is the lefty specialist in the games The Statesmen are trying to win.Steve Cishek (11* C-22 HR-22, 66 IP) and Jon Loaisiga (Grade 9* C-16 HR+35, 48 IP) will also pitch in the middle innings.

There are three caddies who come in to rescue the weak starters. Howard, Zimmmerman and Yarborough are slated for 2 innings per start, then get replaced by some nearly-as-bad innings. At least there are a lot of them. Add it up, and there are almost 700 innings of relief here. Strong City will ride this group very hard, and if they do make the playoffs, it will be the pen that gets them there.

Offense: 6.5
Some solid bats, but not enough.

In 2022, the Statesmen scored 843 runs, fourth best in TBL. This offense is competent, but they probably will be well short of that mark.

There are five excellent hitters in the everyday lineups. Third baseman Nolan Arenado (1-5-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks) has been doing this for years, and is still a great hitter despite having left Colorado. Vlad Guerrero (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-5) had an argument for 2022 TBL MVP with his 50 homers and .988 OPS. This year, he'll bat cleanup in most lineups. The electrifying Randy Arozarena (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, 28 SSN for 44 attempts) is the leadoff man most days. You don't see 44 stolen base attempts very often in modern baseball.

Guerrero: MVP

Willson Contreras (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks + 2 42s) and Bo Bichette (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks) will deliver production from shortstop and catcher. Bichette hits second most days, but Eric does not lean on the hit and run as many managers do, so Bichette will have his share of RBI opportunities.

The rest of the lineup is somewhat lower octane. Nick Castellanos (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 34 SSN for 8 attempts) and David Peralta (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-14) are nice hitters, but don't get on base enough. Yuli Gurriel (1-6-6, 9 hits 2 walks) starts against everybody but bats in the lower part of the order. Carlos Santana (1-0-0, 7 hits, 5 walks, L+4) plays OF every day at the age of 37. Kevin Newman (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 31 SSN for 10 attempts, L+6, R-5) and Mauricio Dubon (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks, L+7) faces lefties. Adam Frazier (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks) is the platoon guy.

This offense has some nice cards and names, but is only really five deep. Strong City is not as good offensively as Blue Hill or Whitman.

Gurriel, Arenado: Solid gold

Defense: 5.0
A good fielding team.

Strong City is an outstanding defensive team. Willson Contreras (C8, Th+2) is excellent behind the dish. His backup - Austin Hedges (C9, Th-2) - is even better, though with a worse arm. Adam Frazier (2B9) is exceptional at second base. Kevin Newman (2B8, SS7) is also excellent out there.

Nolan Arenado (3B5) and Yuli Gurriel (1B5) are solid gold at the infield corners. Two outfielders - Randy Arozarena (OF3, 31 arm) and David Peralta (OF3, 32 arm) are exceptional defenders, although neither has a big arm. Carlos Santana (1B4, OF1, 33 arm) is not a good outfielder at this point in his career, but Vlad is the DH, so Carlos will play in the outfield every day.

The Statesmen need a glove man at shortstop. Bo Bichette (SS8) is 25 years old and an outstanding athlete. But this year, he's only adequate in the field while swinging the big bat.

They are very good here, and the defense will really help the pitching.

Bench: 1.5
Defense only.

There is some defensive help off the bench. Austin Hedges can't hit but he's a C9 who can help out late. Kevin Newman (L+6) and Mauricio Dubon (L+7) can pinch-hit against lefties. Dubon plays five positions, so he can fill in when an injury or pinch hitting opportunity occurs.

There's no hitting toy, and the speed is in the lineup. The bench players are on the bench for good reasons.
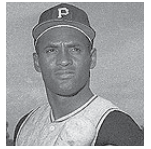
3rd The Statesmen have resisted tearing it down for this year, probably because they know there are simply no dominant teams in their division.

Time is undefeated, however, and the roster has a whopping 21 players aged 30 and over. It will be interesting to see how many of these guys are still here next year.

Ages of players on the Strong City roster, as of 07/01/2023:

39: Y. Gurriel, Morton
38: Melancon
37: Cishek, Ottavino, C. Santana
36: Carrasco
35: Boxberger, D. Peralta
34: Bassitt
33: W. M. Smith, Wheeler
32: Arenado, B. Farmer
31: N. Castellanos, Contreras, Frazier, Trivino, Yarbrough
30: Hedges
29: Dubon, Loaisiga, Y. Lopez, Newman
28: Arozarena, Zimmermann
27: Houck, Mondesi
26: S. Howard, Madrigal
25: Bichette, Clase
24: V. Guerrero

strong city STATESMEN

TQ: **19.5**

2022 riverwoolf SHARKS in review

The future looks much more bright.

by Daniel Dumont

2022 in Review
Final Record: 63-99 (4th, Clemente)

Each year the Sharks take a further step toward respectability. The 2022 club, while still a long way from contending, had some high points. It's hard to evaluate except on this basis – the road to respectability is long and rarely straight.

What went right?

Cedric Mullins had a great season, with 103 extra-base hits: 67 doubles, 4 triples, 41 HR and 106 RBI. Austin Riley had a good season too – 36 doubles, 26 HR and 82 RBI. Rookie Wander Franco, the first pick overall this season, had a good season but was limited to 63 games; he hit .273. Jonathan Schoop, playing 1B, recorded 30 doubles, 20 HR and 65 RBI. Cesar Hernandez had a surprising season with 23 HR. Matt Beaty in limited playing time hit .293 with 14 doubles 20 HR and 57 RBI.

Framber Valdez led the rotation with a 9-8 record in 22 starts. Touki Toussaint was great in his 10 starts with a 6-2, 2.24 mark and 75 strikeouts in 72 innings.

Overall, the Sharks managed to not lose 100 games, finishing with 63 wins in a very tough division.

What went wrong?

Many, many things.

Starter Jordan Lyles went 2-18 with a 6.86 ERA. He was the ultimate example of a rotation that largely didn't come through. In his first full season, Casey Mize had a rough time, with a 7-10 5.32 ERA. Tommy John surgery will cost him the 2023 season.

While the Sharks hit 211 homers, they hit only .234 overall with a .299 OBP, scoring only 656 runs. Combined with a 5.19 team ERA, it was a recipe for a last place finish.

3 Things

Mullins: Great season

1. Winter additions. Starting pitcher Reid Detmers, OF Michael Harris and catcher Shea Langeliers in the draft are very promising additions to the roster, pointing the team in the right direction.

2. Trades will also help. The addition of 2B Gleyber Torres and OF Brandon Nimmo are key steps in the direction of respectability. Harris, Riley, Nimmo, Torres and Max Kepler, as well as the versatile Taylor Walls, will give the team more offensive punch in 2023. The defense is also much improved, with the addition of players such as Torres and Bryson Stott.

3. Pitching can't help but be better. An Achilles' heel of the recent teams, the rotation has been fortified by a group of younger starters – Reid Detmers, Paul Blackburn, Jonathan Heasley, Konnor Pilkington and Adrian Sampson. There's at least some depth; this will be another rebuilding season, but the future looks much more bright.

riverwoolf SHARKS

Daniel Dumont (7th year)

There's a sunny day coming.

In 2018, the Riverwoolf Sharks won 94 games and finished second to Blue Hill in the Clemente Division. Outside of that one fine season, Riverwoolf has averaged only 51 wins in the other six years – one of the most brutal stretches the *Annual* has seen any team endure.

Despite that, your intrepid prognosticators are prepared to make a statement that will get us laughed out of the room at the next draft: Riverwoolf is coming. There's a young core here that was not present in the last few years. Daniel Dumont continues to exercise patience, and it is just starting to pay off. Almost as important, he's starting to place proper value on his players and avoid getting treated like a farm stand for contending teams in the offseason.

That's not to say that 2023 will be a pleasant respite from the carpet bombing they've undergone in the last five years. It will not. But there's a sunny day coming.

Pitching: 4.0 Ugly.

ROTATION. There are thirteen starters in the instructions. Thirteen! That tells us that this is not the part of the team that Mr. Dumont has been concentrating on as he builds his team.

Waxing Crescent. The young core is exciting, but this stuff takes time. The key is the extent to which Sharks management is willing to believe in its choices and hold on to them.

SNT: Michael Harris.

He just does everything – hits, hits for power, takes a walk and runs. He's even an OF3 as a rookie. He was the #2 pick in the 2023 TBL draft and he will be a star here for a very long time.

Turnover Rate: **64%**

Arrived: Graham Ashcraft, Kris Bubic, Jharel Cotton, Wil Crowe, Reid Detmers, Austin Gomber, Marwin Gonzalez, Michael Harris, Jonathan Heasley, Shea Langeliers, Jordan Luplow, Brandon Nimmo, Konnor Pilkington, Tanner Rainey, Erasmo J. Ramirez, Eddie Rosario, Adrian Sampson, Gary Sanchez, Hirokazu Sawamura, Bryson Stott, Gleyber Torres, Taylor Walls, Spenser Watkins.

Departed: Anthony Bass, Matt Beaty, Harold Castro, Steve Cishek, Mike Foltynewicz, Brett Gardner, Cesar Hernandez, Tyler Kinley, Andrew Knapp, Jake Lamb, Jon Lester, Reynaldo Lopez, Cedric Mullins, Blake Parker, Kevin Pillar, Aaron Sanchez, Jonathan Schoop, Luis Torrens, Justin Upton, Framber Valdez, Stephen Vogt, Evan White.

The top of the rotation includes 2 starts of Touki Toussaint (Grade 13* C-62 HR+31, 2 starts, 17 RIP) – the only starter in the stack at 13 and above. Reid Detmers (Grade 11 HR+16, 25 starts), Konnor Pilkington (Grade 11 C-55 HR+21, 11 starts) and 2023 third round pick Adrian Sampson (Grade 10 C+21 HR+21, 19 starts) give the Sharks 57 starts of guys that steal hits without help.

Detmers: Good arm

The other 74 of the remaining 105 starts are endured by people like Paul Blackburn (Grade 7 C+23 HR-13, 20 starts), Jon Heasley (Grade 5 C-32 HR-24, 21 starts) and Jordan Lyles (Grade 5 C+15 HR-14, 32 starts).

Then comes 31 starts rated PG-13: Graham Ashcraft (Grade 3 C+22 HR+16, 9 starts), Kris Bubic (Grade 1 C-36, 5 starts), Austin Gomber (Grade 1 C+22 HR-22, 1 start) and Spencer Watkins (Grade 3 C+16 HR+16, 8 starts) will throw and pray through those starts.

It's ugly – there's no other word for it.

BULLPEN. Erasmo Ramirez (Grade 11* C+41, 86 IP) is the closer. He is to pitch only 1 inning at a time and only in save situations. So the Management is thinking they will win 86 games this year. Hopefully during the season, Erasmo will be used a little more aggressively – he's a good pitcher.

Tanner Rainey (Grade 13* C-43 HR-23, 30 IP) and Amir Garrett (Grade 11* C-62 HR+16, 45 IP) are called out as the setup men. There are several guys that are just as good: Jeff Hoffman (Grade 11* C-43 HR+14, 45 IP), Hirokazu Sawamura (Grade 11* C-45 HR+31, 51 IP) and even Jharel Cotton (Grade 13* C-42 HR-22, 43 IP).

Will Crowe (Grade 9* C-45 HR+16, 76 IP) is useful with his big inning total. Vince Velasquez (Grade 4/11* HR-15, 9 starts, 36 IP) is the mop. His innings will be gone by Mother's Day.

There are 412 innings here and they will use every one of them. The instructions call for the starters to go 7 innings or allow 5 runs. That may be the only thing saving this bullpen this year.

Offense: 7.0
Some guys we like.

This part of the club has some guys we like. Austin Riley (1-1-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks + 42, 159 games) is a scary dude, and like a lot of the hitters here, he's young – only 26. Not as young as budding superstar Wander Franco (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, 35 SSN for 8 attempts, 83 games) or the electrifying Michael Harris (1-4-5-6, 11 hits, 2 walks, R+2, 35 SSN for 20 attempts, 114 games), however. Franco is 22. Harris is also 22 – they were born 6 days apart.

Franco: Youngster

Another youngster is second baseman Gleyber Torres (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks). Torres will play this year as a 26 year old – his birthday is in December. Last year's power surge comes after several years when Gleyber battled injuries and slumps. In 2019, this kid hit 38 homers and got MVP votes in the American League. He arrives here in a trade with Rocky Mountain for Framber Valdez.

There's more. Brandon Nimmo (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks + 42) is a nice on-base machine who plays left field all season. Shea Langeliers (1-5-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, 40 games) is a very good power hitting prospect who can catch. We'll be watching this guy, who could be a big asset going forward. Gary Sanchez (1-6-6, 8 hits, 3 walks, 126 games) is the regular catcher for this season.

Riley: Scary dude

Other regulars are less interesting. Jordan Luplow (1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks) and Ben Gamel (3 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-9, R+2) share first base duties. Bryson Stott (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 16 attempts, L+4) is the regular shortstop

against righthanders, but sits against lefties in favor of Taylor Walls (3 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks, 30 SSN for 13 attempts), who has the better glove.

Willi Castro (3 0s, 9 hits, 1 walks + 42), Max Kepler (3 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks) and Eddie Rosario (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks) play a lot of outfield for this club. Nothing exciting happening with these three load stones at the bottom of the lineup.

The names are terrific, and this is a young lineup that will improve if Riverwoolf can resist trading them away.

Defense: 4.0
Average.

Riverwoolf is very average defensively. Gary Sanchez (C7, TH+1) and Shea Langeliers (C7, TH-2) are the regulars. No one will be confusing either one of them with Johnny Bench. Michael Perez (C8, TH+2) is good behind the plate, but hopeless at bat.

In the middle of the infield, Taylor Walls (SS9, 2B8, 3B4) and Gleyber Torres (2B8) are very good. Bryson Stott (SS8) is the main shortstop because of his bat, however, and the future belongs to Wander Franco (SS8), who is an average at the moment.

Jordan Luplow (OF2, 1B3, 3B3, 31 arm) and Ben Gamel (1B2) will try not to hurt themselves at first. Austin Riley (3B4) is at the hot corner, and he's very solid.

The outfield has two excellent defenders - Max Kepler (OF3, 34 arm) and Michael Harris (OF3, 32 arm). Eddie Rosario (OF2, 35 arm) has a nice arm to go with a competent glove. Brandon Nimmo (OF2, 30 arm) and Willi Castro (OF2, 32 arm) also play a lot, and they are just adequate.

This is a pretty average team with the leather. They will be fielding 2 all year.

Bench: 2.0
Nothing to see here.

There really isn't much on the bench. All the decent hitters are in the every-day lineups. Marwin Gonzalez (1-6, 7 hits, 3 walks + 42) doesn't hit but he plays almost every position. Taylor Walls (SS9) will be a defensive replacement on days that he doesn't start. Michael Perez is around to catch and is better behind the dish than any of the starters.

There's no hitting toy. There's not going to be any need for steals late in games. Nothing to see here.

4th They will most likely lose another 100 games, but they have some 2024 draft picks that, hopefully, will go get them some pitching.

riverwoolf SHARKS

Ages of players on the Riverwoolf roster, as of 07/01/2023:

35: Sawamura
34: M. Gonzalez
33: E. Ramirez
32: Lyles
31: Cotton, Gamel, Garrett, M. Perez, Simpson, V. Velazquez
30: Hoffman, Kepler, Nimmo, D. Norris, Rainey, G. Sanchez, Watkins
29: Blackburn, Crowe, Gomber
27: Toussaint
26: W. Castro, Heasley, Mize, Riley, Torres, Walls
25: Ashcraft, Bleday, Bubic, Langeliers, Pilkington, Stott
23: Detmers
22: Franco, M. Harris

TQ: **17.5**

12
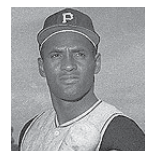
Improved, Not Dominant

We figured this pennant race would be season-long and futile, a scrum between four rebuilders. Based on what was on the table at the time, the Annual called it for *New Westminster*, followed by *Rye*, *Maracaibo* and *Gotham City*. At the end of the day, it wasn't far from wrong. The difference between position 1 and the tie for position 3 was all of four games.

There'll be a bit more of a spread this season. At least three of the teams are improved in one way or another, but there is no dominant leader. There'll at least be a more interesting race.

Though the TQs show a gap between the *Maracaibo Rumrunners* and the *Gotham City Batmen*, we think it's going to be a pretty close race. Both teams have been upgraded, both have strengths, and both *Walter Hunt* and *Anton Greenwald* are experienced, capable managers who know how to make the most of what's on the roster. Neither team is going to run away with the pennant, and it may come down to the games in November.

Last year's winner, the *Rye Herons*, will be getting back to the business of rebuilding. There's a lot to do: the pitching is an issue, and some of the key parts of the lineup are getting old. Will they be better or worse next year? It's unclear, but we don't think *Craig Musselman* will be trying to get his club into the postseason in 2023.
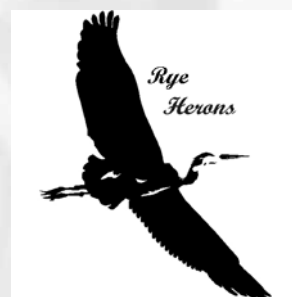
Then we come to *Jim Jeatt*'s *New Westminster Whiskeyjacks*. Missing their top star, losing their top pick to an early 2023 injury, having problems in the lineup and on the pitching staff, all point in the wrong direction; but there are still some Guys We Like on the roster. The TQs, and a casual glance at the cards in the envelope, leave little doubt that they'll finish at the bottom of the division this year – and, by extension, pick high in the draft next year. They'll be lots better in 2024.

Mays Division

Sandy Alcantara,
Maracaibo

1. Maracaibo	29.5
2. Gotham City	25.0
3. Rye	19.5
4. New Westminster	16.0

2022 maracaibo RUMRUNNERS in review

It was a relief to put those cards away.

by Walter Hunt

2022 in Review
Final Record: 77-85 (2nd, Mays)

After a disappointing ending in 2021, it was clear that this year was going to be laborious. And so it was: the lineup was much diminished, the pitching staff was problematic, and there was nowhere near a Maracaibo bullpen. Usage was restricted, and bandaids (Jed Lowrie, Wilmer Flores, Christian Arroyo, altogether too much Maikel Franco) had to be applied.

Somehow the team won 77 games, well beyond the objective of losing less than 100 (this is the only team that has never hit that mark; that's what we play for in seasons like this.)

It was a relief to put those cards away. The expectations are much higher for this year.

What went right?

Salvador Perez was outstanding at the plate (.271-41-133) and was the only genuine power threat in the lineup. Starling Marte hit .317 with 19 homers, and Nick Madrigal was surprisingly good in limited play (.357, 21 extra-base hits in 228 plate appearances).

The bullpen worked very hard. Joe Kelly saved 20, and Mark Melancon (4 wins, 6 saves, 2.12 ERA) was the most effective.

Dylan Cease won 14 and struck out 237 in 198 innings, and Sandy Alcantara won 10, had 5 shutouts and 9 complete games. Considering the limited capability, they kept the team in the running all season.

What went wrong?

This was an arduous team to manage. They slugged only .394 and had a .297 OBP. Three players with significant playing time hit under .220, and five players struck out more than 100 times, led by Salvador Perez at 167. They ran a lot (73 steals) but clearly left them on base.

The team recorded a 4.51 ERA and walked 548 batters, led by Cease at 100 (in 198 innings). Chase DeJong, Bruce Zimmerman and Dinelson Lamet filled the fifth starter spot with a 9-17 record and an ERA in the high 6s. No starter was under 4.00, and they gave up more HR than they hit (190-186). It was as expected – arduous.

Perez: Outstanding

3 Things

1. An era passes. Moreland, Franco, and Cain, as well as Hamels, Holland and Melancon are all gone. This year's roster is actually moderately younger; the next draft will help the team continue to change.

2. We can field again. The 2021 team couldn't field most balls until they stopped rolling. It's good to have decent gloves in the field again. You can't win a pennant with just defense, but it sure helps – not just preventing errors, but turning double plays and keeping baserunners from advancing.

3. Maracaibo is a bullpen team. And always has been. Though picks were used to grab Carpenter and Cabrera, the rebuilding of the relief staff makes the coming squad look much more familiar.

maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

Walter Hunt (37th year); Hall of Famer

Can this team win the TBL title?

Maracaibo is recovering from his losing season in 2022. The 77-85 mark was only Walter's 9th losing season in his 36 years in the league. It will not be repeated this year – Maracaibo will make the playoffs in 2023. The question is – can this team win the TBL title?

The structure of this club is similar to the 2009 TBL Champion Midwest Mongrels – very good pitching, competent offensively. The Mongrels are one of only three teams since 2000 to have won a TBL World Series while scoring less than 800 runs in the regular season. Whitman 2019: 797 runs, Midwest 2009: 782 runs, Munich 2016: 742 runs. That Munich team allowed only 429 runs in 162 games. So the history is there to be repeated. But is rarely done.

Pitching: A championship look.   13.0

ROTATION. If you need a staff leader this year, one of the best in the box is Dylan Cease (Grade 18 C-33

Turnover Rate: 36%

Arrived: Yency Almonte, Tanner Banks, Oswaldo Cabrera, Matt Carpenter, Patrick Corbin, Alexis Diaz, Sam Haggerty, Jose Iglesias, Michael King, Ron Marinaccio, Brett Martin, Jose Quintana, Alan Trejo, Nelson Velazquez

Departed: Tyler Beede, Ryan Borucki, Lorenzo Cain, John Curtiss, Wilmer Flores, Maikel Franco, Greg Holland, Jed Lowrie, Nick Madrigal, Mark Melancon, Mitch Moreland, Chris Stratton, Josh Taylor, Bruce Zimmermann.

SNT: Alexis Diaz.
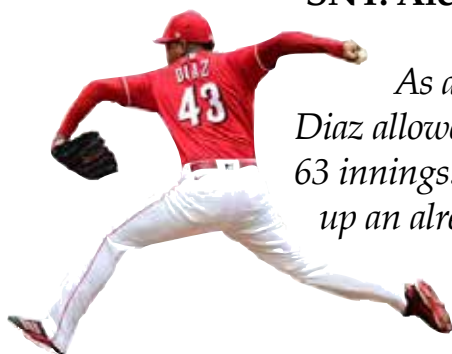
As a rookie in 2022, Diaz allowed only 28 hits in 63 innings. Maracaibo beefed up an already strong bullpen by adding the Grade 27* in the second round.

Cease, Alcantara: Rock solid

HR+23, 32 starts). The 27 year old Cease finished second in the American League in the Cy Young race. He's a little wild, but Maracaibo will be expecting to win every game that Cease starts this season. Ditto for the stylish Sandy Alcantara (Grade 15 C+25 HR+31, 32 starts), who won the NL Cy Young award last year. The top 2 starters give the Rumrunners 64 rock solid starts where 8s go to die.

Behind those two studs are three more excellent pitchers. Martin Perez (Grade 11 HR+41, 32 starts) and Jose Quintana (Grade 11 C+15 HR+43, 32 starts) not the dominant pitchers that one would hope for here, and they are lefthanded. Matt Manning (Grade 11 HR+21, 12 starts) adds 12 starts from the right side with respectable peripherals.

The last 22 starts belong to German Marquez (Grade 5 HR-22, 22 starts), but the instructions call for him to be yanked after 3 in most starts and replace by one of the terrific relievers.
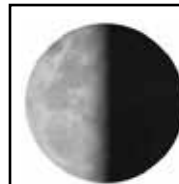
Half Moon. The core of the team is getting a little old, but there are also some great players in their prime. If things break right, and the 2024 draft is productive, they could be at full moon next year. Or …

maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

BULLPEN. Here's where Maracaibo is scary. There are two Grade 27* relievers in this stack. Yency Almonte (Grade 27* C+15 HR+35, 35 IP) and Alexis Diaz (Grade 27* C-52 HR+25, 64 IP) give the team 99 innings of a merciless finishing tandem. Add in Toms River, New Jersey product Ron Marinaccio (Grade 24* C-62 HR+44, 44 innings), and you have the best back end of any bullpen in TBL.

Three guys are primarily responsible for setting up the killer closers. Michael King (Grade 16* C+14 HR+35, 51 IP), Chase Dejong (Grade 16* C-31 HR-15, 72 IP) and Seranthony Dominguez (Grade 15* C-33 HR+26, 51 IP) add 174 innings where 8s get eaten like popcorn. Diego Castillo (Grade 13* HR+21, 54 IP) and Tanner Banks (Grade 13* HR+21, 53 IP) give Maracaibo 424 innings of Grade 13* and above. With the good starters contributing length, the Rumrunners will pressure offenses all season, and they will be a nasty matchup in a short playoff series.

Dinelson Lamet (Grade 5* C-62, 32 IP), Joe Kelly (Grade 4* C-62 HR+43, 37 IP) – who has been here forever, it seems - and Brett Martin (Grade 7* HR+26, 50 IP) round out the relief staff.

This pitching staff has a championship look.

Offense: 7.5
Not great OBP.

Carpenter: Spectacular

The concern with this offense is its ability to get on base. There are some part time players who are spectacular – notably Matt Carpenter (1-1-1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 4 walks+42, 47 games) who has one of the best cards in the set. The plan is to limit him by plate appearances and get 2 at bats per game as long as that lasts.

There are other cards that have 13 or 14 on base numbers – all with limited games. Starling Marte (1-4-6, 11 hits, 2 walks+42, 18 speed, 118 games)

is the regular center fielder and hits third in most lineups. Dylan Moore (3 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks+2 42s, 28 SSN for 29 attempts, 104 games) finds all kinds of ways to get to first, including playing there in the field. Eloy Jimenez (1-5-5, 11 hits, 3 walks, 84 games) is a solid regular for half a season. Sam Haggerty (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks + 42, 35 SSN for 13 attempts, L+15) will get on base plenty against lefthanded pitching.

Perez: Cleanup

The leadoff hitter in the regular lineups is Brandon Marsh (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks 28 SSN for 14 attempts). He's followed by Raimel Tapia (3 0s, 10 hits, 31 SSN for 10 attempts) against righthanded pitching on the boards. Jose Iglesias (3 0s, 11 hits) is a nice waiver wire pickup that will get plenty of playing time. On computer, Christian Arroyo (3 0s, 11 hits, 1 walk, 32 SSN for 6 attempts) bats second most days. Salvador Perez (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 1 walk) is the cleanup hitter in most lineups. Luis Rengifo (1-4-6, 10 hits, 1 walk) provides power as the every day second baseman. Isaiah Kiner-Falefa (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 32 SSN for 26 attempts) is the glove man at shortstop batting ninth all year.

This offense is tough to evaluate. They're very fast and they will hit and run a lot. The better cards have limited usage and will have to be managed carefully. The regulars are more limited.

Perez: Big arm

The TQ has this team roughly on a par with Whitman and Blue Hill in the conference, which seems a bit generous. But Walter Hunt can manage an offense – and he'll squeeze – but *not* suicide squeeze – every drop of value out of these cards.

Defense: 5.5
Good, but not elite.

The typical Maracaibo championship run features a table full of elite defenders. This team is very good defensively, but not elite.

They are excellent up the middle. Salvador Perez (C8, Th+4) is excellent behind the plate. His backup - Jose Trevino (C9, Th+0) – is outstanding but Sal has the big arm. Isaiah Kiner-Falefa (SS9) will clean up everything at shortstop. Luis Rengifo (2B8) plays second all year – and there's nothing wrong with that. Iglesias is only an SS7, but carries a legacy 2B7 that may see some time in some games.

The regular outfield has Brandon Marsh (OF3 31 arm) and Sam Haggerty (OF2, 30 arm) platooning in center. Starling Marte (OF3, 34 arm) is terrific in right. Raimel Tapia (OF3, 31 arm) gets the majority of starts in left. Three of these guys will catch everything. Marte has a nice arm, but everyone else is pretty ordinary when it comes to throwing. The soft spots in this defense are at the infield corners. Third base has Orlando Arcia (3B3, 2B7, SS7) and Christian Arroyo (2B8, 3B4). Matt Carpenter (1B3) will start at first for a third of the season. Dylan Moore (1B3, OF2, 31 arm) starts against righties on the boards. None of this is fatal – Maracaibo will be fielding 1 for most of the season.

Bench: 3.5
A decent collection.

Almost all of the infielders can be moved all around the house as needed, so the entire roster can pinch hit, pinch run and fill in defensively. Oswaldo Cabrera (1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, no shift) is a nice power option off the bench, as is Alan Trejo (1-6-6, 1 walk+42, No shift).

This is blazing fast team, but there aren't a lot of stolen base off the bench. There's no crazy hitting toy, either, as both Carpenter and left killer Sam Haggerty have defined roles in the lineups.

This is a decent collection of players, giving Maracaibo lots of versatility – there are plenty of substitutes at every position, including for everyday players like the shortstop. It's unclear how much difference that will make in moving the needle in wins, but it does mean that there are options both in-game and at the start of the game. Watch out for monthly instructions!

1st

The only team that could give them a run for the division is Gotham City. The more relevant comparisons are not to teams in the Mays, but to Hoboken, Whitman and other powerhouse teams in the International Conference. In the playoffs, Maracaibo brings two big starters with 2 starts apiece and a lockdown bullpen. This will not be easy, but Maracaibo is very dangerous this year.

Ages of players on the Maracaibo roster, as of 07/01/2023:

37: M. Carpenter, Martin
35: J. Kelly
34: S. Marte, Quintana
33: Corbin, Iglesias, S. Perez
32: M. Perez
31: Banks
30: Lamet, D. Moore, Trevino
29: Almonte, Di. Castillo,
 C. DeJong, Haggerty, R. Tapia
28: O. Arcia, Arroyo, Dominguez,
 Kiner-Falefa, M. King,
 Marinaccio, Marquez
27: Alcantara, Cease, Trejo
26: Alex. Diaz, E. Jimenez, Rengifo
25: Manning, Marsh
24: Os. Cabrera, N. Velazquez

TQ: **29.5**

2022 gotham city BATMEN in review

Jury rigged.

by Anton Greenwald

2022 in Review
Final Record: 75-87 (T-3rd, Mays)

It was a long season in Gotham City, even though the final standings made it look as if things were much closer. This might be due the result of the level of competition, or it might be just luck. After all, the trend is often toward the mean.

What went right?

Very little went right. We were rebuilding but were too good for a really high draft pick. One of our later round outfield picks came through (Jake Fraley) with a good MLB season for the coming year. Our waiver wire pick also came through with a good MLB season.

On the field, Giancarlo Stanton delivered 36 homers; Luis Arraez hit a respectable .261, and Nathan Eovaldi (3.31 ERA) and Jordan Montgomery both won 13 games. David Bednar was an outstanding closer (29 saves, 1.66 ERA, 66 strikeouts in 60 innings).

What went wrong?

Not good in TBL and our players in MLB were even worse. With only one exception (Montgomery) our entire starting rotation was injured, everyone for extended time (half-season) forcing our building strategy to pause while we had to put together a legal rotation. Stanton was injured, our planned backup catcher was injured, our planned CF for the future was injured and did poorly on return.

The 2022 Batmen stumbled to their 75 wins. Stanton's 36 homers came with a .236 average and 167 strikeouts; seven players were over the 100 strikeout mark. The team's 4.04 ERA was only accomplished because of good bullpen work; other than Eovaldi and Montgomery, the starters were awful. Eduardo Rodriguez (6-18, 7.04) was the poster boy for their frustration.

Needless to say, expectations for 2023 are much higher – they'd almost have to be.

Stanton: Delivered

3 Things

1. We should get past .500. Jury rigged, GC should still beat .500 but I do not think we will win our division or a wild card spot in the playoffs.

2. The starting rotation could be very good. Our starting staff is up in the air (though the addition of Hunter Greene, Edward Cabrera, Aaron Ashby and Mark Leiter in the draft is certainly encouraging.) Young pitchers often surprise, but as often disappoint. We'll just have to be patient.

3. The future depends on our youth. Our future depends upon the MLB performance of our players. I do not count on the bullpen until near year end. Our infield is young and looks promising (not including first base). The outfield is TBD. If they stay healthy, I could fix it to make wild card in 2024.

gotham city BATMEN

Anton Greenwald (38th year, Hall of Famer)

When the Batmen are good, they're usually good for several seasons in a row.

Gotham City won 75 games in 2022, which represents its most wins since 2019. It signals the team's turn toward contention. There are still problems with the team – it's not yet expected to win the division – but the Batmen *are* expected to continue to improve. The only place you'll find 100-loss seasons is in the rearview mirror.

Looking back over the past 20 years, it's interesting to note this team averaged nearly 83 wins a season. They also made it to four World Series. Mr. Greenwald managed the team to high of 107 wins twice. He also lost as many as 112 games, twice. Every team goes through ups and downs, but when the Batmen are good, they're usually good for several seasons in a row. In 2023, the team should crack .500 for the first time since 2018. You've been warned.

Pitching: 10.0
Things are looking up.

Some pieces are falling into place for the Batmen. Finally. Mr. Greenwald has persevered through a series of off-years and full-season injuries. And now three young pitchers join the rotation, thanks to a rich draft class. They join returning veterans to form a decent starting staff. With a mix of lefties and righties, things are looking up.

Half Moon. The draft has been fruitful – very little of the roster came by trade. It's taken some time to return to respectability, but this is a team with some talent, perhaps better than the status would indicate.

SNT:
Hunter Greene.

He offers multiple benefits to the Batmen: he is young (22), has 24 starts for 2023, is a high-strikeout pitcher, and is only going to get better.
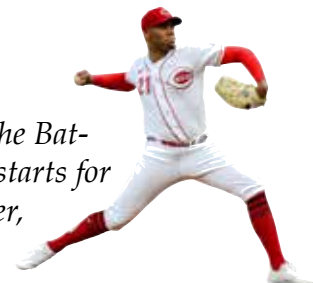
Turnover Rate: 22%

Arrived: Aaron Ashby, Edward Cabrera, Carl Edwards, Jr., Hunter Greene, Mark Leiter, Jr., Luke Maile, Sam Moll, Cristian Pache.

Departed: Richard Bleier, Robinson Chirinos, Danny Duffy, Tyler Gilbert, Ian Kennedy, Wily Peralta, Alex Reyes.

Meanwhile, the bullpen's anchored by the best reliever grade in the set. That's certainly worth a number of wins by itself. The rest of the pen isn't bad, but isn't that deep at the top. Still, there are more positive peripherals than negative, and there aren't any short-inning handicaps. And the grades should support the starters.

ROTATION. The understated ace of this team, despite his mediocre grade, is vet Jordan Montgomery (Grade 10 C+31) for 32 starts. He's joined by rejuvenated Michael Wacha (Grade 11 C+23) and SNT Greene (Grade 10 C-21 HR-32). Together, they deliver 79 mostly competitive starts.

Part-timers include young Edward Cabrera (Grade 18 C-44) and returning Eduardo Rodriguez (Grade 9). They add 31 starts. Nate Eovaldi (Grade

Montgomery: Understated

7 C+34 HR-32) and rookie Aaron Ashby (Grade 7 C-31) contribute 39 more starts. Mark Leiter (Grade 12) adds four, and the rest are absorbed by Tyler Alexander (Grade 4 C+24 HR-25).

BULLPEN. Things start with possibly the best waiver wire pickup in the history of the league in Ryan Helsley (Grade 29*), who came out of nowhere to post the league's best grade. He's ably set up by Clay Holmes (Grade 15* HR+52). That's 128 innings of superlatives. Unfortunately, the rest of the set-up crew is missing-in-action.

Helsley: Out of nowhere

Lefty Sam Moll (Grade 14*) and righties Carl Edwards, Jr. (Grade 14* C-26) and David Bednar (Grade 13* HR+26) try to fill the gap for 157 important innings. Afterward, "the best Nabil in baseball" Crismatt (Grade 12* HR+32), Keegan Akin (Grade 12* C+22), Leiter (Grade 12*), and Jose Ruiz (Grade 10* C-55) kind of mix and match for another 263 more innings.

Offense: 7.5
Need to get lucky.

Arraez: 12 hits

This year's Batmen offer a little bit of everything … just not all at the same time. Let's start with Luis Arraez (3 0s, 12 hits, 3 walks, L-7) and Gio Urshela (3 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks, no shift, but 3 24s). No one else on the team has even 10 hits. There are also no base-stealing burners on the team.

Power comes from Willy Adames (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 28 SSN for 11 attempts), who's the only player on the team with four power numbers. Other power sources include: Anthony Santander (1-5-5, 9 hits, 3 walks+42 L+6 R-4), Jake Fraley (1-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, L-13), Giancarlo Stanton (1-1-5, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-5), and Daniel Vogelbach (1-5-6, 8 hits, 6 walks, L-18 R+2).

Supporting players include Tommy Pham (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+3 R-3, 28 SSN for 11 attempts), Mark Canha (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+ 2 42s), Keibert Ruiz (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-5), and Ji-Man Choi (3 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks). Hit-or-miss results are likely from Bobby Dalbec (1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, L+3 R-3), and Luke Maile (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L+4 R-3).

All these guys may have their moment sometime during the season, but it's going to take skill to put the right guy into the best situation. Unfortunately, the team is beset by limitation issues, which preclude a lot of swapping in and out. They're just going to need to get lucky.

Defense: 4.5
Mostly good news.

Adames (SS9) and Urshela (3B5) anchor the left side of the infield. There are three 1B4s, and the tandem behind the plate, Ruiz (C8 Th+2) and Maile (C8 Th+1), are solid. Cristian Pache (OF3, 36 arm) is as good as it gets, but his hitting relegates him to the bench.

On the other hand, all the second basemen are 2B7s, the other outfielders are OF2s, except Stanton (OF1) when he plays the field. Still, it's mostly good news.

Bench: 2.0
Some good platoon options.

There are some good platoon options available. The three best bench options are Tom

Adames, Urshela: Anchors

Murphy (5-6, 10 hits, 6 walks) for a handful of PAs, Tyler Wade (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L-4, 24 SSN for a team-high 13 attempts), and Sergio Alcantara (1-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks, no shift). The aforementioned Pache (2 0s, 7 hits, 2 walks, L+6 R-5) should never come to bat, and the less said about Jose Barrero and Kyle Lewis, the better.

Ages of players on the Gotham City roster, as of 07/01/2023:

35: Pham
34: Canha
33: Eovaldi, Stanton
32: Choi, M. Leiter, Maile, T. Murphy, Wacha
31: Edwards, Moll, Urshela
30: Holmes, J. Montgomery, E. Rodriguez, Vogelbach
28: Akin, T. Alexander, Bednar, Crismatt, Dalbec, Fraley, Helsley, J. Ruiz, Santander, T. Wade
27: Adames, K. Lewis
26: Se. Alcantara, Arraez
25: Ashby, Barrero, E. Cabrera
24: Pache, K. Ruiz
23: H. Greene

2nd There are highs and lows on this year's Batmen. While Mr. Greenwald is a skilled manager – in fact, he's a Hall of Famer for a reason – but even he may have a difficult time getting the most out of this crew over a full season.

gotham city BATMEN

But it's also possible that he gets lucky, and the HRs come with men on base. Like most Gotham City teams of the past, this team knows how to get on base.

Fortunately, the Mays Division isn't the strongest in the league this year. Hope springs eternal.

Gotham City is a poster child for the theme of transitions. The roster has turned over by almost 50 percent since 2021, which is a good thing, as that team won only 50 games. The pitching staff in particular has been renewed. Pham, Canha, and Stanton are the old men on the roster, and Eovaldi is the elder statesman of the pitching staff.

After losing the World Series in six games in 2018, the Batmen sank slowly into a funk. Only six players remain from that team. Since hitting bottom in 2021, the Gotham City team is climbing back, slowly but steadily, to respectability.

Mr. Greenwald has his team heading in the right direction once again, and he's accomplished this feat through the draft. On the current roster, only Eovaldi was acquired by trade.

TQ: **19.0**

2022 rye HERONS in review

. . . the likelihood of a fan revolt.

by Craig Musselman

2022 in Review
Final Record: 79-83 (1st, Mays)

The Rye Herons stumbled along to a losing record in 2022, and, as some limited compensation, stumbled into winning the woeful but tightly contested Mays division. The Herons' prize for winning the Mays Division was a fully predictable sweep by Brobdingnag in the International Conference semi-finals. Rye really wanted to win the division in this down year for the franchise, and had fun doing so.

What went right?

The league average pitching staff wasn't half bad. Joe Musgrove was rock solid, with a 14-10 record in 230 innings with 227 strikeouts. His 3.36 ERA was bettered by Adrian Houser at 3.24. An OK bullpen was led by J.T. Chargois with 28 saves. Nothing phenomenal, but pretty stable and predictable all year. The staff kept the Herons in quite a few games waiting for the team to score some runs, which were in short supply.

Musgrove: Rock solid

On the offensive side, there were two league leaders. Whit Merrifield led TBL, by far, with 42 stolen bases, and that was with the small bases and unlimited pick-off attempts. And Ty France led the TBL in being hit by pitches, which has been a particular Rye strength for more than a decade. Since extra base hits and homers are what primarily score runs, these SB and HBP strengths don't lead to a lot of run production. Still, Rye outscored its opponents 734-707, which one would think should have led to a slightly better record.

What went right, really, was that the team won the TBL Tomato Can Division. What could be better than another division winner? Well, playoff success of any kind would be better, but winning a season-long division race was fun.

What went wrong?

It's not so much that things went wrong, in that this team was not expected to do even as well as it did. What went wrong can probably best be characterized as it was by one TBL pundit who offered that the Rye franchise was sailed right off the cliff. Aging stars, some repeatedly injured, were not traded away to start anew because the Rye fan base likes the team's core players, even if they under-perform. And, under-perform they did.

3 Things

1. Fan revolt. The Rye Herons management is unable to unload core players due to the likelihood of a fan revolt. This leaves the club in an inevitable cycle of maintaining a marginally competitive roster year in and year out. There's no boom and bust here, just middling. Still fun

2. The team appears to have inadvertently assembled a bullpen. Not a playoff caliber bullpen, but a regular season bullpen that doesn't need shoring up in the draft every year. By being able to draft hitters late, we've stayed competitive.

3. Starters still mediocre. The starting pitching that had been the hope for the future has just not maintained, led, no, not really led, by Chris Sale. Despite some useful core hitters, it is likely the truly mediocre pitching staff that will send Rye into the lower TBL echelons in the next several years.

rye HERONS

Craig Musselman (19th year)

It's not exactly a case of 'the mighty have fallen.'

The Rye Herons won the division by default in 2022. While Mr. Musselman can claim bragging rights for the feat, that and $1.50 will buy him a cheap cup of coffee. Still, it's an accomplishment for an astute GM and field manager, even considering the team won just 79 games.

According to the TQ in this year's *Annual,* however, this current team will have a difficult time repeating even that limited that success in 2023.

While there's obvious talent on the club, it's not deep enough to compete, and it'll suffer through significant game limitations that will hurt. Mr. Musselman may look for better things to come, but for now…

Waxing Crescent. There is clearly some work left to do, the team is in the process of building toward contention. This is a poster child for a team in transition.

SNT: C. J. Abrams
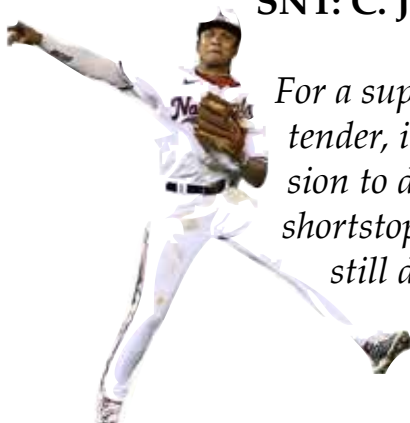
For a supposed non-contender, it's an easy decision to draft a 22-year-old shortstop prospect who's still developing. He'll be a good one for years to come.

Turnover Rate: 28%

Arrived: C. J. Abrams, Rodolfo Castro, Jake Cave, Kutter Crawford, Yerry De Los Santos, Ryan Feltner, Braxton Garrett, Tyler Heineman, Bubba Thompson, Trayce Thompson.

Departed: Daniel Coulombe, Delino Deshields, Jr., Dustin Garneau, Guillermo Heredia, Travis Jankowski, Taylor Jones, T.J. McFarland, Hirokazu Sawamura, Taylor Widener, Nick Wittgren

Pitching: 5.0
No depth of quality.

There are still names on the pitching staff every manager would be glad to turn to. There are some proven veterans and some worthwhile youngsters. What there isn't is the depth of quality you expect from a Rye team. The starting rotation starts decently, but it bottoms out with a lot of small grades and negative peripherals.

The bullpen is a problem, a common ailment of teams that aren't competing. There's no closer grade. In fact, you could argue that the set-up grades are pretty mediocre as well. But at least it helps the rotation … and way more than you'd expect it to. Even when the team's not expected to win, Mr. Musselman puts it together as best he can.

ROTATION. The top end of the rotation is actually decent, and there's 104 games of it. It starts with this year's ace Joe Musgrove (Grade 12 C+25). He's followed by Brady Singer (Grade 10 C+24), Jameson Taillon (Grade 8 C+34 HR-16),

Musgrove: This year's ace

rye HERONS

and rookie southpaw Braxton Garrett (Grade 8 C+22 HR+16). The rest of the rotation present opportunities for self-improvement. And patience. Or maybe a quick hook. Veteran Adrian Houser (Grade 6 C-32 HR+32) has seen better seasons. Rookies Kutter Crawford (Grade 4 HR-16) and Ryan Feltner (Grade 3 HR-21) still have to grow into their paws. Former ace Chris Sale (Grade 5 C+36 HR+62) contributes a couple September starts, just like in real life. They'll all need help.

BULLPEN. Yes, well. JT Chargois (Grade 16* C+24) is the closer for all of his 22 innings. The set-up crew and soon-to-be-closers include Barria, Carlos Estevez (Grade 13* C-24), and Trevor Stephan (Grade 11* C+23 HR+44). That's 218 innings that may be effective, if not overpowering. They'll help on all those days when the game's still close.

The middlemen include Alex Lange (Grade 13* C-43 HR+31), Connor Brogdon (Grade 9* C+23), and Zach Pop (Grade 8* C+46 HR+42). Again, they may be effective in spots. Phil Bickford (Grade 8* C+24 HR-34) and Yerry De Los Santos (Grade 8* C-21) pitch when the game's outcome isn't in doubt. Altogether, there are about 450 innings. While not excessive, Mr. Musselman knows how to get the most out of what's here.

Offense: 5.5
It'll be a juggle all year.

For sheer power, Trayce Thompson (1-5-5-6, 9 hits, 5 walks, L-12 R+6) will punch out LHPs. Alex Bregman (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks+22 L-6), JT Realmuto (1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, 35 SSN for 22 attempts), Ty France (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+42+22, L-3),

Bregman: Contributes

Rodolfo Castro (1-4-5, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+5 R-4), and Eric Haase (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) all contribute.

Usually, you expect power from Jose Abreu (3 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks+42), but he contributes in other ways this year. He's joined in the hit parade by Edward Olivares (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, L+4 R-3), David Fletcher (2 0s, 10 hits, L-3), and Bubba Thompson (2 0s, 10 hits, L-6, 33 SSN for 21 attempts).

Realmuto: Contributes

Part-timer Austin Slater (3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks+22, R-4, 35 SSN for 13 attempts) makes the most of his playing time. Meanwhile, Whit Merrifield (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 21 attempts), Tony Kemp (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-3, 35 SSN for 12 attempts), and SNT C.J. Abrams (2 0s, 9 hits, 1 walk+42, L-12 R+4, 25 SSN for 11 attempts) round out the lineup cards.

There are obvious platoons that may come into play. There are also lots of good steal attempts, which may steal a couple wins over the season. But there's also enough mediocrity at the bottom of the lineup to hamper big innings. A number of good players are also game-limited. It'll be a juggle all year.

Defense: 5.0
Overall strong defense.

There are some real strengths here. Realmuto (C9 Th+6) is as good as it gets. Bregman (3B5) and France (1B4) anchor the infield corners. Fletcher (SS8 2B9) and Slater (OF3) are solid up the middle. But Abrams (SS8) and Castro (2B7) are just average.

While the other outfielders are OF2s, poor Haase (OF1) will have to play out there quite a bit. It's an overall strong defense that will help the pitching.

Bench: 2.5
Maybe they can get lucky.

There's a reason these guys ride the pine. Jake Meyers (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22) is at least innocuous, which is useful. Jake Cave (1-3-6, 8 hits, 2 walks) has isolated power. Paul DeJong (3 0s, 6 hits, 3 walks+42, SS9) helps the defense. Tyler Heineman (6-0, 8 hits, 2 walks+42, C6 Th+2) has a skill.

Maybe they can get lucky.

3rd It's not exactly a case of The Mighty Have Fallen, as this team didn't even finish above .500 last year. But at the *Annual*, we always expect more from the Rye Herons. Not this year. While it may be fun stealing a win here and there while juggling the lineup and the bullpen, this team doesn't match up well against the stronger teams in the league … or even in the division. Sadly, there's no division crown in the cards this year.

Rye won the 2010 TBL World Series; it seems like a long time ago. But Mr. Musselman has guided this team since 2005, more often putting together winning campaigns than losing ones.

While the team has won 100+ games twice under his leadership and only lost 100+ once, this once-proud franchise is about to hit bottom. After winning 100 in 2019, the team has seen fewer and fewer wins every year, with this year predicted to be worse than last year's 79-win team.

TBL is a game of cycles, and we at the *Annual* fully expect this team and Mr. Musselman's fortunes to rise, starting in 2024. The transition may be sudden or gradual, but it's coming.

DeJong: Helps the defense

rye HERONS

Ages of players on the Rye roster, as of 07/01/2023:

36: J. Abreu, Ryu
34: Merrifield, Sale
32: Chargois, Heineman, Realmuto, T. Thompson
31: Kemp, Taillon
30: Cave, Estevez, Haase, Houser, Musgrove, Slater
29: Bregman, P. DeJong, Fletcher
28: Brogdon, France
27: Bickford, K. Crawford, Lange, Meyers, E. Olivares, Stephan
26: Barria, Feltner, Pop, Singer
25: De Los Santos, Garrett, B. Thompson
24: R. Castro

TQ: **19.5**

2022 new westminster WHISKEYJACKS in review

It will be exciting.

by Jim Jeatt

2022 in Review
Final Record: 75-87 (T-3rd, Mays)

Early predictions last season had the Mays division extremely tight. New West held up their end by being competitive into November. In fact, heading into November the Whiskeyjacks were in a three-way tie for first. (Are you still allowed to say three-way in the USA?) Winning just 7 games in November left them in third, 4 games back. A successful season if only because the division completely collapsed, and no team managed a winning record.

What went right?

Fernando Tatis, Jr. continued his Hall of Fame pace. A second consecutive season with over 50 HR, finishing with 51 to lead all hitters. He slashed .304/.381/.682. He also led the TBL in slugging, and in the International Conference was 4th in runs scored and 6th in RBI. A fine season. On offense the Whiskeyjacks finished in the middle of the pack for Avg but in the bottom quarter for runs scored. Juan Lagares had a ridiculously productive year. The glove only outfielder nailed 18 homers and 45 RBI. Andrew Vaugh in his rookie debut hit 21 dingers and drove in 54.

Pitching was a bonus as John Means (12-5, 3.90) and John Gant (10-3, 2.84) had respectable years. Rookie Luis H Garcia had no luck rolling along with 8-14, 4.71. The overall lack of talent and depth were reflected in Freeland, Morgan and Hearn (a combined 12-38).

What went wrong?

After winning the most games since 2018, New West seemed to be moving positively in the post pandemic era. Fate has intervened in a large way. Tatis will miss the entirety of the season due to both a motorcycle accident and PED use. Chisholm will only play 60 games. This is supposed to be the center of the offense and the middle of the infield. O'Neil Cruz was brought in to add some power and be an option in the middle infield. This too has collapsed with Cruz being injured in 2023 real life (on a play involving Yoan Moncada, of all people). So, what should be three huge talents at 2B and SS we now have three outfielders with uncertain futures.

Tatis: A fine season

3 Things

1. 2023 is not our year. The rebuild will be longer than anticipated given real life injuries and suspensions. Depth continues to be a problem as the roster continues to turnover mediocre talent. Much of the roster will hit at or below .240 and slug well below .400.

2. Talent is scattered. Hitters such as Tatis, Chisholm and O'Neill are supported by the likes of Siri, Lopez and Schoop. Pitching has emerging talent in Luis H. Garcia and George Kirby but others – Means, German and Freeland – have yet to find a consistent groove.

3. The path back to the playoffs looks daunting. It may well require a complete teardown. Management has been reluctant to leave the pitching staff too exposed and in fact has tried to improve the defense to limit getting killed on a consistent basis. 2023 will be a pivotal year and hopefully provide clarity as to whether the talents of Tatis and Chisholm can carry the team forward with the existing supporting cast or whether a fire sale is needed. Either way it will be exciting.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

Jim Jeatt (19th year)

Someday they'll start collecting wins in bunches. Sadly, it won't be this year.

Everyone plays in the Transcontinental Baseball League for different reasons. Some want to win now, at all costs. Some scheme for future greatness. Others want to trade, trade, trade. And then there are some who seem content to just play the game, win or lose. At the *Annual*, we're not here to judge, just *kvetch* a little bit.

Last year, the *Annual* picked the Whiskeyjacks to win the Mays Division. They finished tied for last with the rebuilding Gotham City club, although just four games back. This year, the cellar is the prediction, and while the team may rise to third with good luck, it won't get any further than that.

We spent years hammering the Northboro Phoenix owners to go for it all before they finally did it. Maybe it's time to do the same for this beleaguered franchise. Mr. Jeatt has collected some outstanding players, but has yet to put it all together. At some point, this team has to turn the corner and start collecting Ws in bunches. Sadly, it won't be this year.

Pitching: 5.0
Bring body armor to the mound.

The Whiskeyjacks have brought in some new faces to join a mostly young rotation. Given the grades this year, however, the team's in for a long season. While the starters do show some promise of improving, for the time being, this team will have to lean heavily on its top three. The others may have to bring body armor to the mound.

The bullpen has one thing going for it: depth. There are many innings here, and all of them help the lower tier of the rotation. They may need it. This team will be going to the bullpen

more often than Gaylord Perry went to his mouth to throw his famed spitball. Unfortunately, the pen tops out with several mediocre grades, which will turn every lead into a nailbiter.

ROTATION. Last year's SNT Luis Garcia (Grade 11 HR-16) has become the team's ace, although he still has some growing to do. He's followed by the rotation's elder statesman at 30 years old: Domingo German (Grade 10 C+21 HR-21), who

Turnover Rate: 36%

Arrived: Domingo Acevedo, Kyle Bradish, J.T. Brubaker, Oneil Cruz, Jose Herrera, George Kirby, Nicky Lopez, Hoby Milner, Ryan O'Hearn, Austin Pruitt, Jonathan Schoop, Jose Siri, Jackson Stephens.

Departed: Willie Calhoun, Zack Collins, John Gant, Niko Goodrum, Juan Lagares, Yermin Mercedes, Alec Mills, Adam Ottavino, Gregory Polanco, Edgar Santana, Ervin Santana, Alex Verdugo, Jacob Webb.

Waxing Crescent. Their core is in its prime. There are some great names on the roster, but this is very clearly not a winning year. But this has to come together sometime, doesn't it?

SNT: Oneil Cruz.

Oneil Cruz holds promise of becoming another All-Star, but may be lost for the season.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

put together his first TBL winning season last year (8-7). They're joined by Jordan Hicks (Grade 9 C-62 HR+26) for 8 starts. That's 50 starts of stealing hits without help.

Rookie George Kirby (Grade 7 C+36 HR+16) contributes 25 decent starts. Then come the works-in-progress in Kyle Bradish (Grade 6 C-21), J.T. Brubaker (Grade 5), Kyle Freeland (Grade 4), and Zach Thompson (Grade 3). John Means (Grade 8 C+23 HR+62) adds a couple of April starts. Let's just say these could be better numbers.

BULLPEN. There's a lot here. Righty Eli Morgan (Grade 14* C+31 HR-23) and lefty Taylor Hearn (Grade 13* C-25) share the closer role. Domingo Acevedo (Grade 13* C+31) and Hicks (Grade 12* C-62 HR+26) are the main set-up relievers. That's 210 innings probably for when the team leads.

Then come the string of middle relievers. The first batch, in alphabetical order, includes Jarlin Garcia (Grade 9* C+21 HR-21), Austin Pruitt (Grade 9* (C+36 HR-35), and Jackson Stephens (Grade 9* HR+42). Notice anything similar? Then there's Lucas Luetge (Grade 8* C+21 HR+34), Hoby Milner (Grade 8* C+25 HR+31), Joel Payamps (Grade 8* C+23), and the mop Hunter Strickland (Grade 7* C-44). There's at least a lot of it.

Offense: 5.0
There isn't enough.

In terms of power, the scariest cards belong to Jazz Chisholm (1-1-3-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-15 R+2, 27

German: Elder statesman

SSN for 17 attempts), SNT Oneil Cruz (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11 R+3, 28 SSN for 15 attempts), and Chas McCormick (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+9 R-5). All three hitters are game-limited, especially Chisholm (60) and Cruz (87).

Garrett Cooper (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L-6) and Edmundo Sosa (4 0s, 9 hits, a walk+42, but 3 24s, R-3) have good doubles power, for what it's worth. In terms of hits, Alec Bohm (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks, L+10, R-6), Andrew Vaughn (1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, no real shift), and Christian Vazquez (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L+4 R-3) are the best of the rest.

Chisholm: Scary

Everyone else on the roster has 9 hits or fewer. Nicky Lopez (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-5, 31 SSN for 16 attempts) can at least run. Odubel Herrera (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+3 R-3) can run a little bit. That leaves lots and lots of plate appearances for Yoan Moncada (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L+6 R-3) and Jonathan Schoop (3 0s, 8 hits, L-3).

While there are some effective platoons, the sign of a talented GM, there aren't enough guys with power to connect when the other guys manage to get on base, which also may not happen often enough. Given the pitching staff, this team may find itself trying to overcome a deficit way too much.

Defense: 4.0
Strong up the middle.

Vazquez (C9 Th+1), both Lopez and Sosa (SS9s), Schoop (2B9), and McCormick (OF3) make the team strong up the middle, but there are weaknesses. Cooper (1B3) and Moncada (3B4) are average at the corners, and Herrera (OF2) is

OK in the outfield. But Vaughn and Cruz (both OF1s, although Cruz flashes a 38 arm) play all their games roaming the OF pastures. At least Jose Siri (OF3) can spell one of them.

Vazquez: Fielding One

Bench: 1.5
Won't help much.

While the platoons would make you think of pinch-hitting for one another, the only instructions call for Ryan O'Hearn (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-6) as the only PH option. Siri (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks, L-7, 34 SSN for 16 attempts) can pinch-run. Poor backup catcher Jose Herrera (0, 7 hits, 3 walks, L+2 R-3) will have to start almost all of his 47 games. With all the game limitations, this bench won't help much.

4th
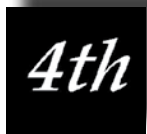
Yeah, there won't be much to cheer about in New Westminster in 2023.

Wait until next year seems to be the team's motto. Sometimes, it's a challenge just to put a legal team together, and this is one of those years. Between single-digit pitching grades and game limitations on the offense, just finishing the season will feel like an accomplishment.

Many TBL managers have been in the same situation. Let's hope, for Mr. Jeatt's sake, that it passes quickly.

Teams' fortunes rise and fall. Very few stay near the top. Several tend to float near the bottom. New West is one of those clubs. Over the past 20 years, this team has flirted with greatness, once even besting 100 wins. We're not pointing fingers. Injuries and disappointments plague some teams more than others.

But this is a team in need of a transition, something to jump-start a new chapter. We hope it happens soon. After all, with a few exceptions, this is a very young team.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

Ages of players on the New Westminster roster, as of 07/01/2023:

36: Luetge
34: Strickland
33: Pruitt
32: Cooper, Milner, Vaughn
31: O. Herrera, Schoop
30: Freeland, Ja. Garcia, German, Means
29: Acevado, Brubaker, O'Hearn, Payamps, Stephens, Z. Thompson
28: Hearn, N. Lopez, McCormick, Moncada
27: Morgan, Siri, E. Sosa
26: Bohm, Bradish, L. H. Garcia, J. Herrera, J. Hicks
25: Chisholm, Kirby, Trammell, A. Vaughn
24: O. Cruz

TQ: **16.0**

Another Year, Another Bounce

2022 Ruth Division
Final Standings

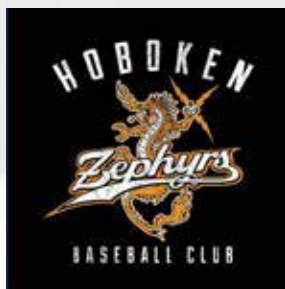| Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Brobdingnag*	118	44	.728	—
Knoxville†	89	73	.549	29
Hoboken	73	89	.451	45
Midwest	44	118	.272	74

*2022 TBL Champions.
† Lost to Strong City in the Wild Card.

Last year it was trivial to determine how the division would turn out. Needless to say, we were right. This year it is less clear, but we're reasonably certain that *Darrell Skogen* will take home the division crown with the rejuvenated *Midwest Mongrels*.

The Guru has gone all the way, trading out all of the 2024 draft to build the club he's putting on the field. There is a lot of great pitching on the roster, the top #1 pick in the lineup, and most likely a moratorium on the bunt. We're sure that they'll bounce all the way from worst to first, at least as far as the Ruth Division is concerned. Can they go even further? Stay tuned.

The team chasing the Mongrels all year is the *Hoboken Zephyrs*. *Steve Powell* has a difficult task ahead of him – but he also has Aaron Judge. Say what you will about Julio Rodriguez: he's no Aaron Judge. There's enough lineup for the team to be competitive, and a good rotation and a very nice bullpen. It should come as no surprise that the *Annual* is hedging its bets: Midwest is good, but Hoboken is good too, and Mr. Skogen had best not take the competition from Mr. Powell for granted. We think there'll be a race right into the fall, and Hoboken can make moves (while Midwest very clearly can not.)

There's no question that a large gap exists between second and third place. *Joe Auletta* has worked his usual magic in disassembling the TBL Champion *Brobdingnag Barbarians* – so much so that the *Annual* has had to create a new graphic to depict the size of their thermometer. (Not that size matters, of course.) There was a time when a Brobdingnag build down was worthy of the name: there would be *no* pitching, *no* bench, almost no offense, and there would be a large pile of picks in the next draft – some of which would be pushed to the following one. They're not the worst in the league, not even the worst in the division. Please don't tell us the Prince is getting sentimental?

So who's worse? The *Knoxville Blue Thunder.* *Pat Martin* has to deal with lots of injuries and missing games, and what's here isn't wonderful – even the parts that have names that we like. What they truly need is for the players already here to play up to their ability. If they come through, and the 2024 draft is fruitful, they could be very good. If not, it will continue to be tough.

Ruth Division

Justin Verlander,
Midwest

1.	Midwest	28.0
2.	Hoboken	25.0
3.	Brobdingnag	18.5
4.	Knoxville	17.0

2022 midwest MONGRELS in review

The plan changed.

by Darrell Skogen

2022 in Review
Final Record: 44-118 (4th, Ruth)

The Dawgs decided to take the bounce after their 2021 season of success, and broke up the team in anticipation of garnering draft picks to use to jump start a two year rebuild. The plan actually worked as expected, and the 44 win season set a new low for the team; their previous low was 49. The prize? Number one pick Julio Rodriguez. The Guru spent the summer watching Seattle Mariner games and salivating over the young J-Rod, and he announced his pick in November. No-brainer.

But the rest of the plan changed. When Munich first mentioned trading away Justin Verlander, Kyle Schwarber, Jose Altuve, or some combination of all three for draft picks, and then Paul Montague came calling directly . . . all we can say here in Midwest is that there might be a second Prince of Darkness in whose eyes you should never look! Once the deal was made for Verlander and Schwarber, it was "all-in" time and back we went to Trader Jack to return some of the pieces traded away the previous winter. We have only a tenth round pick left in 2024. That's it—this is a two-year window by design. If it is only a one-year window, well, gulp, next year is going to be horrible. Time will tell.

Smith: Best hitter

What went right?

We won the sweepstakes for J-Rod. That number one pick was the plan, and we stuck to that. As for players who played honorably in 2022, the list is short. Well, it includes few hitters —the often-dissed Rougned Odor. He outplayed his card, slashing .243/.309/.492 with 20 homers and 54 RBI in 313 at bats. Pavin Smith was the best hitter with a .284/.344/.436 line.

On the mound, only Garrett Whitlock excelled, with 67 innings of relief ending with 15 saves, a 2.15 ERA and 67 strikeouts. Rookie starter Shane McClanahan was solid at 9-10, 4.04. The rest were horrible.

What went wrong?

Everything, by design. Slash line of .226/.285/.357 on offense. 5.50 ERA doesn't tell all; the defense was so bad that 80 unearned runs bloated the total runs allowed to 959. Only 560 runs scored for Midwest—a differential of 399. Ouch. If you're going to be bad on purpose, go historical if you can!! Zach Davies went 1-22, and three more starters lost at least 15 games each.

3 Things

1. *The tear down worked.* Along with the #1, the draft for next year brought Verlander, Schwarber, Nelson Cruz, Eduardo Escobar, Josh Harrison, Cedric Mullins, Rich Hill, and Edwin Diaz, as well as draftees Joey Meneses, Javier Assad, and Cionel Perez.

2. *New management.*The tragic airplane crash over the Boundary Waters in Northern Minnesota in the winter brought a new management team, one committed to winning, for V-Mart and the Guru. In Adam Jones, we have a winning player looking to bring winning ways back home to the fans of the beloved Dawgs.

3. *Pitcha, pitcha, pitcha?* Starters McClanahan, Tony Gonsolin, Hill, Dustin May, Verlander, and Assad will keep the Dawgs in games. Davies *will not* be a one game winner this season. Diaz returns to be the lockdown closer, and second year men Sam Hentges and Enyel de los Santos are ready for prime time after auditioning last season. It's a left handed relief staff, and we might need to get some more relief pitching before the season ends, but the Mongrels expect to challenge Hoboken right down to the final out in November for the Ruth Division championship.

midwest MONGRELS

Darrell Skogen (21st year)

Grasping for it.

He's shown us before how it's done. It's almost an act of sleight of hand now; it's a remake, like the movies that bring back some old film that did well a few decades ago and now has a new cast and new special effects. We saw this in 2009 and mocked it then: it was Adam Jones and David Wright and Derrek Lee then, Nate McLouth and Victor Martinez (the young catcher, then), and Adam LaRoche. But far more importantly it was Ryan Dempster and Johan (and Ervin) Santana and Brandon Webb, Joey Devine and Taylor Buchholz and Russ Springer. Relentless small ball and expert use of the bullpen and a World Series win in six games against Gotham City. They came back in 2014 and took Brobdingnag seven games doing much the same thing.

And here they are again. It's a little different, but not that much. The #1 pick, Julio Rodriguez, isn't a mercenary, and really neither is Cedric Mullins, but most of the trade acquisitions are just that. It is a gamble in the face of fragility, a hope that the guys brought in to do the job last longer than just this year. Mr. Skogen isn't really a boom and bust guy – he understands patience and knows how to build a contender. But as noted in the Year in Review, the plans changed because there was a chance for the ring. Grasping for it comes just as naturally.

Turnover Rate: 47%

Arrived: Joan Adon, Hanser Alberto, Javier Assad, Nelson R. Cruz, Edwin Diaz, Tyler Duffey, Eduardo Escobar, Josh Harrison, Rich Hill, Joey Meneses, Adrian Morejon, Cedric Mullins, Cionel Perez, Julio Rodriguez, Kyle Schwarber, Terrin Vavra, Justin Verlander.

Departed: Shogo Akiyama, Willians Astudillo, Madison Bumgarner, Alex Claudio, Patrick Corbin, Wil Crowe, Wilmer Difo, Jeurys Familia, Josh Fuentes, Erik Gonzalez, Daniel Norris, Stephen Piscotty, Josh Reddick, Brent Rooker, Bryan Shaw, Travis Shaw, Joe Smith.

Full Moon. After being the worst team in TBL last year, Midwest is among the best this year. They hired the usual mercenaries, built a killer pitching staff, and will be no more than a spectator in next year's draft.

SNT: Julio Rodriguez.

The Mongrels won the sweepstakes, and one of the best rookies in recent years. He'll be a cornerstone here for some time to come.

Pitching: 13.5
The Guru loves pitching.

The heart of any Midwest contender is the pitching staff. This is a really good one, with an excellent top end to the rotation and a talented and deep bullpen.

ROTATION. The top mercenary is one of the best pitchers of our era, Justin Verlander (Grade 18 C+34 HR+31). Not too many 40 year old pitchers turn in a season like that. He's not alone: young ace Shane McClanahan (Grade 16 C+24) and slightly

McClanahan: Young ace

midwest MONGRELS

older ace Tony Gonsolin (Grade 19 C+ 15 HR+22) join him to provide 80 outstanding starts – half the season.

Things get interesting after that. Zach Davies has a decent full season (Grade 10 C-22 HR-21, 27 starts) and Rich Hill provides a decent card for a 43-year-old lefty (Grade 7 C+14). Javier Assad (Grade 12 C-53) and Dustin May (Grade 12 C-42) have 14 starts between them. That gets us 60 more in total. The rest will be made up by Garrett Whitlock (Grade 6 C+32) and Joan Adon (Grade 1 C-54), who will have a *very* short leash.

BULLPEN. This part of the staff is deep and strong. The guy slamming the door is Edwin Diaz (Grade 24* HR+42, 62 innings. He has all the strikeout letters. He has some support from the right: Garrett Whitlock (Grade 16*) and Enyel de los Santos (Grade 13*); they have 92 innings

Diaz: Slams the door

between them. There are a lot of lefty arms: Cionel Perez (Grade 19* HR+51), Sam Hentges (Grade 17* HR+43), Brooks Raley (Grade 15* HR+41), A. J. Puk (Grade 13*) and David Price (Grade 12* C+35 HR-16). That's 280 lefty innings, which is really extraordinary.

Adrian Morejon (Grade 8* C+24, 34 innings) will serve as a caddy for the tail end starters.

The Guru loves pitching. Fortunately, he'll have a lot of it to use, and ample opportunity to use it.

Offense: 7.5
A few good cards.

We have to start with Julio Rodriguez, of course. It's a great card (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks, 32

SBA with a 30 SSN). He'll play 3/4 of the season. His best pal in the outfield arrived by trade: Cedric Mullins (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 44 SBA with a 30 SSN). He's a five tool player, though the power is a little down from last year.

Mullins: 5 tools, power down

Along with Rodriguez, power is provided by Three True Outcomes (and not a very Midwest) Guy Kyle Schwarber (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, 9 13s, L-6; interestingly 11 SBA with a 35(!) SSN). There are 56 great games for 31-year-old rookie Joey Meneses (1-5-5-6, 12 hits, 2 walks, 6 24s but fortunately 2 31s, L+5 R-4).

The rest of the regulars and platoon players have 3 or fewer power numbers, except for Trevor Larnach (4 0s for 51 games). Nelson Cruz has remarkably little power (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+2); Eduardo Escobar has some power but is short on OBP (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks); Josh Harrison is Okay I Guess (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 hits+42); but the double play combination is not so much – Roughned Odor (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+42) and J. P. Crawford (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks). Waiver pickup Hanser Alberto (4-5-6, 10 hits) actually improves things. Eric Hosmer has shed his big lefty shift, but has an average card (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks). Behind the plate Jorge Alfaro (3 0s, 10 hits, 1 walk, L+3) and Elias Diaz (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+3) are interchangeable.

This is a little thin for a contender offense, even though there are some good cards. Their best chance to win any game is to surge for three or four runs early and then bring the hammer down with the bullpen.

Defense: 4.5
Adequate.

The outfield is the best feature of the defense. Rodriguez, Mullins and Victor Robles are all

OF3s. Robles has a 37 arm, while the other two are 33s. Cody Bellinger is also an OF3 (34 arm) when he is on the roster.

The infield is a little more pedestrian. Cruz is a statue at first (1B2), though Hosmer is a 1B4; Odor and Crawford are a 2B7 and SS8 respectively, and Alberto is both, and a 3B4 as well – he can come in for defense for Eduardo Escobar (3B3). Josh Harrison is a 2B8 and will be an upgrade when he plays. Kyle Schwarber (OF1, 34 arm) won't make it to the field much, nor will Pavin Smith (OF1 1B3) or Terrin Vavra (OF2 2B6). Trevor Larnach (OF2, 36 arm) might get some reps.

Behind the plate Edwin Diaz (C8 Th-1) is capable; Jorge Alfaro (C7 Th-4) isn't.

Bench: 2.0
Some choices.

There are a few choices, particularly when platooning. Schwarber's L-6 can be replaced by Meneses' L+5; Diaz and Alfaro are largely irreplaceable, but there are about 25 games of overlap.
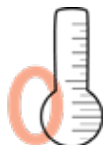
Pavin Smith, who was the best hitter last year, is a spare part now (1-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-6). Rookie Terrin Vavra (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks) can walk. Cody Bellinger (1-6-6, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-4, 17 SBA with a 32 SSN) was on fire a few years ago but has been lost recently – one must assume that there's only limited patience left. There's a lot of him at least.

1st   Hoboken might be able to make it close: they don't have the pitching, but their offense is overall better. But the Mongrels should be able to come out ahead. They don't have any margin to adjust the roster, though, without giving up something already here. They'll be watching the draft (or, just maybe, playing the World Series.)

Robles: Superb on defense

Diaz: Adequate

Ages of players on the Midwest roster, as of 07/01/2023:

43: N. Cruz, R. Hill
40: Verlander
39: J. Smith
37: Price
35: Harrison, Raley
34: E. Escobar
33: Hosmer, T. Shaw
32: El. Diaz
31: Difo, E. Gonzalez, Meneses
30: Alfaro, Davies, Schwarber
29: Ed. Diaz, Gonsolin, Machin, Odor
28: J. P. Crawford, Mullins, Puk
27: Bellinger, De Los Santos, Cl. Perez, P. Smith, Whitlock
26: L. Diaz, Hentgen, Larnach, Mc-Clanahan, V. Robles, Vavra
25: Adon, D. May
24: Morejon
22: Ju. Rodriguez

TQ: **28.0**

2022 hoboken ZEPHYRS in review
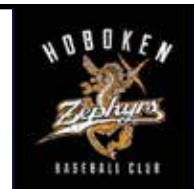
Stay relevant.

by Steve Powell

2022 in Review
Final Record: 73-89 (3rd, Ruth)

It was a long season, to say the least. Sharing a division with the Brobdingnag juggernaut certainly bounded expectations. Still, there were disappointments even with that.

What went right?

Once again, pitching kept Hoboken from a total collapse. Of the starters, Carlos Rodon experienced a huge breakout season winning 15 of 24 starts while striking out 216 in 170 innings of work and keeping his ERA under 2.3.

Rodon: Breakout

Devon "No Contact Stanhouse" Williams lived dangerously as the closer saving 21 while walking 31, fanning 73 in 49 innings. That was somewhat surprising given the number of starts made by homer friendly starters under Grade 9. Team WHIP was just a tick under 1.3.

On the other side of the ball, Josh Naylor turned in a decent season (.293), and Josh Bell, Francisco Lindor and Aaron Judge combined for 90 of the team's 173 home runs.

What went wrong?

How did we win 73 games with this offense? Aaron Judge? "Adam Dunn with a glove" finally produced a full slate of games, 148 to be exact, and did connect for 35 long balls. His .225 average and .778 OPS and 16 DP were rally killers. The highest qualifying average was .249 and that belonged to exciting Leury Garcia. No hitter came close to 100 RBI or runs scored. I could go on, but the *Annual* did use the phrase "oh boy" in describing this offense and that sums it up nicely.

3 Things

1. Build around Judge. Add some decent hitters via the draft, send the placeholders packing, count on a rebound from Lindor and we are no longer struggling to score 4 runs a game. Might even avoid getting shut out 18 times.

2. Improve the defense. Management philosophy of being strong up the middle has left the corners exposed, especially on either side of the diamond. There still has not been a decent fielding third baseman since Ryan Zimmerman walked the earth on the roster, and Josh Bell over at first is marginally more competent than Dr. Strangeglove. This will be hard to correct as bat first infielders appear to be an MLB trend.

3. Stay relevant in the Ruth. Brob embarking on a major rebuild coupled with a Knoxville slight decline create an opportunity to fill the void. It doesn't happen often. Keeping close to Midwest this year and beyond could see us playing in more than one December.

hoboken ZEPHYRS

Steve Powell (34th year)

This may be the year to take a shot.

We thought, last year, that there might be a two-year fallback in process in Hoboken. 2022 was not a great year for the club: they won 73 games, hit .231/.298/.376, with a 4.07 ERA. No regular hit .250; the bullpen was sound, but other than Carlos Rodon (15-5, 2.23), who was stellar, no starter won 10 games. Even Aaron Judge (35 HR, 176 strikeouts, .225) scared no one.

While the team isn't overpowering – yet – they're clearly well above the average team in the conference, and should make it to the post season. Does that qualify as a second year of rebuild? The *Annual* says no. They're good and may be even better in 2024.

Pitching: 9.0
Some good arms.

The pitching staff is a key part of the Hoboken roster. They're capable in the rotation, and even

Turnover Rate: 36%

Arrived: Victor Arano, Chris Archer, Kerry Carpenter, William Contreras, Thairo Estrada, Luis F. Gonzalez, Oscar Gonzalez, John King, Dauri Moreta, Kyle Nelson, Jake Odorizzi, Andre Pallante, David Villar.

Departed: Archie Bradley, Starlin Castro, Paolo Espino, Erick Fedde, Leury Garcia, Jason Heyward, Derek Hill, Jake Marisnick, James McCann, Caleb Smith, Ronald Torreyes, Luke Williams, Kyle Zimmer
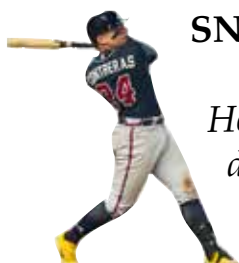
SNT: William Contreras.

Hoboken's first pick in the 2023 draft, the 25-year-old catcher is a big part of Hoboken's resurgence.

stronger in the bullpen. There's no Verlander, no DeGrom, but there aren't any really bad starts either, and a lead of a couple of runs should be easily preserved by the bullpen back end.

ROTATION. As with last year, lefty Carlos Rodon (Grade 14 K, HR+33) will lead the staff. Shane Bieber (Grade 12 C+33 HR+21) and Ross Stripling (Grade 11 C+41 HR+22) very capably follow, with a little help from Bailey Ober (Grade 11 C+32 HR+32). This group provides 97 good starts.

It cost only a fifth rounder to add Chris Archer (Grade 10 C-42, 25 starts) to the staff, and along with Jose Suarez (Grade 8 C+15, 20 starts) and Jake Odorizzi (Grade 7, 22 starts) the whole season is covered.

BULLPEN. The relief staff is led by Evan Phillips, who is absolutely lights out (Grade 26* C+23 HR+51, 63 innings). Along with Devin Williams (Grade 24* C-53 HR+52, 61 innings) they will shut down opponents in the late innings.

Evan Phillips: Lights out

Half Moon. The team has acquired some excellent talent in the draft, and already has key players on the roster. They have more to come in 2024, and if this is the second year of rebuild, there won't be a third.

Lefty Kyle Nelson (Grade 17* C-23 HR+54) is the key setup man, with help from Mason Thompson (Grade 14* C-16 HR+25) and Drew Smith (Grade 13* HR-34). Andre Pallante (Grade 12* HR+25) also contributes as a bridge to the big guys at the end. There are 162 innings here – not really enough, and with no lefty. But there's another tier of relievers: Seth Lugo (Grade 10* C+21), lefty Aaron Bummer (Grade 9* HR+33), Trevor Richards (Grade 8* C-53), and the scary Dauri Moreta (Grade 8* HR-54) for 245 more.

The solid rotation has some short fatigue ratings, which means that this crew may be overworked. Hoboken may look for a solid middleman if they're in a tight race.

Offense: 9.0
Aaron Judge and his friends.

The easiest decision in the *Annual* is where to start the description of the Hoboken offense. It's Aaron Judge, who has an absolutely awesome card (1-1-1-0-0, 11 hits, 5 walks, 32 SSN for 19 SBA, L-6). The pesky shift won't keep him out of any lineups. It is among the scariest cards in the set. He has some friends: Josh Naylor turned in a solid performance (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, 33 SSN for 7 SBA, L-12, slow); so did rookie Oscar Gonzalez (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, L-5).

Judge: Awesome

Francisco Lindor is better than last year's down performance (1-4-5, 10 hits, 3 walks, 28 SSN for 28 SBA). William Contreras' two-thirds of a season is pretty good too (1-5-5, 10 hits, 4 walks, L+8 R-5).

Naylor: He's a big man

The next tier of players are more average. There are a lot of mix and match choices. Josh Bell gets a lot of playing time with no batting shift, but is down power (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks). Donovan Solano provides a similar card for half a season (10 hits, 2 walks+42) and plays various places. Thairo Estrada (10 hits, 2 walks+42, L+4 R-4, 30 SSN for 27 SBA) is also useful in various positions. Wil Myers (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks), Michael Brosseau (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+42) and Luis Gonzalez (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 32 SSN for 12 SBA) will get playing time.

Remaining at bats will belong to David Villar (1-5-5, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, L+7 R-8); Jo Adell (1-4-6, 9 hits, L-4) and Tomas Nido (0-6, 9 hits, 2 walks).

There's plenty of usage, though a lot of it is very much the same. Solano, Estrada, Myers, Bell, Gonzalez . . . it'll be largely based on who's on the roster that month, and how the lineup is put together.

Defense: 4.0
Some highlights.

There are three excellent defenders on the field: Aaron Judge (OF3, 36 arm); top glove Francisco Lindor (SS9); and catcher Tomas Nido (C9, Th-1), who will play roughly two-thirds of the season.

Lindor: Top glove

Other than that, the team is largely Fielding Two: 1B3s (Bell, Solano, Myers, Naylor); 2B7s (Solano, Estrada, Maton); OF2s (both Gonzalezes,

Naylor, Adell, Myers, Maton, none with outstanding arms). Third base is 3B3s as far as the eye can see (Estrada, Myers, Solano, Villar, Brosseau, Estrada, Maton). When his superior bat is in the lineup, William Contreras (C7 Th-4) is a defensive liability.

The good news is that there's lots of room for substitution. Still, this is another area where things might be improved if Hoboken is in the race – with a good glove to play late in games.

Bench: 2.5
Choices abound.

As noted, there are lots of choices, though they tend to be quite similar. In addition to the players who might start and could be on the bench, there is a marvelous hitting toy: Nick Maton (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks); he can play the outfield competently and the infield

Maton: Hitting toy

occasionally. Rookie Kerry Carpenter (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L-9 R+2) has some use as a pinch hitter. These two have very limited playing time, but can help against opponents' late inning relievers.

Because of the flexibility of the lineup and roster, there should be some tactical options for Hoboken management.

2nd

The numbers say it isn't close, but any lineup with Aaron Judge in it can't be lightly overlooked.

The back end bullpen is potent, though the relief corps isn't as deep as the divisional rival.

On the other hand, there's quite some distance between Hoboken and the other two teams in the division. This team has a decent chance to get to the postseason even if it doesn't make any moves.

The question remains whether they sees themselves as contenders. The *Annual* thinks they should. But with a substantial 2024 draft, it would be easy to coast. But this may be the year to take a shot.

Ages of players on the Hoboken roster, as of 07/01/2023:

35: Solano
34: Archer
33: Lugo, Odorizzi, Stripling
32: Le. Garcia, Myers
31: Judge, C. Smith
30: J. Bell, T. Richards, Rodon
29: Brosseau, Bummer, Lindor, Nido, E. Phillips, A. D. Smith
28: Arano, Bieber, D. Williams
27: Estrada, L. Gonzalez, Ober
26: N. Maton, Naylor, Nelson, A. Villar
25: K. Carpenter, Contreras, O. Gonzalez, J. Suarez, M. Thompson
24: Adell, Pallante

TQ: **25.0**

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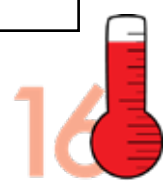
2022 brobdingnag BARBARIANS in review

The hired guns shot straight . . . the bills came due.

by Joe Auletta

**2022 in Review
Final Record: 118-44 (1st, Ruth)
2022 TBL Champions**

The bounce to respectability achieved the ultimate goal: the Barbarians sliced through opposition and overcame the Hudson Generals in the World Series – their eighth championship. It appears to have been a one year dynasty, though: but there's a lot of draft in 2024, so the cycle will begin again.

What went right?

The hired guns shot straight. On the offensive side Nelson Cruz came in a trade and led the team in HR (31) and RBI (100). Frank Schwindel was drafted as a short term fix and hit .297/.340/.517. And in the September trading period, Jacob deGrom was added and he went 10-0 in 10 starts before losing a game in the World Series.

The core aces of the pitching staff, Walker Buehler and Brandon Woodruff, went 38-12 with a 2.42 ERA, and were backed up by a deep relief staff that amassed 65 saves spread over 10 different relievers.

The team finished fifth in BA, OBP, and slugging; first in ERA, wins, complete games, saves, walks and home runs allowed (fewest). It was, as advertised, best in the league.

What went wrong?

The bills came due, and the mercenaries left. Cruz and deGrom didn't make it to March 1, and Schwindel has been sold to Japan with an April 1 delivery date—and that left holes without enough draft capital to fill them. The piper will be paid.

Cruz: Hired gun

The offense was good, but susceptible to periods of underperforming – one of which lasted through the playoffs and World Series It almost derailed the championship run and caused multiple anxiety attacks among the fans before winning by the slimmest of margins.

3 Things

1. Just how deep will the fall be? There is no doubt it will be a steep descent, but can the trio of Acuna-Soto-Machado generate enough offense to avoid 100 losses?

2. Is the core on the roster already? Will some of the younger players – Garcia, Campusano, Bart, Sandoval, et. al. – show that they can be core building blocks of the next Barbarian title run?

3. Can the pitching staff hold up? How well can a reworked bullpen of rookies and cast-offs find a way to win the winnable games?

brobdingnag BARBARIANS

Joe Auletta (35th year; Hall of Famer)

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We know how this works, because this is the way it's always worked. Spend many tokens to build a championship team; go win the championship; then unwind it all, build up in the draft, and start again. When he first started in the league, our very own Prince of Darkness would give up anyone on the roster. He'll tell you he still will – for a price; but if the price is too high, it belies that statement. Certainly Acuna, Soto, and Buehler aren't going anywhere.

It was a tremendous surprise to see Mookie Betts leave the team – but perhaps at 30 he would be considered too old for the next push. Still, since the club has four #1s, five #2s, two #3s and four #4s, it might be reasonable to think that the next push is only one year away. Maybe Mookie will come back in some other high-value deal. With Brobdingnag, anything is possible.

Meanwhile, this year will be laborous. They're underpowered, but not truly *bad*: perhaps Mr. Auletta doesn't feel the need to suffer, since there's plenty of draft already. They are, by their own admission, "younger, but neither good nor deep." But they'll still win some games.

Waxing Crescent. A bit deceptive, as they've still got some great talent on the roster. But the deep draft in 2024, and the known mystical powers of management, suggests that next year's team will be quite different.
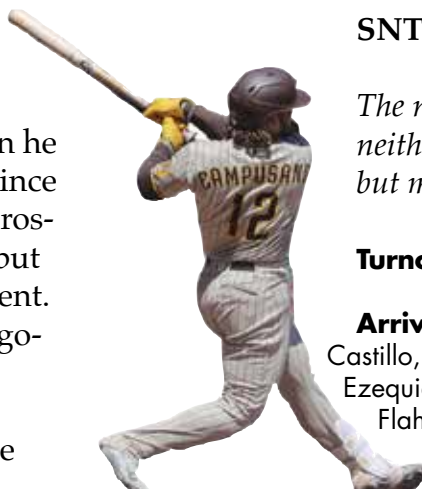
SNT: Luis Campusano.

The next great hope as catcher, he's neither Rutschman nor Mauer ... but maybe someday.

Turnover Rate: 53%

Arrived: Luis Campusano, Diego A. Castillo, Ernie Clement, Franchy Cordero, Ezequiel Duran, Jhoan Duran, Jack Flaherty, Wilmer Flores, Chad Green, Hunter Harvey, Elieser Hernandez, Jakob Junis, Daniel Lynch, Steven Matz, Adam Oller, Jace Peterson, Abraham Toro, Mitch White.

Departed: Mookie Betts, Jake Brentz, Adam Cimber, Carlos Correa, Nelson R. Cruz, Jacob DeGrom, Dylan Floro, Rich Hill, Carson Kelly, Martin Maldonado, Brandon Nimmo, Roberto Osuna, Brendan Rodgers, Casey Sadler, Frank Schwindel, Ryne Stanek, Ryan Yarbrough, Ryan Zimmerman.

Pitching: 5.5
Much diminished.

A year after sending out the best in the league, the Brobdingnag pitching staff is much diminished. It's not completely awful: there's a top starter in Brandon Woodruff (Grade 13 C-15) and a second full season in lefty Patrick Sandoval

Woodruff: Top starter

(Grade 11 C-24 HR+42). That's a third of the needed starts for the year.

brobdingnag BARBARIANS

The next tranche of starts are at least competent. Ranger Suarez (Grade 9 lefty, C-15 HR+22, 29 starts) shares time with Jack Flaherty (Grade 8 C-62 HR+16, 8 starts) and Walker Buehler (Grade 7 C+22 HR-15, 12 starts). That gets them through the next third of the season.

Then it's turtles all the way down. Steven Matz (Grade 3 C+32 HR-22), Daniel Lynch (Grade 2 HR-15) and Adam Oller (Grade 2 C-46 HR-36) will go to the mound roughly sixty times. They, like the better starters, have to go deep; on days they're getting beat up, they'll all "take one for the team."

BULLPEN. There is one, though it's understrength and thin. Rookie Jhoan Duran is at the top (Grade 17* C+32 HR+21). He has a little help in returning

Duran: At the top

Giovanny Gallegos (Grade 14* HR+14) and Craig Kimbrel (Grade 11* C-32 HR+35) and draftee Hunter Harvey (Grade 13* HR+34). This quartet has 226 innings, and they'll be used in the games Brobdingnag can win. There are a few innings from Justus Sheffield (Grade 11* XC) and Chad Green (Grade 12* XC) as well. Jakob Junis (Grade 9* C+26, 28 innings) and Tyler Rogers (Grade 8* HR+46, 76 innings) extend the pen a little more.

There are some surrender pitchers that will be available each month to pick up the slack. They are here to fill innings, and will mostly not be here in a year.

Offense: 8.0
They still have some punch.

There's still some punch on the roster. Manny Machado has a very dangerous bat (1-5-56, 11 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 10 SBA. He'll play every day, as will Juan Soto: a bit diminished but still an on-base machine (1-5-6, 8 hits, 7 walks). Ronald Acuna has a card that looks a little foreign to old hand APBA players (1-6-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, 28 SSN for 40 SBA) but will provide some speed to the lineup. There's about a half season of 23-year-old Luis V. Garcia (0-6-6, 11 hits, L-7 R+1) and of the somewhat older Franchy Cordero (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-7). Myles Straw (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, 35 SSN for 22 SBA) at least can run.

Machado: Dangerous bat

The catching tandem is not very potent. Joey Bart (1-5, 8 hits, 3 walks) and Omar Narvaez (0-6. 8 hits, 3 walks) are primarily in the batting order because if you don't have a catcher, pitches roll all the way to the backstop.

The rest of the lineup is an interesting combination of utlitymen, gathered in part for maximum usage. Jace Peterson (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, 35 SSN for 13 SBA), Wilmer Flores (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+42), Abraham Toro (1-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks), Diego A. Castillo (1-5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks), and Ezequiel Duran (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks) will all get a chance to play. As with the bulk relievers, they are primarily there to fill games and at bats. Some have power, some have speed, some have walks. None have long-term leases in downtown Brobdingnag.

Sadler: Stands out

Defense: 3.5
Some holes in some gloves.

Manny Machado is the best glove on the field (3B5). He's joined in Fielding One by two of the outfielders – Ronald Acuna and Myles Straw,

Machado: Outstanding glove

both OF3s, and Omar Narvaez (C8, Th-0). That is really all of the strong defense on the field. The rest of the gloves have holes.

At shortstop there'll be an SS7 every day – either Garcia or Castillo. At second, it's a 2B7: Flores, Toro, Peterson or Castillo again. Peterson and Toro both play first as 1B3s. Soto is adequate in the third outfield spot (OF2, 31 arm). Joey Bart (C7 Th-2) is at best average. Franchy Cordero is equally incapable at first (1B2) and the outfield (OF1).

It's going to lengthen innings, unless there are lots of line drives to third.

Bench: 1.5
Not as such.

Well no. There are enough games to cover the various positions and fill in at DH – Ezequiel Duran will play there some, and presumably waiver pickup Ernie Clement (6, 7 hits, 2 walks) will add his "bat" to the lineup. Luis Campusano has a nice card (2 0s, 10 hits) but no usage until November.

Visiting managers are instructed not to use anyone off the bench (the original instructions

3rd   list a guy who has been released, so there it is.) Surprisingly, they're not the worst rated team in the division. The few good bats and the not-terrible pitching keep them from the Ruth basement.

This isn't quite a part of the Evil Master Plan: the idea is to come apart in such manner as to be prostrate, and then come roaring back in the draft the next year. The first part is not quite the case. As for the second – we had to create a brand new graphic just to account for the Brobdingnag draft presence. We'll all enjoy watching the clever manipulation next spring. That is to say, we won't.

Ages of players on the Brobdingnag roster, as of 07/01/2023:

35: Kimbrel
34: Strasburg
33: Ja. Peterson
32: Green, Ty. Rogers
31: Flores, Gallegos, Matz, Narvaez
30: Junis, M. Machado, Woodruff
29: Glasnow
28: Buehler, F. Cordero, Harvey, E. Hernandez, Oller, Straw, M. White
27: Clement, Flaherty, Ra. Suarez, Sheffield
26: Bart, Lynch, Sandoval, Toro
25: Acuna, D. A. Castillo, J. Duran
24: Campusano, E. Duran, J. Soto
23: Lu. Garcia, Patino

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brobdingnag BARBARIANS

TQ: **18.5**

38

2022 knoxville BLUE THUNDER in review

There's enough draft capital.

2022 in Review
Final Record: 89-73 (2nd, Ruth)

Pat Martin's 35th season in TBL was a successful one, with an 89-73 record and a playoff appearance. They got smacked early by the excellent Strong City Statesmen.

Knoxville piled up some draft picks in the off-season, getting a nice return by sending long-time staff ace Gerrit Cole to Warrenton. Pat's looking at a quiet 2023 season as he prepares for what should be very lucrative 2024 draft.

What went right?

Gerrit Cole was a horse – *again* - for Knoxville last year – 19 wins, 6 complete games, 3 shutouts, 200 innings. Unlike previous seasons, Cole got some help from Tarik Skubal who went 13-6 in 28 starts. The bullpen delivered, with 4 wins and 18 saves from Andrew Chafin and 11 more saves from Ryan Tepera.

Cole: Horse

With the bats, Knoxville hit a stunning 251 home runs – third in TBL behind Melrose and Hudson. Jorge Polanco led the way with 35 dingers and an .897 OPS over 152 games. Seven Outlaws hit over 20 homers. Byron Buxton hit 23 homers and slugged an eye-popping .663 in 60 games. Ozzie Albies had 24 homers, 75 XBH and 180 hits total – an exceptional season for the youngster.

What went wrong?

Despite the nice numbers from the stars, Knoxville had problems generating runs last year. They scored 714 runs on the year, 15th in the league in that department. The lack of production can be traced to this team's inability to walk – they were 18th in the league in walks with 471. The team on-base percentage was .292.

3 Things

1. Reset. Pat has nine picks in the first five rounds of the 2024 draft including two first round picks, so Knoxville is about to get a major infusion of youth. They will need to draft some pitching – every team needs 162 starts, but there's enough draft capital here to redefine the team for the next few years.

2. Stockpiling Talent. Although they're clearly taking a step back this year, Knoxville has hung onto most of its young offensive talent. Ozzie Albies, Matt Chapman, Byron Buxton, and Jorge Polanco are still here.

3. Buxton Watch. Last year, we mentioned that Byron Buxton is a player who has to put together a big year for Knoxville to take a run at a division title. He's supremely talented, but has been limited by injuries throughout his career. Last season, he played 92 games for Minnesota. The Minnesota fans are apparently as frustrated as the rest of us with Buxton's fragility. As of this date in mid-May, Byron Buxton has played zero games in the outfield. He has played every day in 2023 as the Twins' DH. This may work for both Minnesota and for the Knoxville Outlaws.

knoxville BLUE THUNDER
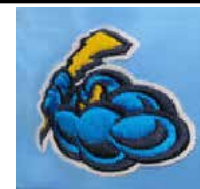
Pat Martin (36th year)

What Knoxville needs . . . is for the players it has to perform like they should.

Every season's end brings evaluation, especially when the team doesn't dominate. 89 wins was enough to get into the playoffs, but not enough to get very far – they exited quickly in their first series against the 103-win Strong City club.

So what to do? The most talented hitter, Byron Buxton, showed titanic power but only hit .224 in 92 games; Ozzie Albies hit only .247 in 64 games, Jorge Polanco .235 in 104 games; Matt Chapman had a full season, but managed only .229. The starters, other than Cole and Triston McKenzie, took a step back (though Skubal was better). And so on. Can't fix it all. The thing to do was to rebuild.

Gerrit Cole was the obvious choice to move. He brought this year's shortstop (Nick Allen), the SNT (Seby Zavala), a 2024 #1 and the restless ghost of Madison Bumgarner. Was that enough? We won't know for a year at least.

But what is left behind is a bit of a mess. How big? In a year when the Brobdingnag club has amassed an insane amount of draft weight in 2024 and has set up a typical no-bullpen, no-bench lineup designed to suffer and draft early, it's not the lowest-ranked team in the division. This team is. Both on offense and on the mound, this club is going to struggle.

Pitching: 5.0
Only a few high points.

This is a big come down from the fine staff that pitched the Outlaws to the playoffs last year. There are some good starts, and there are a few good relievers. But the lower end of the rotation is going to remain stapled to the mound, and the bullpen is far too shallow.

MacKenzie: New ace

ROTATION. With the departure of Cole, there's a new ace in town: Triston McKenzie (Grade 14 C+23 HR-14, 30 starts, fatigue 24). He's joined

Turnover Rate: 42%

Arrived: Jorge Alcala, Nick Allen, Shawn Armstrong, Christian Bethancourt, Madison Bumgarner, Gilberto Celestino, Austin Davis, Erick Fedde, Cesar Hernandez, Geraldo Perdomo, David Phelps, Bryan Shaw, Dominic Smith, Kyle Stowers, Seby Zavala.

Departed: Nick Ahmed, Nick Anderson, Gerrit Cole, Eduardo Escobar, Kyle Finnegan, Sandy Leon, Brett Martin, Juan Minaya, Colin Moran, Jake Odorizzi, Steven Okert, Victor Reyes, Eddie Rosario, Miguel Sano, Nick Solak.

Third Quarter. The team has extra in the 2024 draft, but there's a lot of work to do. The pitching is thin, in particular because Gerrit Cole is not on the roster. But the lineup is thin too. This is a rebuild in progress.

SNT: Seby Zavala.

He might be a little old to be a rookie SNT, but this is the catcher of the future if Ryan Jeffers doesn't work out. He's got good power and can catch too.

by a much improved Tarik Skubal (Grade 10 C+16 HR+26) for 21 starts. That gets Knoxville through about a third of the season. Nick Pivetta isn't awful (Grade 7 C-24 HR-15, 33 starts), but he's very solid compared to what has to make up the rest of the season.

Kyle Gibson (Grade 4 C+16), Madison Bumgarner (Grade 3 HR-16), and Erick Fedde (Grade 1 C-32 HR-21) have to go to the mound the rest of the time. The instructions for these guys is very clear: they only come out when they have to, or if they fatigue and Knoxville is still in the game. That is probably unlikely and shouldn't be counted on.

Pressly: Big arm

BULLPEN. The news is better here, but there aren't anywhere near enough arms and innings to rescue the lower half of the rotation. The closer is Ryan Pressly (Grade 16* HR+22), who has a big arm (but not a closer grade). His trusty henchmen are veteran David Phelps (Grade 14* C-45 HR+53), Ryan Tepera (Grade 13*) and lefty Andrew Chafin (Grade 13* HR+24). This quartet provides 226 solid innings, and lefties Tim Mayza (Grade 12* C+26 HR-21) and Caleb Thielbar (Grade 11* HR+24) add another 108. Andrew Kittredge is a Grade 13* for 20 innings with scary peripherals.

The rest of the staff is a set of Grade 5*s and Grade 4*s, who may pitch a lot more than anyone would want. They'll caddy for the bad starters.

There isn't enough bullpen, so the good starters will try to pitch too much. They'll give up runs.

Offense: 5.5
Scrapping for runs.

No one could argue that the most talented player on offense is Byron Buxton. He has lights-out power (1-1-4-5) and can run a little – but this year he has 8 hits, 3 walks+42, and 9 13s. He also can only play 92 games. This sort of isolated power would be easier to take if it was a full season (and batting in the #6 spot); but it's not, and he's tagged as the leadoff hitter.

Buxton: Isolated power

The best all around card belongs to Manuel Margot (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+7 R-4). He is the everyday right fielder. Seby Zavala is pretty solid though he lacks homerun power (5-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks). Christian Bethancourt has risen from the depths to turn in a pretty good card (1-6-6, 10 hits). The Names We Like on the roster are disappointing: Ozzie Albies (1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, 64 games); Matt Chapman (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42); and Jorge Polanco (1-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks, 104 games).

Unfortunately, Knoxville will not be able to get them all into the lineup very often. Instead, there will be some other folks taking their place: infielders Nick Allen (8 hits, L+8 R-5), Cesar Hernandez (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, 14 SBA with a 28 SSN), and Geraldo Perdomo (2 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks, 31 SSN for 11 SBA); catchers Ryan Jeffers (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, L+10 R-6) and Mitch Garver (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, L+12 R-7); outfielders Connor Joe (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, 29 SSN) and Gilberto Celestino (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 31 SSN) and firstbaseman Dom Smith (3 0s, 7 hits, 3 hits+42).

This is a bit of a mess, and it is a disappointing successor to an underperforming 2022 offense. The power and speed are both down, and there aren't enough games or hits. They're going to get outscored. A lot.

Defense: 4.0
Changes in the later innings.

As with the offense, the defensive alignment varies considerably depending on who is available. Matt Chapman will be great every day as a 3B5; Ozzie Albies, when playing, is a 2B9 (and

Chapman, Albies: Top gloves

the other part of the second base position, Jorge Polanco, is a 2B8); and there are three OF3s – Buxton, Margot and Harrison Bader. Buxton has a 36 arm, Bader a 35. The rest of the outfielders are OF2s except Carlos Hernandez, who is listed as an outfielder (as an OF1). Behind the plate, Ryan Jeffers is the best of the lot (C8, Th-3); Bethancourt is a C7 with a great Th+6; Zavala is a C7, Th+1. Garver is a C6 and shouldn't play the field. At first base Smith and Alex Kiriloff are 1B3s; Allen and Perdomo are SS8s.

They can flash good gloves – sometimes, and in some places. It's not an awful defense, but it may lengthen innings that will already be long.

Bench: 2.5
A few extra parts.

Because of the limits on some players, there will be many different lineups. A few extra bodies can be used if available, though they too are limited. Alex Kiriloff (3 0s, 10 hits, L-8) will play some first base; Harrison Bader (0-6, 10 hits, 2 walks, 20 SBA with a 33 SSN) is good on defense and is the most legitimate speed threat on the roster; and Kyle Stowers (1-4-6, 9 hits, 2 walks+42) offers a little power off the bench. Bader and Bethancourt will help in games where Knoxville leads.

4th

It could be close, but the Barbarians have a few very solid cards and there is nothing like that here. Handicapping the race between the bottom two teams in the Ruth is an exercise in futility in any case; both clubs will lose a bunch of games and, next year, draft a bunch of new players.

What Knoxville needs, more than anything, is for the players it has to perform like they should. Albies, Chapman, Kiriloff, Skubal, and especially Buxton have to come through, or it'll be another long year in 2024.

Ages of players on the Knoxville roster, as of 07/01/2023:

36: Phelps, Thielbar
35: Gibson, B. Shaw, Tepera
34: Pressly
33: Bumgarner, Chafin, Ce. Hernandez, Kittredge, T. May
32: Armstrong, Garver
31: Bethancourt, Mayza
30: M. Chapman, A. Davis, Fedde, Joe, Pivetta
29: Buxton, J. Polanco, Zavala
28: Bader, Margot, Do. Smith
27: Alcala
26: Albies, Jeffers, Skubal
25: Kirilloff, McKenzie, Stowers
24: Allen, Celestino
23: G. Perdomo

Knoxville BLUE THUNDER

TQ: **17.0**

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2022 TBL world series

Hudson vs. Brobdingnag

by Joe Auletta

Two teams with long-term stable ownership faced off in the last series of the 2022 TBL season. Both Hudson (102-60) and Brobdingnag (118-44) have been around well over 30 years in their current locations. They were two of the six teams that won 100+ games during the regular season and both entered the World Series hot. The Generals defeated both the other two 100 win teams in the NC, 4-2 over Melrose, and 4-1 over Warrenton. The Barbarians swept Rye 4-0, and then defeated Whitman 4-1. The match-up was two different styles – Hudson was second in the league in runs scored with 906, 119 more than Brobdingnag. But the Barbarians had the league's best ERA (2.73), while Hudson was in the middle of the pack. Each team would have two games started by Grade 20+ pitchers, and each had a Grade 30* closer (first time ever?).

Game 1 at Brobdingnag
Peralta vs. Buehler

Peralta

During the regular season meeting between the two teams, Hudson's offense had its way against Brob pitchers. In order to succeed, dominant pitching would be needed: but it was Hudson's starter, Freddy Peralta, who provided it. He held the Barbarians hitless through seven innings; meanwhile Hudson put together four hits in the top of the first to score two, and added five in the 7th to break it open. Jake Cronensworth was 3 for 5 with a double, homer, and two RBI.

Hudson 7, Brobdingnag 1
W: Peralta   L: Buehler

Game 2 at Brobdingnag
Gausman vs. Woodruff

Hudson played small ball to score a run in the top of the 2nd with a walk and two singles, while Brobdingnag went longball to tie it on a Nelson

Cruz homer in the bottom half. After that the starters took over and it stayed 1-1 into the 7th. A walk to Miller put the lead run on for Hudson – then a steal and a two out single broke the tie. Hudson added another in the 8th on a Brian Reynolds

Cronenworth

solo homer. Though the home team got the tying runs on base in the 9th, Josh Hader struck out Juan Soto to strand them and get the save in a 3-1 Hudson win. Cronensworth had hits his first two times up to make it five in a row. Other than Cruz's HR, no Barbarian got past 2nd base. Hudson's pitching was nothing short of dominant as they took a 2-0 game lead back to Hudson.

Hudson 3, Brobdingnag 1
W: Gausman   L: Woodruff   S: Hader

Game 3 at Hudson
deGrom vs. Flexen

Since arriving in Brobdingnag in a late season deal, Jake deGrom had won 10 games in 10 starts. The Barbarians were counting on him to get them back in this series. They gave him an early run on the first pitch on a Mookie Betts homer. But the Generals showed deGrom no respect in the home first inning. A walk, single and two-out Darren Ruf double erased the lead and put Hudson up a run. From there, both starters toughened. In the 5th, a two-out pinch hit double by Schwindel tied the game, but in the 7th a walk followed by Galvis and Reynolds hits untied it putting Hudson up 3-2. From there Hudson's pen threw a hitless 8th and 9th to go up three games to none, Hader getting his second save.

Hader

Hudson 3, Brobdingnag 2
W: Cousins   L: DeGrom   S: Hader

Game 4 at Hudson
Glasnow vs. Lopez

Facing elimination, the Barbarians needed two things – a strong game from Tyler Glasnow, and for their bats to wake up. They got both. Glasnow pitched a shutout into the 9th, scattering three harmless singles. Meanwhile Brobdingnag did some strategic bombing: 12 hits including 4 homers (two by Mookie) and four doubles to score six times. The Barbarians lived to fight another day.

Glasnow

Brobdingnag 6, Hudson 1
W: Glasnow   L: Lopez

Game 5 at Hudson
Buehler vs. Peralta

The rematch of Game 1 went rather differently. No one scored until the top of the 4th when a Manny Machado solo homer put the Barbarians up 1-0. Buehler faltered in the home 5th and gave up RBI doubles to Murphy and Galvis to put Hudson up a run, 2-1. Both teams threatened but did not score going into the 9th, and Brobdingnag was down to their last three outs of the season down a run – and facing Josh Hader, who had 2 saves and a 0.00 ERA for the series.

Rodgers

Narvaez singled, Acuna was hit by a pitch, and the go ahead run was on with one out. Hader threw to Brendan Rodgers who hit a two run double to take the lead back, 3-2. Hader struck out the side to keep it a one-run game in the bottom of the 9th. With one out Andrew McCutchen doubled to put the tying run on 2nd, but Sadler retired the next two and the Barbarians held on for a 3-2 win. The Hudson fans were deflated, and in retrospect the 9th inning of this game was the series' turning point. The series returned to Brob with Hudson needing one of two.

Brobdingnag 3, Hudson 2
W: Cimber   L: Hader

Game 6 at Brobdingnag
Gausman vs. Sandoval

Overall, this was the best pitched game of the series, Gausman for the Generals vs the hoard of Brob relievers. Both were dominant. After seven innings the line score was 0 runs, 2 hits for Hudson, 0 runs 2 hits for Brobdingnag. In the visitors' eighth it was more of the same, three up and three down. In the bottom of the eighth, Acuna doubled off Gausman and was sacrificed to third. Betts (hitting .333 with 3 homers so far) was walked to set up the DP, but Juan Soto hit a fly to left, Acuna tagged up and scored the first – and only – run of the game. Suarez pitched the 9th for the save. After almost 180 games, it came down to game seven, winner to hoist the trophy.

Acuna

Brobdingnag 1, Hudson 0
W: Kimbrel   L: Gausman   S: Suarez

Game 7 at Brobdingnag
Flexen vs. Woodruff

Both pitching staffs came at this game in waves with 12 of them stepping onto the mound before the game was over. Neither starter made it into the 4th inning. The hits were few, and home runs dominated the scoring. Nelson Cruz started things with a two-run shot of Flexen, but this was matched by a pinch hit two-run homer off Brentz in the 4th to tie the game. In the home 4th, Cruz hit his second homer of the game – a solo shot – to give the Barbarians a 3-2 lead after four. From there on the bats went cold. The Hudson pen shut down the Barbarians on one single the rest of the game, but the Brobdingnag pen did the same thing to the Generals the rest of the game – and the 3-2 Brob lead became the final score in the final game of 2022.

Cruz

Brobdingnag 3, Hudson 2
W: Brentz   L: Flexen   S: Suarez

The series MVP was Mookie Betts, who hit .286/.464/.810 and led the Barbarians with 4 runs, 4 RBIs, and 3 homers.

The Clock

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Melrose*	107	55	.660	—
Kansas	74	88	.457	33
Calusa	72	90	.444	35
Las Vegas	55	107	.340	52

* Lost to Hudson in Conference semifinal.

If there is any unifying theme for the Aaron Division, it is the truth that we all face but for these teams is written large: that the clock is ticking for all of them. In a few years the key players are going to be very different.

The *Kansas Koyotes* are our consensus pick for the Aaron Division pennant. They have very good pitching, and enough offense to compete. *Bill Schwartz* has a home-grown team: he drafts at his own position, and rarely trades; this year he added a shortstop, a third baseman, some bullpen and a hitting toy. It should be enough to win the pennant, but is it enough to take him further?

A little ways behind Kansas is the *Calusa Indians*. We said last year (and the year before, "Ah, the Calusa Indians," noting our almost Hudson-like inability to predict how they would turn out. *Gordon Rodell*'s team won 110 in 2021, but only 72 last year.

We like that they get Albert's last hurrah, and we applaud the acquisition of Carlos Correa, but we don't think they get above second place.

The *Vegas Gamblers* are under new management, and we welcome *Rob Skogen* to TBL. He's already made a blockbuster trade, the biggest one in any recent offseason, and we think he won it: still, trading Adley Rutschman – whatever comes back – carries the risk of looking foolish for many years to come. We think a rebuild is coming, but they may be scrappy this year. Good luck to our newest manager.

Say what you will about the *Melrose Avengers*, but they're always interesting. This year's club is going to be more of a fixer-upper than usual, as they are neither really good nor really bad. That makes prediction very difficult, and the

Annual would like to thank *Mark Freedman* for that. There may yet be a fire sale before Melrose returns to the top echelon.

Aaron Division
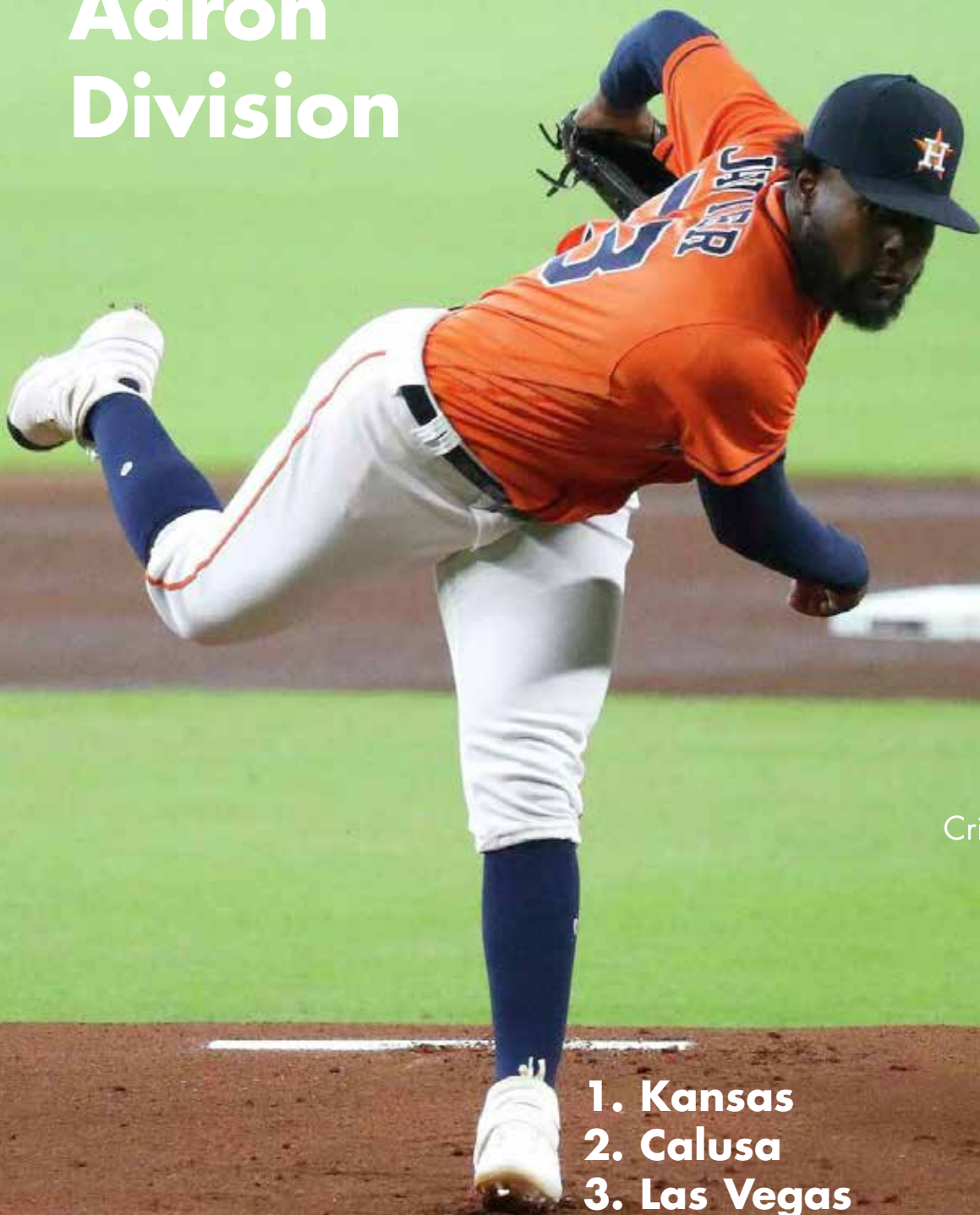
Cristian Javier,
Kansas

1. Kansas	31.5
2. Calusa	25.5
3. Las Vegas	19.0
4. Melrose	18.5

2022 kansas KOYOTES in review

Legitimate hope.

by Bill Schwartz

2022 in Review
Final Record: 74-88 (2nd, Aaron)

Kansas has been accustomed to exceeding the computer pre-play – six times in the previous seven years. Not so this time as, much to the chagrin of Koyote fans, the projected 77-win season was even optimistic. Surprisingly, the actual 74 wins were good for second place in the Aaron – but a distant 33 games behind Melrose.

2023's version gives legitimate hope for a much-improved season, thanks to a much better rotation and solid bullpen (see below).

What went right?

One thing the Koyotes did well was hit the longball, sending 249 balls over the fence: good for 4th in the TBL. Adolis Garcia led the way with 33, followed closely by Seth Brown with 30 and Jared Walsh with 29. No less than eight others had double figures in HR.

An otherwise mediocre offense was led by Walsh, who led the team in several categories – batting average (.290), slugging (.520), on base (.347), hits (167) & doubles (43).

Walsh: Led offense

On the pitching side, longtime ace Max Scherzer was dependable with a 14-12, 3.90 line and 239 K's, posting his ninth consecutive season of double figure wins. First round draftee Michael Kopech was stellar in his 54 innings, which included 4 starts; he went 3-1, 1.49.

What went wrong?

74 wins were all that could be achieved. Some might say "What can you expect with 70 starts of Grade 6 and below and no reliever above a Grade 15?" And with ten "hitters" batting under .237, the bats couldn't be depended on to out-score the opposition.

It seemed like the wind was blowing out every time Scherzer toed the slab. His 3.90 ERA would have been better, but for an inordinate number of 66 rolls resulting in him surrendering 44 HR, second most in team history.

And what list of negatives could be complete without the sad story of one-time Koyote stalwart Yasiel Puig, who finally had to be cut from the roster in 2023? It's hard to play from jail!

3 Things

1. Excellent starters for 2023. The Koyotes will have 130 starts of Grade 12+, headed by Cristian Javier (19) and perennial staff ace Scherzer (15). Michael Kopech (15), Luis Severino (14), Sonny Gray (12), and Anibal Sanchez (12) follow those two. We'll have to carefully use the shallow pen to rescue the low-fatigue starters.

2. Draft results. Jeremy Pena's SS-9 in the first round added a pitcher's friend with good speed and occasional power. Second rounder Brandon Drury will provide much needed power at 3B. Matt Moore and Zach Jackson, along with holdover Swanson, provide Kansas with three closer closer grades. Other additions fortify the bench. Even with a better bullpen, it'll have to be managed carefully, innings wise.

3. Scherzer watch. Max Scherzer's march up the TBL career leaderboards to a potential Hall of Fame induction will be interesting for Koyote fans to watch.

kansas KOYOTES

Bill Schwartz (16th year)

They'll win the Aaron, and might even go further.

We thought they might break .500 last year. The starters were decent, though the bullpen was weak; but there were some hitters, and Kansas management always makes good use of talent. They didn't make it, though not by much; seven losses turned into wins and there's your .500 season.

This year there's more on the roster, and some nice additions – bullpen, primarily, and all from the draft. The turnover was small and all through the draft; Mr. Schwartz isn't inclined toward trading, and has taken only at his own picks for at least the last three years. Thus, the Kansas club is the very epitome of "home grown." There is no bounce here, no boom and bust here – they're just steadily changing, adding newer players and saying goodbye to the older ones. In the meanwhile, what's here is pretty solid. The *Annual* thinks they'll win the Aaron, and might even go further.

Pitching: 15.0
Lots and lots of arms.

There are lots of arms on the roster, a Kansas hallmark. The draft helped, particularly in the bullpen, and this staff can go head to head with any in TBL.

Turnover Rate: 28%

Arrived: Michael Chavis, Jose Cuas, Brandon Drury, Darick Hall, Zach Jackson, Matt Moore, Reyes Moronta, Jeremy Pena, Anibal Sanchez, Brian Serven.

Departed: Brett Anderson, Kyle Funkhouser, Dallas Keuchel, Kyle McGowin, Jose Peraza, Yasiel Puig, Jose Rojas, Jose Rondon, Tayler Saucedo, D.J. Stewart.

Scherzer, Javier: Old and new aces

ROTATION. None of the starters gets to pitch 30 times, so it takes eight guys to make all of the needed starts. The staff is led by an old ace and a new ace: Max Scherzer (Grade 15 C+35 HR+21) and Cristian Javier (Grade 19 C-16) make 48 starts. The next 44 belong to two guys who are in between – Michael Kopech (Grade 15 C-45) and Luis Severino (Grade 14 HR-15).

Sonny Gray (HR+22) and the recycled Anibal Sanchez (C-36 HR-31) both turn in Grade 12s for

SNT: Jeremy Pena.

Kansas' prize in the 2023 draft: a full season shortstop with a good glove and power. Sweet.

Third Quarter. Some of the newcomers are young, but most of the key players are more . . . mature. Since the Koyotes don't trade much at all, and this isn't likely to change, this may well all come apart in a few years.

kansas KOYOTES

38 total starts, with Todd Smyly, the only lefty (Grade 9 C+24 HR-16) adding 22 more. Aaron Civale (Grade 6 C+36 HR-15) fills the last few.

BULLPEN. The closer throws very hard: Erik Swanson (Grade 18* C+34 HR+36, 54 innings). His lefty sidekick – another retread, returned to use – is Michael Moore (Grade 19* C-52 HR+46, 74 innings). Where did that come from? There's even a *third* closer grade: Zach Jackson (Grade 18* C-62 HR+54, 48 innings. The instructions note that Javier has a few innings once his turn in the rotation is done.

To go with this capable crew, there are about 175 innings of good middle relief: Rafael Montero (Grade 16* HR+44) and Yimi Garcia (Grade 13* C+26 HR-15) from the right side and Brad Hand (Grade 14* C-43 HR+45) from the left. Reyes Moronta (Grade 11* C-36), Darren O'Day (Grade 10* C-15), Jose Cuas (Grade 9* C-55 HR+44) and a morsel of Miguel Sanchez (Grade 11* C-36 HR+42) add about 110 more.

It's a good staff, and though it'll require some mixing and matching, it'll keep Kansas in most games.

Offense: 8.0
A few highlights.

Drury: Reuse, recycle

The theme of reuse and recycle continues on the offense. The best card belongs to a 2023 draft pick, whom we've seen before: Brandon Drury (1-5-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+4 R-3.). The other prize from the draft (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 10s, 32 SSN for 13 SBA.

There's some power and speed in the outfield. George Springer has a full season (1-4-5, 10 hits, 3 walks, 2 10s, 16 SBA with a 34 SSN); Adolis Garcia (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 31 SBA with a 31 SSN) and Tyrone Taylor (1-0-0-0, 2 walks+42) join him. Seth Brown (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11, 13 SBA with a 32 SSN) will play against some righties.

Swanson: Throws hard

In the infield, there are two second basemen and two first basemen. Veterans Kike Hernandez (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L+5 R-3) will share time with Jean Segura (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, 19 SBA with a 27 SSN) will play second, while last year's offensive leader Jared Walsh (1-0-0, 8 hits) will share first with Michael Chavis (1-0-0, 9 hits.) Neither pair will strike fear into opposing pitchers' hearts. Behind the plate Yan Gomes (3 0s) will share time with Francisco Mejia (4 0s, 10 hits, L+9 R-5). Again, nothing to be excited about.

Drury, Pena and Springer are the highlights of the lineup, but they'll have to roll fairly well to provide leads for the pitching staff to hold.

Defense: 5.5
Fielding One.

Kansas is very good in the field. The infield has an SS9 (Pena) and 2B8s (Segura, Hernandez) in the middle, with 1B4s (Walsh, Chavis)

Springer: Defensive force

on one corner and an adequate 3B4 (Drury) at the corners. Behind the plate, Yan Gomes (C8, Th+3) is excellent; Francisco Mejia (C7, Th-1) is mediocre. Brian Serven, taken late in the draft, is a C6, and will likely just warm up pitchers in the bullpen.

In the outfield, Russ Springer (OF3, 34 arm) is a defensive force; Adolis Garcia is also an OF3,

and so is Kike Hernandez, should Kansas wish to play him out there. Seth Brown and Tyrone and Chris Taylor are all OF2s.

In some ways this is a very 1960s team: solid pitching, good defense, speed and enough offense to keep the team in the game.

Gomes: Excellent

Bench:
Platoons, and a hitting toy.

The ability of the team to platoon is a good strength. Each position in the infield, other than shortstop, has two people, and there are several outfielders that fill various roles. The team can run; there is no ultimate speedster, but there'll be opportunities for hit and run (though the instructions don't give many suggestions; expect them to go in motion more at home.)

The Koyotes also managed to snag a hitting toy in the draft: Darick Hall (1-1-0-0-0, 10 hits, L-11), who will make most of his appearances as a left-handed DH. He may be able to pinch hit in a few critical instances. At age 27, his solid power may yet blossom in MLB. The team could use it.

Hall: The hitting toy

1st

Calusa is good, Vegas and Melrose are rebuilding; Kansas should be able to take the Aaron Division pennant, though they shouldn't start printing playoff tickets just yet. There's not much to do with the starters – send them out and pitch until fatigued; the bullpen, however, will have to be well managed since there are some wild arms out there.

This should be a good year in Kansas. Can they go deep in the playoffs? Unclear, but in a short series the pitching will tell the story.

kansas KOYOTES

Ages of players on the Kansas roster, as of 07/01/2023:

40: O'Day
39: A. Sanchez
38: Scherzer
35: Gomes
34: M. Moore, Moustakas, Smyly
33: S. Gray, Hand, J. Segura, Springer
32: Y. Garcia, Montero, Shreve, C. Taylor
31: K. Hernandez
30: S. Brown, Drury, Ad. Garcia, Moronta
29: Cuas, M. Sanchez, L. Severino, Swanson, T. Taylor, J. Walsh
28: Civale, Z. Jackson, Serven
27: Chang, Chavis, Hall, Kopech, F. Mejia
26: Javier
25: Pena

TQ: **31.5**

2022 calusa INDIANS in review

Wait a minute, that's football.

by Gordon Rodell

2022 in Review
Final Record: 72-90 (3rd, Aaron)

Beware the lollipop of mediocrity; lick it once and you will suck forever.

– Brian Wilson

The 2022 Calusa season was sunk by mediocrity. Players who excellled in 2021 reverted back to the mean in 2022. The strength of the team was supposed to be the starting pitching. It failed and with it went any chance for a successful season. The offense was mediocre and couldn't compensate for the mediocre pitching. The bull pen was mediocre. Anyone detect a common theme here? The glass half-full observation was *"We didn't lose a hundred!"* No, just mediocre enough to lose 90.

What went right?

Albert Pujols. His 18 home runs moved him ahead of the dastardly A-Rod into second place on the TBL career HR list with 641. Jonathan Villar hit 21 home runs good for 72 RBI. In limited playing time, Luis Robert slashed .310/.374/.540. Frankie Montas won 16 games and posted a 3.29 ERA. Rowan Wick threw 20 innings with an ERA of 1.80. Didn't earn him much; one win and one save, but hey, we're trying hard to be positive here.

What went wrong?

Pretty much everything. Freddy had a very unFreddy type season. Yeah, he led the team with 33 home runs and 90 RBI. But a .268 BA, C'MON! Freddy, say it ain't so! It was. Jose Berrios joined a growing list of trade busts. Jack

Montas: 16 wins

Flaherty's ERA was 5.13 and he won only five games. Hardly Ace type numbers. Luis Robert was limited to 296 PA. Mediocre catcher slash line .213/.326/.311. Mediocre team slash line .239/.307/.395. Mediocre team ERA 4.27. Team errors 71. 28-53 road record. What's up with that? That's not even mediocre.

3 Things

1. Hurricane Ian. Swept through SWFL on 28 September. It was a monster storm that devastated Fort Myers Beach, Pine Island, Sanibal Island, and Captiva. It pounded Lee County for 12 hours. Built on Calusa shell mounds, that have weathered hurricanes for centuries, the team complex survived. The 2023 season will go on, albeit without fans in the Shell Mound Stadium which is now just a shell. Get it, a shell mound stadium is just a shell. A little humor there.

2. Gravel? Syndergaard, Flaherty, Robert. All designated as the rocks to build a winning team on. After their rookie seasons, instead of rocks, they turned into gravel. Tough to build on gravel Flaherty and Robert are still young enough to be rocks or they could both end up as Syndergaard. Throw in failed trade acquisitions Andujar and Berrios, who were more like sand than gravel.

3. 2023? DE-FENSE, DE-FENSE! The acquisitions of Maldonado, Semien, Correa, and with Robert or Grisham in CF, Calusa will field solid defense up the middle. We all know defense wins championships. Wait a minute, that's football. Never mind. This year, the Indians will go as far as the big boppers take them. 2023 is all up to Freddy, Rowdy, Hunter, and Albert.

calusa INDIANS

Gordon Rodell (9th year)

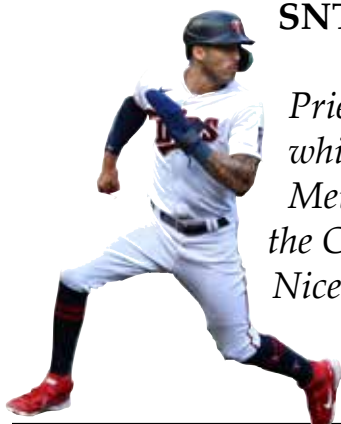*A season-long juggling act.*

The minions are smiling in the group picture that adorns the instructions. Why shouldn't they? Albert has turned in a great final card, and Carlos Correa has landed in the middle of the lineup. The bullpen is stronger, ready to rescue the middling rotation. Freddie Freeman is pretty awesome; Rowdy Tellez is, well, rowdy. Marcus Semien isn't exactly the power source he was a year earlier, but there would be a knife fight in a phone booth if he went on the market.

This is a good team, with a better lineup than the team they're chasing, but their pitching is clearly not as good. The question is whether they can slug their way past. The TQs say no: with no starter above Grade 11, it's going to be tough.

Pitching: 8.5
Solid, but not overpowering.

The staff is, well, solid. There are only a dozen unpleasant starts; the rest are between Grade 7 and Grade 11. There's a knockout reliever, but he only has 24 innings; there's no other closer grade and only 116 innings of setup grade. But they're relentless, and will have lots of innings to support them. There may be a bunch of 7-5 games.

ROTATION. Taijuan Walker (Grade 10 C+15 HR+21, 29 starts) is the best full season starter, with David Peterson's 19 lefty starts (Grade 11 C-34 HR+16) as the best grade in the stack.

The majority of starts will be handled by pitchers who steal 9s. Cal Quantrill (Grade 9 C+22), Zach Eflin (Grade 8 C+34), and Frankie Montas (Grade 8 C+16) go to the hill 72 times; Noah Syndergaard (Grade 7 C+25) will steal those 9s with a little help for 24 more starts. The few left will be handled by Keegan Thompson (Grade 5 C-16 HR-24), who will be better used as a reliever.

Walker: Best starter

Half Moon. The key players are in the middle of their careers, but there's somewhat of a reckoning coming. With no draft in 2024 before round 6, this won't be fixed next year. Entropy may catch up before that.

SNT: Carlos Correa.

Pried from Brobdingnag while he was slated to be the Mets' 3B, he's a key man in the Calusa offense and defense. Nice addition to the Indians' roster! (With lots of extra !!!s!)

Turnover Rate: 45%

Arrived: Jake Burger, Adam Cimber, Carlos Correa, Kyle Finnegan, Jason Foley, T.J. Friedl, Cooper Hummel, Jose Leclerc, Martin Maldonado, James McCann, Marcus Semien, Keegan Thompson.

Departed: Miguel Andujar, Alex Colome, Sam Coonrod, Jack Flaherty, Josh Fleming, Jose Iglesias, Andrew Knizner, Yusmeiro Petit, Domingo Tapia, Jonathan Villar, Rowan Wick.

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BULLPEN. The top reliever is the hard-throwing Peter Fairbanks (Grade 24* C+42 HR+44); he has only 24 innings. He'll be joined by Thompson as a Grade 26* for 37 more, but that luminary will be in the rotation for about a third of the year.

Doval: Key in the bullpen

The real key in the bullpen is Camilo Doval (Grade 15* C-31 HR+36, 68 innings). He doesn't have a closer grade but will be the go-to guy in critical situations. He'll have some help from Jose LeClerc (Grade 16* C-35 HR+14, 48 innings).

After these guys, there is a wave of middle relievers that will start appearing as soon as the starters fatigue. Kyle Finnegan (Grade 12* HR-14), Adam Cimber (Grade 10* C+35 HR+14), and lefties Brent Suter (Grade 10* HR-14), Joely Rodriguez (Grade 10* C-46 HR+41) and Joe Mantiply (Grade 9* C+51) contribute 315 decent innings.

Will all of this be enough? Unclear. This staff is solid, but not overpowering. If there was any draft left to trade, adding another solid pitcher would be high on the priority list. As it is, what you see is clearly all you get.

Offense: 8.5
Some serious power.

As usual, the offense is led by the great Freddie Freeman (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 4 walks, 16 SBA with a 31 SSN, L-6 R+1). But there's no doubt that the most feel-good story is that of Albert Pujols, who has a great two-thirds of a season (1-1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, L+10 R-8) to walk off into retirement. There's one more power card in the lineup: Rowdy Tellez (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-5). He's a

Pujols: Last hurrah

walking expression of the Three True Outcomes, with only two of them really apparent. He'll platoon with Albert due to shifts.

The middle infield belongs to Marcus Semien (1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, 33 SBA with a 29 SSN) and Carlos Correa (1-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks). Third base is mostly the province of Joey Wendle (3 0s, 10 hits, 15 SBA with a 31 SSN), with some reps for Matt Duffy (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks).

In the outfield, Luis Robert (1-0-0, 11 hits, 14 SBA with a 30 SSN) is a solid contributor; Hunter Renfroe (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks) has some power; Trent Grisham (1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks, 8 SBA with a 35 SSN) will fill some games, as will rookie TJ Friedl (1-3-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42). That guy needs to buy a vowel. Marcell Ozuna (1-5-5, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-9 R+2) is a shadow of his former self.

Catcher is a real sore spot. James McCann (2 0s, 7 hits, 2 walks+42, L-12 R+5), Martin Maldonado (1-0-0, 7 hits, 2 walks+42), and Austin Barnes (1-6, 8 hits, 5 walks) present variety in futility.

This is a lineup that might generate a pile of runs, or could struggle against better pitching. That might make all the difference during the upcoming pennant race.

Defense: 6.5
Good gloves almost everywhere.

The club has more good gloves than it can put into the field at the same time. Freeman (1B5), Semien (2B9) and Correa (SS9) are all at the top of their profession, and Duffy and Wendle are capable at third base (3B4). Behind the plate there are C8s in McCann and Barnes, and a C9 in

Semien: One of the best

Maldonado. He and McCann have Th+1, while Barnes is a Th-3.

In the outfield, Robert, Grisham and Renfroe are all OF3s; Renfroe has an excellent 37 arm. Friedl is an OF2, and Ozuna an OF1.

Danny Mendick is an OF2 and also decent in the infield (2B8, 3B4, SS8), and Wendle is also a 2B8 and an SS8. Tellez is a 1B4, but won't get into the field much at all.

Bench: 2.0
Usage makes this a bit thin.

It will be necessary for Calusa to move the roster around due to missing games, so the bench isn't going to be very deep. There are a few players available beyond that. Danny Mendick (1-4-6, 11 hits, 2 walks, L+5 R-4) is a good pinch-hitter and is fast enough to pinch-run.

Garrett Hampson (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, 14 SBA with a 33 SSN is good for the occasional steal.

Jacob Burger (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, L+11 R-6) should be a decent situational pinch hitter. Cooper Hummel (3 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks, L-6 R+2) has a cool name.

Eeee.

The power is there, the gloves are there.

But there aren't that many hits past the top few bats, the rotation is mediocre, the bullpen is deep but not especially strong. This is likely going to have to be a season-long juggling act.

At the *Annual*, we always express our confidence in managers' ability to draw out the best from their rosters. This isn't unwarranted: TBL has an excellent corps of experienced managers, and we are constantly surprised at how well they do. We used to rate management, but we don't have to anymore. Can Mr. Rodell get these guys to the playoffs? Don't count them out.

calusa INDIANS

Ages of players on the Calusa roster, as of 07/01/2023:

43: Pujols
36: Maldonado
33: Barnes, F. Freeman, Suter, Wendle
32: Cimber, Duffy, Mantiply, Ozuna, Semien
31: Finnegan, Renfroe, Jo. Rodriguez
30: Montas, Syndergaard, T. Walker
29: Eflin, Fairbanks, Leclerc, Mendick
28: Correa, Hampson, Hummel, Quantrill, Tellez, K. Thompson
27: Burger, Foley, Friedl, Paddack, D. Peterson
26: Grisham
25: Doval, Robert

TQ: **25.5**

2022 las vegas GAMBLERS in review

One last bounce.

by Walter Hunt

2022 in Review
Final Record: 55-107 (4th, Aaron)

There were no illusions about what the season was going to look like. As management said in this column last year, "this year the team gets to pay for its investments." 2021 was "going to be The Year" – even though they fell short, they won 108, with a powerful lineup and a strong pitching staff.

The plan: to coast for a year and get ready for a return to respectability. It was not so much a coast as a drag: they were dragged to a 55-107 record. It wasn't completely unexpected, but it was really over the top for the team's opponents. At the end of the day they secured the second position in the draft, and prepared to stock up again. For Paul Harrington, it was going to be yet another Bounce. Unfortunately, he won't have a chance to follow it through – it falls to our newest manager to do so.

Bogaerts: Center

What went right?

Xander Bogaerts had a very good year for a very bad team. He hit 30 homers and drove in 78, and was the center of the lineup. Adam Duvall led with 35 homers, and Pete Alonso contributed 33. Jacob Stallings in part-time play hit .273 with 23 doubles

Caleb Baragar, the short innings closer, managed 10 saves with a 1.16 ERA; Lucas Sims saved 12 to lead the team. Lucas Giolito was the staff ace with a 15-12 record and 253 strikeouts in 227 innings, recording 9 complete games and two shutouts.

What went wrong?

The team struggled on offense, on defense, and on the mound. They slashed .220/.289/.379 as a team, and other than Bogaerts and Stallings, every player hit under .250. Six players struck out more than 100 times. They recorded 119 errors, tied for fifth in the league.

The pitching staff was a nightmare, other than Baragar and Giolito and Tyler Mahle (6-13, but a respectable 3.66 ERA). Adbert Azolay went 7-11, 4.95; rookie Cole Irvin 8-14, 5.58; Zach Plesac 4-13, 6.30; Vladimir Gutierrez 3-12, 7.64.

3 Things

1. Whither go? There's a strong 2024 draft and there's some talent on this roster. It's an article of faith that being in the middle is a disadvantage, but there's a certain satisfaction in being able to compete. So this won't be a repeat of 2022.

2. The big trade. It's going to be at least a year before we know whether Vegas or Warrenton came out on top – but it's quite a splash for new management to deal a top pick like Rutschman and stalwarts like Bogaerts and Giolito, and to pick up Burnes, Turner and Tucker all in one deal – and all before rolling the dice on the first TBL game.

3. Core for success? Can the roster as constructed, with the next draft, be good enough for long term success? With a new manager on board, there's no track record to refer to. We can only wish Rob Skogen luck with the club.

vegas GAMBLERS

Rob Skogen (1st year)

Welcome aboard, Rob.

Can TBL stand two Skogens in its ranks? We'll find out. For the first time in several years we have a new manager in our league, and for the first time we can't wish his predecessor well. The vision will change: it already has – the Big Trade overshadows everything. Trea Turner and Corbin Burnes are both on their third team in three years (shades of Mark McGwire and Roger Clemens!)

Would they be better without the trade? It's unclear; as with so many such exchanges, it will take some time to evaluate that; though of course, in many cases, we'll have completely forgotten about it in a few years' time, since there will be another such. And the *Annual*, you can be sure, will write about it as well.

Pitching: 4.5
Corbin Burnes, and all hands.

Corbin Burnes is one of the best pitchers in baseball, and has been acquired twice (along with Trea Turner) to power pennant chases. He's clearly the best pitcher on this roster as well, but there's no pennant race for him to pitch in: there are a few other decent arms on the staff, but the cupboard is really bare beyond that. It's a bit reminiscent of Carlton and the 1972 Phillies. Scott Barlow is the new Mac Scarce.

ROTATION. Well, you know, Corbin Burnes (Grade 15 C+21) will be fine for 33 starts. Right behind him are Cole Irvin (Grade 8 lefty C+34) and Zach Plesac (Grade 6

Burnes: Also third team
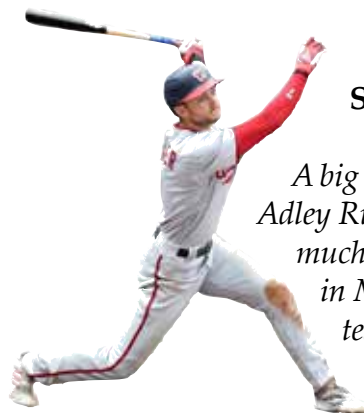
SNT: Trea Turner.

A big part of the return for Adley Rutschman. He's as much in demand in TBL as in MLB: this is his third team in three years.

Turnover Rate: 50%

Arrived: Gabriel Arias, Scott Barlow, Corbin Burnes, Tucker Davidson, Nolan Gorman, Nolan Jones, Carson Kelly, Joel Kuhnel, Justin Lawrence, Elehuris Montero, Nick Nelson, Colin Poche, Nick Pratto, Victor Reyes, Aaron Sanchez, Antonio Senzatela, Kyle Tucker, Trea Turner.

Departed: Caleb Baragar, Xander Bogaerts, Jackie Jr. Bradley, Kris Bryant, Franchy Cordero, Lucas Giolito, Vladimir Gutierrez, J.A. Happ, Elieser Hernandez, Travis Lakins, D.J. Lemahieu, D.J. Peters, Brett Phillips, Roman Quinn, Andrew Stevenson, Justin Williams, Andy Young.

C+16). That's more than half the starts needed. If the season could end in August, they'd probably be all right. But it doesn't: instead, it's turtles – er, Grade 1s – the rest of the way down. Antonio Senzatela, Humberto Castellanos,

Waning Crescent. Some of the key players are in their prime, but the core is narrow. This club may have to undergo a major teardown before they can contend again, which might have been the plan all along.

vegas GAMBLERS

Tucker Davidson, and Aaron Sanchez have to make the rest of the starts. The four of them will have to remain until pounded out, or until the bullpen can be used; instructions suggest that there won't be much more than 3 innings per game available. Expect many long afternoons when they pitch.

BULLPEN. Speaking of which: there just isn't enough of it. Scott Barlow is the best in the pen (Grade 17*, 74 innings); he has a bit over 40 good innings from Grade 13*'s Albert Abreu (C-62) and Adbert Alzolay (C+41 HR+26), both XCs.

The real second pitcher, who may have to pitch late, is Joe Jimenez (Grade 10* C+24 HR+32, 57 innings). Chris Martin (Grade 10* C+54) has 56 useful innings as well.

The rest of the innings belong to a crew of middling grades. Colin Poche (Grade 12* C-21 HR-31) and Tim Hill (Grade 9* C+16 HR+56) pitch from the left side for about 100 innings, and Phil Maton (Grade 10* HR-16) and Nick Nelson (Grade 6* C-51 HR+62) have about 135 from the right. Justin Lawrence (Grade 4*) and Joel Kuhnel (Grade 1*) may get their chances too.

There will be some long teeth-gritting innings for Vegas management during the year.

Offense: 7.5
Team strength.

The acquired bats are very nice indeed. Trea Turner is an offensive force (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks, 30 SBA with a 34 SSN); Kyle Tucker is very solid (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, 29 SBA with a 33 SSN, L-5 R+1). Along with holdover Pete Alonso (1-1-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+42), who has cut down on the strikeouts and improved his average, there's a very solid core to the lineup.
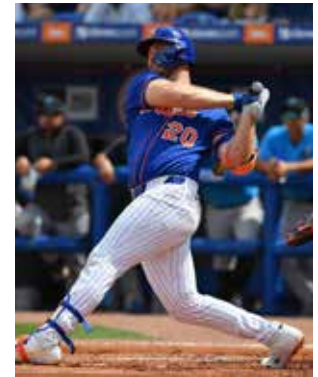
Tucker, Alonso: Power

The second rank can hit a little too. Taylor Ward (1-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks) and Yonathan Daza (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks) will get on base; Victor Reyes (3 0s, 10 hits) has a useful card, as does Ramon Urias (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks). Jon Berti (9 hits, 3 walks, 46 SBA with a 34 SSN) is the biggest stealing threat.

The rest of the lineup has some mix-and-match characteristics to it. Corey Dickerson (3 0s, 10 hits, L-16 R+1) has platoon usage, as does Nolan Jones (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11). Nolan Gorman (1-5-6, 8 hits, 3 walks) will play some games, and the catching duties will be split between Jacob Stallings (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks) and Kyle Higashioka (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks), neither of whom will be particularly frightening.

As with the rotation, though to a lesser extent, there is a distinction between the impact players and the rank and file. This lineup is a team strength, but primarily due to the former rather than the latter.

Defense: 4.0
Capable in places.

The team has some good gloves. Both Stallings (C9 Th-3) and Higashioka (C8 Th+4) are Fielding One; Pete Alonso (1B4) can pick it at first, and Ramon Urias (3B5) has a big time glove at third base. In the middle, Trea Turner is an SS8, and second base is shared between Jon Berti (2B8) and rookie Nolan Gorman (2B7).

In the outfield, Kyle Tucker (OF3, 32 arm) is the defensive standout; everyone else – Ward, Daza, Reyes, and Berti are OF2s with average arms.

This group will catch the ball reliably.

Urias: Big time glove

Bench: 2.0
A few lottery tickets.

What is on the roster is a group of players that might be good in the future. In addition to Jones, Dickerson and Reyes, there is Elehuris Montero (1-6-6-6, 9 hits, L+4 R-5); Nick Pratto (1-0-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks, 10 13s, and Gabriel Arias (2 0s, 7 hits). They are all very young, and may be a part of the next version of the team. There's also Carson Kelly, who came over in the Big Trade. He can hit a little (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks) and catch a little (C7 Th-1).

The bench is not going to play a big part in the game outcomes.

3rd Only because Melrose is engaging in the time-honored tradition of the Bounce, the *Annual* assumes that Vegas will finish ahead of them. It could very well be a difficult season for Rob Skogen's club: like those previously mentioned 1972 Phillies, Corbin Burns could win 20 games and the team could win 60.

Or, "because we play the games," they could go .500 and be in the playoff scrum. The team has some extra stuff in the 2024 draft, and if they're close, management might consider making some moves – maybe some pitching, which they desperately need.

This is a reasonable temptation. At the *Annual*, we don't advise it, as good as it might feel: there's too much to do, and the team is just a little too old. And if you think we're picking on the new guy, please be assured that (1) we don't have anything against the new guy: we wish him success; and (2) the TBL highway is littered with new teams that pushed themselves into contention for a season and then spent two or three years picking up the pieces.

Ages of players on the Vegas roster, as of 07/01/2023:

37: C. Martin
34: C. Dickerson
33: Berti, J. Bradley, Higoshioka, T. Hill, Stallings
31: Aa. Sanchez
30: S. Barlow, P. Maton, T. Turner
28: Alonso, Burnes, Jimenez, C. Kelly, Kuhnel, V. Reyes, Senzatela
29: Daza, Irvin, Poche, Sims, R. Urias, T. Ward
28: Alzolay, Plesac
27: A. Abreu, Davidson, N. Nelson
26: Tucker
25: H. Castellanos, N. Jones
24; E. Montero, Pratto
23: Arias, Gorman

TQ: **19.0**

16
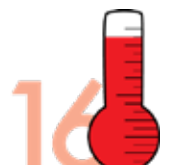
2022 melrose AVENGERS in review

It was a badly constructed offense.

by Mark Freedman

2022 in Review
Final Record: 107-55 (1st, Aaron)

False Hope

We cannot say it was a successful season when expectations were more than a one and done in the playoffs (I used the same words in 2021). The team was severely flawed. It became obvious we could not win against the top 10 teams, and unfortunately those are the ones you need to beat to be successful.

What went right?

107 wins and the division crown. We led the league in runs (919), hits, RBI (894), doubles, HR (281), batting average (.275), OBP (.350) and slugging (.497). We were second in ERA (2.77) primarily driven by the bullpen.

Martinez: Outstanding

J. D. Martinez was outstanding at the plate: 56 doubles, .317-30-108. Matt Olson hit 48 homers, Shohei Ohtani 45 (while going 14-7, 3.27). Marcus Semien hit 38 and drove in 100. Charlie Morton and Marcus Stroman each won 19; Carlos Hernandez won only 3 but had a 1.66 ERA in 11 starts. Five relievers were under 2.00, three more under 2.50.

What went wrong?

There was no World Series bid. While the offense put up impressive numbers, they lacked the ability to hit against good pitching. Left-handers killed a lineup that had no positive shifts; even the right-handed batters had negative LH shifts.

Aside from the shift issues, there were too many guys with 9 hits, even if they had walks and power. It was a badly constructed offense: the overall numbers simply belied how they played on the field – and in the clutch.

3 Things

1. Revamping the team to be more flexible. A massive trade with Cayman sent Melrose favorite Matt Olson to the isle of Whitey. Low on real assets, the trade brought the team a windfall of new resources used to start the reconstruction.

2. What will the 2024 staff look like? Part of the issue with this year was every reliever on the staff turned into a 9 or less. We had only one double digit Grade reliever, and sent him away to Cayman.

The relievers need to rebound. As far as starters go, Kyle Wright blossomed but will it continue and who else will step up to join him and Ohtani, Trevor Rogers? Will Alex Wood rebound and/or Wade Miley to add some depth? How about Johan Oviedo? I feel the names have improved, hopefully the results will.

3. An offensive mulligan. The trade with Cayman gave the Avengers the resources to add Mookie Betts to Ohtani, India and Happ and still have the draft to grab Pasquantino, Vaughn Grissom, and Chris Morel.

Nick Senzel and Matt Vierling will add some of that needed flexibility and if Anthony Rendon and Michael Conforto can bounce back, we'll have more firepower and possible depth to trade.

melrose AVENGERS

Mark Freedman (30th year)

We have certainly been here before.

We have certainly been here before. Melrose practically defines the concept of the Bounce: good team becomes bad team becomes good team, all in the space of two seasons. It scarcely needs elaboration.

This is a bounce, but it's a weird one. Melrose is not universally bad. Indeed, it's a strange move for a rebuilder to trade two #1s for a prime player (Mookie Betts); but it speaks to the fierce inner logic of the Bounce itself: if you're going to be good in a year, lay the groundwork now. Much more so in Melrose than in Brobdingnag, this is about being good – but with Guys You Like. Holding on to Ian Happ, or acquiring Betts, or keeping Shohei Ohtani (not that we find any fault with that!) – are Freedman char-

Turnover Rate: 44%

Arrived: Mookie Betts, Paolo Espino, Vaughn Grissom, Garrett Hill, Drew Hutchison, Jimmy Lambert, Christopher Morel, Steven Okert, Vinnie Pasquantino, Wily Peralta, Manuel Pina, Trevor Rogers, Nick Senzel, Luis Torrens, Matt Vierling, Alex Wood.

Departed: Michael Brantley, Ernie Clement, Austin Gomber, Carlos Hernandez, Dominic Leone, Zach McKinstry, Charlie Morton, Matt Olson, Wandy Peralta, Richard Rodriguez, Marcus Semien, Pedro Severino, Marcus Stroman, Cole Sulser, Blake Treinen, Cole Tucker.

Waxing Crescent. Things change quickly in Melrose. The 107-win team has been superseded by something more tenuous. Next year's draft will build upon what's left, a year further into entropy. Can they do a 1-year bounce?

Ohtani: On the mound

acteristics, more than Auletta ones. This isn't a numbers game – it's a people game. When Melrose contends again, there will be players that Mark Freedman likes on the roster. Given his very solid ability in evaluating talent, there'll certainly be players we like too.

Pitching: 4.5
A long drop from last year.

ROTATION. Shohei Ohtani. This is a once-a-generation talent, on whom no amount of praise constitutes excess. He's a top notch starter (Grade 15 C+16 HR+23, 28 starts). There is another good full season starter to go with him: Kyle Wright (Grade 12 C+13 HR+14, 30 starts.

Here the similarity to a good rotation ends. There are 24 decent starts between Wade Miley (Grade 12 C-16 HR+26), Johan Oviedo (Grade

SNT: Vaughn Grissom.

A perfect selection for a team that wants to add a blue-chip player without making the team significantly better overall. He's one of the youngest players in MLB, and has lots of future potential.

12 HR+14) and Garrett Hill (Grade 11 C-42). To them are added 67 starts of the less competent: Drew Hutchison (Grade 5 C-16); Alex Wood (Grade 4 C+26); and Trevor Rogers (Grade 3 C-26). Paolo Espino is a painful Grade 1 (C+32 HR-35) for about half a season to complete the rotation, other than a few spot starts.

The starters will have to pitch and endure.

BULLPEN. The relief staff is fairly weak. Melrose went out and got a closer after the draft: lefty Steven Okert (Grade 17* C-42, 51 innings). He is supported by three Grade 13*s: Jimmy Lambert (C-51 HR+25), Paolo Espino when not starting, and Wily Peralta (C-62 HR+43). There are 115 innings between them.

The rest of the innings belong to a group of bulk relievers. Andres Machado (Grade 11* C-31, 59 innings), Matt Barnes (Grade 9* C-45 HR+44, 50 innings) and lefties Aaron Loup (Grade 9* HR+34, 59 innings) and Tanner Scott (Grade 9* C-62 HR+32, 63 innings)will pitch middle relief. Taylor Clarke (Grade 6* C+36) and Josh Staumont (Grade 2*) will handle mop duties.

This is a further reason for the starters to endure – there's not much to rescue them.

Offense: 7.5
A mix of good and bad.

We once again mention Shohei Ohtani, who will be in the regular lineup even when not pitching. He's very good (1-4-5-5, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-6). He's joined by the very powerful Mookie Betts (1-0-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, 12 SBA

Ohtani: At the plate

with a 33 SSN), and half a season of 1B of the future Vinnie Pasquantino (1-0-0, 11 hits, 4 walks, L+3) and a full season of Ian Happ (4 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, 13 SBA with a 27 SSN. Chris Morel is decent as well (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-6), with Josh Donaldson (1-6-6, 8 hits, 4 walks) taking up the rest of the slack at third base. J. D. Martinez is still useful (4 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, L+9 R-4) but has to play the field since Ohtani takes up the DH spot.

In the middle infield, Santiago Espinal (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, L+5 R-4) is the regular shortstop, while last year's SNT, Jonathan India (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42) is the regular second baseman. Matt Vierling (0-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) shares first base. Note that Espinal and Vierling play at a spot which is not as good as their regular position, but that's part of the "make do" nature of this year's Melrose lineup.

Betts: Powerful

Catcher is competent for half a season: Reese McGuire (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks), and half a season of Guys, namely Luis Torrens (0, 9 hits, 3 walks) and Curt Casali (1-6, 7 hits, 5 walks, L+6 R-6).

This is truly a mix of good and bad, with most players available only when starting.

Defense: 4.0
Some good news.

Happ and Betts are OF3s, as is Matt Vierling (though he'll largely serve as a 1B3). India is a 2B7, Espinal is a 2B8 (but will be an SS8). Josh Donaldson is a 3B5; Chris Morel is only a 3B3. Behind the plate, McGuire (Th+3) and Torrens (Th+2) are both C7; Casali is a C8 Th-2.

When in the lineup, Pasquantino is only a 1B2, and Martinez is an OF1 with a 30 arm. The other outfielders – Morel, Senzel, and Ortega – are all OF2s. Vaughn Grissom, who may get some reps in middle infield, is a 2B7 and SS7.

There's certainly some good news: the outfield is mostly strong, and Martinez will certainly leave in games where Melrose is leading; the catchers are decent. But this isn't a team built for defense – too many people are playing out of place or where someone is needed to fill a vacancy.

Bench: 2.5
Could rate even higher.

The cupboard is not completely bare. Vaughn Grissom (1-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks+42, L+5 R-4) can be useful as a pinch-hitter; Rafael Ortega (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, L-7, 19 SBA with a 25 SSN) can play defense and run a bit. Nick Senzel (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks) may be useful as a fill in.

There are several platoons, and there's some good versatility and some extra games and plate appearances. It's not a bad bench, though it will have to be used carefully to get good use of it.

4th Though close, the Melrose club probably brings up the rear in the Aaron Division. Vegas isn't quite a powerhouse, and it's possible for Melrose to be able to slip past. It may come down to the pitching.

For the past few years Melrose has been going back and forth: since 2019, it's been 116, 97, 47, and 105 wins, and we think they'll wind up somewhere around 70 wins this year. They're not good enough to contend, but not bad enough to draft first (not that it matters: they don't have their #1 or #2 – they'll draft first at Calusa's #2). For the Avengers to assemble again, they may have to visit IKEA.

melrose AVENGERS

Ages of players on the Melrose roster, as of 07/01/2023:

37: Donaldson
36: Espino, Miley, M. Pina
35: Loup, J. Martinez
34: Casali, W. Peralta
33: M. Barnes, Rendon
32: Hutchison, R. Ortega, A. Wood
31: Okert
30: Betts, Clarke, A. Machado
29: Staumont
28: Espinal, I. Happ, Lambert, McGuire, Ohtani, T. Scott, Senzel
27: G. Hill, Torrens, K. Wright
26: India, Vierling
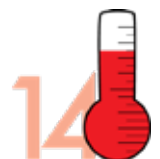25: Oviedo, Pasquantino, Tr. Rogers
24: Morel
22: Grissom

Back to IKEA

TQ: **18.5**

14

Rivals' Rematch

The Mantle has a real pennant race this year involving two, and just possibly three, teams. The two principal contenders are old friends and old rivals, and though we pick one over the other, the outcome is by no means determined. It'll be fun to watch all summer.

The *Annual*'s pick for the pennant is *Vic Vaughn*'s **Columbus Jets**, who have gone out and picked up an ace starter and a lockdown closer. They're coming off a 63-win season, and while some parts of the lineup are a step down from last year (which team doesn't have that problem?) their pitching is substantially improved and the team is much better put together.

The *Rocky Mountain Dragons* are not far off. *Dave Jaskot* won 94 games last year and he has a solid team as well: again, it's the pitching, but they might – emphasis, might – be a step behind the club of his old friend. Both teams have the ability to make some moves, so the jury's still out.

After getting all the way to the final dance (and, for a change, fulfilling the *Annual*'s prediction for their finish), *Clay Beard*'s **Hudson Generals** are looking at rebuilding this year. Mr. Beard hasn't torn it all down, and we are of two minds as to whether he should; the clock is ticking on this version of the team. We don't think they're quite good enough to stay with Columbus and Rocky Mountain, but there isn't a manager in TBL who is better at using what he has to win games.

The **Munich Marauders** have not quite come together, and even though they have had both Verlander and DeGrom on the roster in the last twelve months, neither is here, and the pitching is going to be providing offensive surges for opposing lineups. *Paul Montague* probably has one year to go before his club becomes a youthful juggernaut. For Marauder fans, the wait is almost over (but it's not over yet).

Mantle Division

Jason Adam,
Columbus

1. **Columbus**   **26.0**
2. **Rocky Mountain** **25.5**
3. **Hudson**   **22.5**
4. **Munich**   **19.5**

2022 columbus JETS in review

The youth movement continues.

by Vic Vaughn

2022 in Review
Final Record: 63-99 (3rd, Mantle)

Entering the season, the expectation was that this was a 75-80 win team as both the pitching staff and offense had regressed significantly from 2021. It turned out that expectation was a tad optimistic as we narrowly avoided a 100-loss season, finishing 63-99 and a distant third place in the Mantle Division.

What went right?

Offensively, the team never got going, ending the season with a .224/.298/.385 slash line. There were some individual highlights. Rhys Hoskins was the team offensive MVP putting up a .287/.381/.633 slash line, with a team leading 31 home runs. The ageless Joey Votto contributed 27 homers and a .533 slugging percentage. Harold Ramirez pitched in, hitting .271 and slugging .435.

Hoskins: MVP

On the mound, highlights were hard to come by. Sean Manaea led the team with 10 wins and had 193 strikeouts. Closer J.P. Feyereisen made the most of his limited availability posting 18 saves, paradoxically with a 5.40 ERA, in 47 innings.

What went wrong?

Well, this section will be much easier to write. With several hitters with substantial playing time hitting under .200 and slugging under .400, generating any kind of offense was a real issue. Most notably, our 2022 first-round draft pick Jesus Sanchez had a very disappointing .185/.244/.267 line. He wasn't alone. Eugenio Suarez (.189/.262/.336) and Tucker Barnhart (.176/.263/.243) were just as bad. Facing left-handed starters was a particular challenge as we posted a 15-42 record in those games. We knew the pitching was going to be bad with

around 100 starts of Grade 7 or less but giving up 256 home runs and compiling a 5.04 team ERA was even worse than expected. Aaron Nola had a particularly bad year going 7-15, 6.33, allowing a team high 36 long balls. Tylor Megill was equally awful posting 3-9, 6.36 and giving up 23 homers in only 93 innings. J.T Brubaker completed the unholy triumvirate with a 6-10 record, 5.68 ERA and an amazing 31 home runs (aided largely by his -34 HRA rating) in 117 innings.

We were also very poor defensively finishing the season with 147 errors resulting in 99 unearned runs. The left side of the infield contributed 50 of those miscues (Suarez 27 and Andrus 23).

Despite all that, by winning 63 games, we outperformed our Pythagorean record of 57-105. So, we have that going for us.

3 Things

1. The youth movement continues. With many of our older players in reduced MLB roles their or even retiring, the rebuild continues with first round draft pick Spencer Strider, who we hope will be a major contributor going forward.

2. The pitching staff has leapt forward. Led by Strider, the Jets' 2023 pitching rotation will feature 121 double digit starts supplemented by a legitimate back of the bullpen tandem in Jason Adam (Grade 25* C+21 HR+23) and Feyereisen (Grade 24* C+24 HR+62). We shouldn't lose many leads late in the game.

3. The 2023 outlook is improved. The 2023 Jets line-up is pedestrian, but with offense seeming down across the board, the hope is that the pitching will put us in the mix for a playoff spot.

columbus JETS

Vic Vaughn (17th year)

It will be a juggling act.

Last year the *Annual* noted the consistency of the Jets in finishing between 70 and 88 wins in 11 of his 15 prior seasons. With only eight draft picks and sitting fifth in our annual sweepstakes, Mr. Vaughn saw the best young hitters fall before his first pick and decided this was a year to keep working on his pitching staff. His first two choices, Spencer Strider and Jason Adam, netted an ace starter and a lockdown closer.

In a season when we think there will be no great teams but a few good ones in each division, this appears to have been enough of a boost to get Columbus into contention. The TQ prediction gives Columbus a half point lead over the Rocky Mountain Dragons. Clay's preplay, however, shows Columbus averaging 86 wins, four off the pace set by Rocky Mountain. Meanwhile, that

Turnover Rate: 22%

Arrived: Jason Adam, Matt Bush, Nick Fortes, Zach McKinstry, Penn Murfee, J.P. Sears, Spencer Strider, Trevor Williams.

Departed: Anthony Banda, J. T. Brubaker, Ryne Harper, Heath Hembree, Aaron Hicks, Dom Nunez, J.B. Wendelken, Huascar Ynoa.

SNT: Spencer Strider.

An ace starter, he made it to the fifth pick overall. He's a big part of the chase for the postseason, but is also a superb building block for the future. Columbus is happy to leave the 63-win season behind.
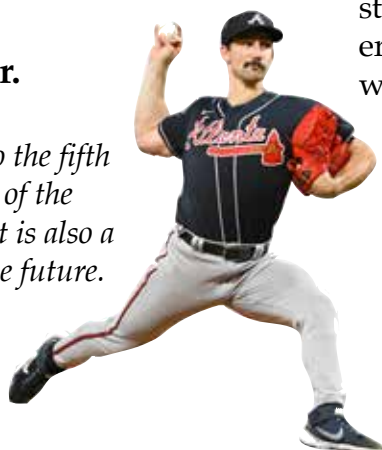
pre-play suggests that the other two divisions in the National Conference are stronger and are more likely to take both wild card spots. The stage is set for an epic battle between these two relatively equal teams as the season begins. Both teams need to play like winning the division is the only way into the post-season—and who knows, maybe that leads to a surprise wild card showing for the loser as these teams challenge themselves to play their best in every game all season long.

Pitching: 12.0
Solid starters, top of bullpen.

The Jets will go as far as their rotation allows them to work past the lack of extensive quality relief late in games as the season progresses. What Columbus has available is very good; it lacks some depth, however, in addition to not having enough left-handed quality. He will be counting on some marginal middlemen to pick up the slack and make his late relievers able to take leads to his good closers. It will be a juggling act, but the *Annual* staff believes Mr. Vaughn is a solid manager who handles a pitching staff well.

ROTATION. The starting rotation is a major strength for the Jets this season, with four starters combining for 110 starts of grade 11 or better, with average to good peripherals. Leading the

Waxing Crescent. Coming off a poor campaign, this is a big jump to respectability: but there is some serious talent on the roster and a 2024 draft. We think they're on the upswing with better days ahead.

pack is Strider (Grade 16 C-13 HR+41) for 20 starts. Jeffrey Springs is a solid number two starter (Grade 13 C+24 HR+14) for 25 more starts. Merrill Kelly (Grade 12 C+13 HR+13) and Aaron Nola (Grade 11 C+42 HR+16) combine for 65 starts in the three and four spots in this talented rotation.

There is not a huge dropoff in the final 52 starts. John Sears (Grade 9 C+11 HR+11) gets 11 starts while Mitch Keller provides great bulk as the real fifth starter (Grade 7 C-14 HR+24). The final 13 starts are handled more than adequately by Trevor Williams (Grade 7 C+23 HR-13) and Tylor Megill (Grade 5 C+16 HR-15). Sean Manaea would start on many teams (Grade 6 C+13 HR-26), but he takes that homerun rating into long relief for 158 innings for the Jets.

BULLPEN. Jason Adam is the primary closer (Grade 25* C+21 HR+23). He is available for 63 innings, and his backup is pretty darn fine as well. J.P. Feyereisen is a solid, if inning limited, counter closer (Grade 24* C+24 HR+62) for 20 innings. The seventh and eighth innings are the weakest part of the core, with 129 innings shared by the three primary setup men: Matt Wisler (Grade 17* C+12 HR+15), Daniel Hudson (Grade 15* C+31 HR+45), and Penn Murfee (Grade 15* C+21 HR+14).

The group of middlemen vary in the weaknesses they put forward. Matt Bush (Grade 14* C+16 HR+32) has the best grade but the weakest homerun peripheral. He will have to be used judiciously to keep the Jets in games in the middle innings. Corey Knebel (Grade 14* C-62 HR+24) will stop some homers, but the walks will test Mr. Vaughn's patience, and Knebel only has 45 IP. XC Matt Boyd augments that a bit

Springs: Solid #2

(Grade 13* C-31 HR+62), with the same strengths and weaknesses, but only for 13 innings. He is also the only lefty in the final three innings of games. Michael Fulmer (Grade 10* C-11 HR+35) will see plenty of action in the seventh inning despite his listing as a fifth and sixth inning guy. Lefties Taylor Rogers (Grade 7* C+22 HR+14) and Manaea are slated for early use in blowouts, but Mr. Vaughn will find good use for Rogers as a LOOGY in the mid and late innings against those bad lefty splits. This bullpen is more than serviceable, but short on top-end quality.

Offense: 7.0
Taken a step or two downward.

This is not a scary team on offense, although it is true in general that offense is weak everywhere in TBL this season.

Columbus has a few nice pieces, but like everyone else, it suffers from holes in key spots. Catching is the

Hoskins: Power and on-base

weakest spot where Tucker Barnhart returns and will platoon with rookie Nick Fortes. Barnhart is weak (6, 8 hits, 3 walks) but has a better glove. Fortes is not as weak (1-6, 8 hits, 3 walks,+42, two 10s) but suffers defensively. The infield looks better. Rhys Hoskins (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks) brings power and on base ability to first base. Andres Gimenez (1-6-6, 11 hits, 2 walks+42) excels at second base. Eugenio Suarez is a bookend to Hoskins on the left side of the infield (1-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks) as he comes back from a previous bad season. Elvis Andrus seems to have found the Fountain of Youth as he turns 35 this season (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks). On paper, it is not too bad an infield.

Gurriel: Star

The outfield, however, must utilize platoons to be playable this season. Harold Ramirez (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks+42, L+5 R-4) shares time with LaMonte Wade (1-6, 7 hits, 4 walks+42, L-14 R+2) share left field, while Dylan Carlson (0-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+6 R-4) and Jesus Sanchez (1-4-5, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-18 R+2) share center. Lourdes Gurriel is the everyday outfield star on this roster (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks). Hoskins is the only S runner, but Gimenez and Andrus are the only stolen base threats in the daily lineup. The offense is serviceable, but it does not scare other teams.

Defense: 5.0
Consistent good defense.

Gimenez: Exceptional

Barnhart (C9), Gimenez (2B9), Wade, Carlson, and Gurriel (all OF3) are exceptional. Fortes is only a C7, however, while Hoskins (1B3), Suarez (3B4) and Andrus (SS8) are only average, as are outfielders Ramirez and Sanchez (both OF2).

There are excellent defensive options on the bench, moreover, to fill those holes late in games the Jets lead.

Bench: 2.0
Will help a bit.

Joey Votto (1B4) and Aaron Hicks (OF3) will see action solely for defensive purposes. Jorge Mateo makes a nice replacement for Andrus (as an SS9) who can also steal a base and hit with a bit of power, which is also true with Kevin Kiermaier (OF3). Ketel Marte (2B7) brings a little pop off the bench, but his defensive keeps him on the bench. Jorge Soler (1-0-0) is available for a big fly.

1st

Mr. Vaughn has a good team here with some flaws, as do many of the other good teams in TBL this season. None of those flaws are fatal, but like other managers, he will have to play hard to get the best out of his bench and bullpen to create some wins on his way to a Mantle Division championship. It will be fun to watch the Jets and the Dragons fight back and forth for first place in this division this summer.

The Jets are in the First Quarter, a team still on its way up. The past two years have addressed pitching, and in the next phase, some aging hitters will have to be replaced, with further development for the young guys already here.

columbus JETS

Ages of players on the Columbus roster, as of 07/01/2023:

39: Votto
37: Bush
36: Hudson
34: Andrus, M. Kelly
33: A. Hicks, Kiermaier
32: Barnhart, Boyd, Ta. Rogers
31: Adam, Knebel, Manaea, Soler, E. Suarez, T. Williams
30: Feyereisen, Fulmer, Hoskins, A. Nola, Springs, Wisler
29: L. Gurriel, K. Marte, Murfee, L. Wade
28: J. Mateo, H. Ramirez
27: Keller, Megill, Sears
26: Fortes
25: J. Sanchez
24: Carlson, A. Gimenez, Strider

TQ: **26.0**

2022 rocky mountain DRAGONS in review

2023 will be another competitive year.

by Dave Jaskot

2022 in Review
Final Record: 94-68 (2nd, Mantle)

The Dragons finished their season as a Mantle Division wildcard team, in second place in the Mantle Division. Their won-loss record of 94-68 was very acceptable as was their 3.66 ERA. As a team still in the middle of a rebuild, a wildcard finish was expected and the season long battle with Hudson for first place was a very enjoyable bonus.

What went right?

Much went well in 2022. The Dragons finished with a 94-68 record, second only to Hudson. Seven teams finished with a better record in TBL. Starters Anthony DeSclafani and Julio Urias led the pitching staff with 15 and 12 wins with Eric Lauer posting 12. Two relievers, Duffey and Littell each won 9 games out of the bullpen. Urias led the starters with a 3.26 ERA with DeSclafani a close second at 3.34. McHugh led the staff with 25 saves. Duffey had the low relief ERA of 1.31 over his 62 innings pitched.

DeSclefani: 15 wins, 3.34

The offense produced only 770 runs which proves out the Dragons' pitchers were the reason for the team's fine finish. The team hit 229 HR, led by Baez with 35, Franmil Reyes with 34 and four others with 25. The team finished with a .237/.310/.412 line. Team MVP was Brandon Lowe with a .271 average, 29 HR, 77 RBI, 169 hits and 99 runs scored. Part time OF Bryan De La Cruz led the team with a .308 average over 227 PA.

What went wrong?

Although 2022 was a good season for the Dragons, it was hoped that once we reached the playoffs as a wild card, we could sneak our way into the World Series. That was not the case. Statistically Rocky Mountain's poor offense with a team BA of .237 was not able to produce against the higher-graded pitchers which we faced in the first playoff round series against the hated Grand Cayman squad. The team offence also hit into 116 double plays. The Dragons struck out 1,654 times compared to drawing 539 walks. With a better OBA than .310, the runs scored could have increased significantly and perhaps we could have advanced deeper into the playoffs.

3 Things

1. 2023 will be another competitive year for the Dragons, led by their superior starting trio of Zac Gallen and Julio Urias (Grade 16) and Framber Valdez (Grade 13) for 91 starts. Several of the newly drafted players will contribute for the push to win the Mantle. Nothing less than a wild card finish is expected this year. The draft concentrated on youth and best available including future potential.

2. Newly acquired hitters. Bryant, Donovan, Jose Miranda, Parades and Yepez will join the regulars such as Edman, Dozier, De La Cruz, Lowe, Raleigh and Stephenson for the 2023 campaign. Projections for the 2023 offense are for a slash line of .240/.325/.425.

3. Starting pitching a strength. Several pitchers had impressive seasons as noted above. Lauer and Smeltzer are average, but there are 18 Grade 1 starts. Relievers are an average staff. If the Dragons can score a few more runs and not have to overuse the bullpen, a trip to the playoffs should become a reality once again.

rocky mountain DRAGONS

Dave Jaskot (12th year)

With help from the starters, this could work out.

Coming off a strong showing last season, the *Annual* once again picks the Dragons to finish second, this time to the pesky Columbus Jets. The margin is paper thin, though, with TQ placing the Dragons behind the Jets by half a point. Clay's preplay, meanwhile, has the Dragons averaging four wins more per season than the Jets; your guess as to how this will play out is as good as ours. As the Hudson Generals take a step backward this year, these two longtime Mantle rivals will duke it out all year.

Pitching: 10.0
## As far as the arms take them.

The Dragons like their offensive players and once again drafted a preponderance of hitters this winter. Time will tell if Mr. Jaskot should

Turnover Rate: 42%

Arrived: Anthony Bass, Kris Bryant, Brock Burke, Brendan Donovan, Chad Kuhl, Josh Lowe, Nick Martinez, Jose Miranda, Isaac Paredes, Edwin Rios, Devin Smeltzer, Jack Suwinski, Framber Valdez, Steven Wilson, Juan Yepez.

Departed: Kris Bubic, Tyler Duffey, Joey Gallo, Deolis Guerra, Carter Kieboom, Zack Littell, Mike Minor, Anthony Misiewicz, Hansel Robles, Gary Sanchez,

SNT: Framber Valdez.
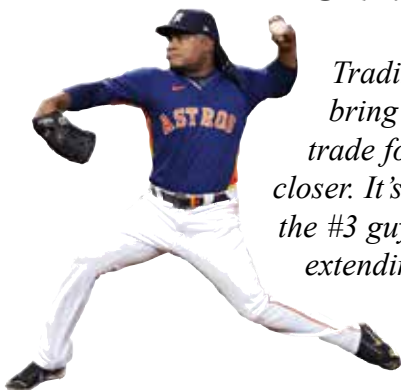
Trading for Valdez helped bring about Columbus' trade for a top starter and big closer. It's a Mantle thing. He's the #3 guy here in the Rockies, extending their fine rotation.

have zeroed in a little more on relief help in a year when there were plenty of good relievers with good usage availabe. The rotation has a solid top three, a typical fourth starter, and then that fifth starting spot fills up with some scary choices. Will the bullpen have enough innings to make this a winning combination? Don't count out a manager who last season made the jump from last to second with 90 plus wins.

ROTATION. Rocky Mountain has assembled a starting crew that matches the Jets' top four. The back end of his rotation, however, is noticeably weaker and might not have quite enough bullpen depth to make up for that shortfall over an entire season. Zac Gallen (Grade 16 C+16 HR+24) and Julio Urias (Grade 16 C+23 HR-14) are a solid one, two, and Valdez (Grade 13 HR+41) is a great #3. Each has 31 starts. Eric Lauer (Grade 11 C-21 HR-24) is available 29 times, but he will have Dragon fans worried about short starts due to those weak peripherals. Devin Smeltzer (Grade 9

Gallen, Lauer: One, two

Half Moon. The team is growing in talent, but it isn't young either. Unlike some of the current contenders, they're not in hock; a good 2023 in MLB could make them a dominant team next year.

rocky mountain DRAGONS

C+16 HR-22) and Nick Martinez (Grade 7 C-22 HR-14) fill the fifth spot satisfactorily, but the final two starters hit the mound 18 times too often. Anthony DeSclafani (Grade 1 C+35 HR-25) and Mike Minor (Grade 1 HR-42) will struggle to make it past three innings on a regular basis. The rotation is a step below that of the Jets; the preplay suggests this is not a big deal, but the TQ speaks with a different mind.

BULLPEN. While there is no top end similar to that in Columbus, the big three of Anthony Bass (Grade 19* C+14 HR+23), Brock Burke (Grade 17* C+14), and Tyler Matzek (Grade 17* C-62 HR+33) will provide 196 good late innings in close games.

There are only five more relievers, totaling 262 innings, however, and given the starting limitations, this will be a bumpy ride. Steven Wilson (Grade 16* C-23) and Jose Quijada (Grade 15* C-33) are wild, while Collin McHugh (Grade 14* C+32 HR+31) and Jake Woodford (Grade 12* C+26 HR+55) are not but have slightly lower grades. Dennis Santana (Grade 7* C-36 HR+52) provides only 57 innings in a mop up role that will be taxed early and often. Mr. Jaskot uses his bullpen well, and with help from his ace starters, this could work out.

Offense: 8.5
## They will score some runs.

In a year when offense is at a premium in TBL, Rocky Mountain has assembled a strong offense with no big names but many good hitters at his disposal. At catcher are Cal Raleigh (1-1-5-6, 7 hits, 3 walks) and game limited Tyler

Bass: Closer

Stephenson (1-6-6, 12 hits, 2 walks). Nate Lowe excels at first base (1-5-6, 11 hits, 3 walks). The threesome of Isaac Paredes (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks), Tommy Edman (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks), and Javy Baez (1-4-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) man second and short, with Paredes and Baez' shifts offsetting. Ryan McMahon (1-0-0, 9 hits) had a down year at third, but he is capably supported by rookie Jose Miranda (1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+42).

Brendan Donovan (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42) and game limited Kris Bryant (1-0-0-0, 11 hits) balance each other in left field. Michael A. Taylor is adequate in center (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 14s), and Bryan de la Cruz (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, L-11 R+2) complements Hunter Dozier in right (3 0s, 9 hits, L+2 R-2). While the outfield is a bit short offensively, there are some bench players who can provide power when it is needed in crucial game situations.
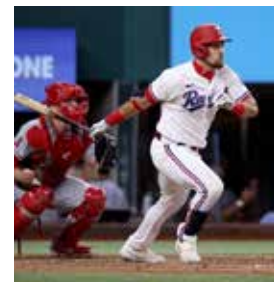
Lowe: Excels

Defense: 4.0
Outfield defense a bit short.

The infield stacks up nicely except at first base. Stephenson and Raleigh are both C8 with average arms. Lowe (1B3) will sit late when Brandon Belt (1B4) provides a small upgrade. Paredes (2B8. 3B4, 1B3) has good versatility, as does Edman (2B9, SS9, OF2). Baez tops out at SS8 in a down year defensively. McMahon (3B5) starts most games as of press time, but the Dragons might switch to Miranda (3B4) to get the better hitter more at bats.

Donovan is only an OF2, but he is a super sub on defense (2B7, 3B4, 1B3, SS7). Taylor is the only OF3.

Bench: 3.0
Some helpful parts.

There are no monster cards on the bench, but there is a little bit of everything from Belt's defense at first to some running speed in the persons of Sam Hilliard and Josh Lowe. If the boys from Rocky Mountain need some pop, Edwin Rios (1-1-5) is a great option, and if base hits are needed Juan Yepez raises his hand and steps up (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks). Jack Suwinski (1-5-5) and Franmil Reyes (1-0-0) in a down year are also ready to go. All in all, the bench is a strength for the Dragons.

2nd There is an ongoing debate in TBL about the merits of pitching and hitting. Some managers, well, make that just the Guru in the tundra of the Midwest, believe you should build that pitching staff first and find your hitting where you can. Prevent runs and score enough to win consistently.

The rest of the league generally argues it is better to find hitters first, pound teams into submission, and find pitching when you can. The Dragons tried to split the difference this winter. Management traded for an ace starter and the best reliever available in the market. Then they used the draft to compensate for hitters in down years or with bad shifts.

Our predictive sources can't seem to agree if this was the proper approach, but they *do* agree that this is a strong team in a year where there are few great teams. The Dragons will need to hit and play good enough defense to overcome some weak starting and a lack of lock down relief and bullpen length. There are lots of ways to win in TBL and there is no reason a manager as capable as Mr. Jaskot won't find a way to win with this team, this year.

The Dragons have had two solid years of rebuilding. There is still a bit of work to do, so the club is still in Half Moon and on the way up. There is a great combination of youthful hitting and pitching. Next year could well find the Dragons entering Full Moon status.

Ages of players on the Rocky Mountain roster, as of 07/01/2023:

36: McHugh
35: Bass, Belt, Minor
33: DeSclafani
32: N. Martinez, Matzek, M. Taylor
31: Bryant, Dozier
30: Baez
29: Hilliard, Rios, F. Valdez
28: Edman, Lauer, McMahon, S. Wilson
27: Gallen, N. Lowe, Quijada, F. Reyes, D. Santana, Smeltzer
26: Burke, De La Cruz, Donovan, Raleigh, T. Stephenson, J. Urias, Woodford
25: J. Lowe, Miranda, Yepez
24: Paredes, Suwinski

rocky mountain DRAGONS

TQ: **25.5**

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2022 hudson GENERALS in review

In that respect, nothing has changed.

by Clay Beard

2022 in Review
Final Record: 102-60 (1st, Mantle)

In November, we expected to have a dramatic showdown with Rocky Mountain: but it never happened. Hudson went 15-5, with a slash line of .290/.362/.547, featuring 11 Max Muncy homers. The Dragons hit a home slump and Hudson cruised to a 102-win season.

Then, to our surprise, we got past the Melrose club in 6 games and Warrenton in 5, setting up a World Series turn against Brobdingnag.

What went right?

The season slash was .266/.347/.470. Four players had over 90 RBI. Most of the team's hitters exceeded their MLB performance. I think I faced more low grade pitching than most seasons.
There were many highlights: Bryan Reynolds was the offensive leader at .312/.382/.540 with 31 HR, 116 runs; Max Muncy hit 39 HR, with 101 RBI; C.J. Cron hit .300 with 71 extra base hits and tied a team record with 24 HBP. Darin Ruf hit 24 HR, and a bunch of platoon players overperformed.

Reynolds: Offensive leader

AOn the mound we had a genuine ace. Freddy Peralta went 20-5, 2.78, including a team record 16 straight wins. Our first rounder Chris Flexen was solid at 15-6, 3.33. Other starters were the beneficiaries of all that offense and Josh Hader had 35 saves at the end of the pen.

What went wrong?

During the regular season, not much. The club set a team record for strikeouts with 1,496, but that's 2022 talking. Four players had more than 100, and four more had more than 90. The low end starters had good records – Kevin Gausman won 15 with a 4.09 ERA, Pablo Lopez went 13-3, 4.34; and even Kolby Allard had an 8-4 reocrd (and a 5.67 ERA).

Still, the elephant in the room for 'What Went Wrong' was the World Series after Game 3. During the next four games, Hudson had numerous opportunities to take home the trophy, including having Brobdingnag down to its last three outs and Josh Hader on the mound. Somehow it slipped away.

3 Things

1. No teardown. It's not really in our nature to dive for the bottom. There's still a team here, with some pitching (likely not enough), some offensive talent (with some holes), and a full draft in 2024. Time to hold on.

2. Age is an issue. Some of the key players from the last several years are getting near the end of their careers. Riley Greene is the first player of many who will help form Hudson's future.

3. 26 guys. As always, Hudson will use the entire roster, and make the best of what the season presents. In that respect, nothing has changed.

hudson GENERALS

Clay Beard (39th year); Hall of Famer

Clay is a masterful fixer-upper.

Mr. Beard has been on a fabulous run with his Generals. He has been over .500 in six of the previous eight years and has gone to the World Series twice, losing both times in an agonizing seven game series. This season his boys take a step backward as his team starts to show its age.

In typical Hudson fashion, there has been no tear-down. Instead, the option is to fix things on the fly and hope for the best. While Columbus and Rocky Mountain surpass the Generals both in total TQ scores and in the preplay, the Generals will still be a force to contend with. In the preplay, Rocky Mountain averaged 90 wins, Columbus 86, and Hudson 80. At the *Annual* we believe that quality of managerial decision-making is an important intangible, and Mr. Beard is not in the TBL Hall of Fame just for his vast contributions to the administration of the league.

We're betting that he will be over .500 again and make a good run at the two teams expected to excel in the Mantle this season. This looks like a two-way division race on paper, but the Generals will not go away without making a final stand.

Pitching: 9.0
Weaker in 2023.

What a difference a season makes. Pitching was a strength for the Generals last season with

Third Quarter. Maybe not a contender this year: but we've been wrong before. Never count out the Hudson club. Still, there's likely a rebuild on the horizon – the team is aging and needs some good drafts.

two ace starters and a strong top end in the late innings. This year it will be a struggle for the Hall of Fame manager to pull things together on a consistent basis. There are only 163 starts, and many of those feature pitchers with weak peripherals. The bullpen is deep but wild and will need great care as the season wears on. The head General, though, should never be counted out.

ROTATION. There are only 65 starts of double-digit grade in Hudson this year. Freddy Peralta (Grade 14 C-14 HR+26) and Andrew Heaney (Grade 13


Peralta: Still the top starter

Turnover Rate: 28%

Arrived: Bryan Abreu, Bryan Baker, Tyler Freeman, Riley Greene, Ha-Seong Kim, Dylan Lee, Tucupita Marcano, Josh Smith, Blake Taylor, Josh Winckowski.

Departed: Hanser Alberto, Kolby Allard, Sean Doolittle, Freddy Galvis, Victor Gonzalez, Didi Gregorius, Brad Miller, Jose Quintana, Darin Ruf, Abraham Toro.

SNT: Riley Greene.

Greene should slot in well with the other outfielders – McCutchen, Pollock, and Grichuk – that are at the center of the Hudson offense. As the old timers play to their final hurrahs, Greene helps pick up the slack.
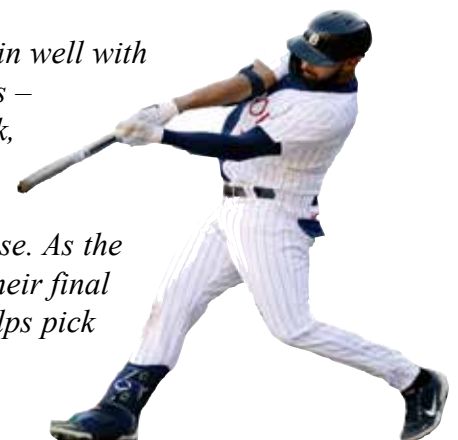
C+22 HR-32) take the top rotation spot for a combined 31 of those starts. Pablo Lopez is the number two starter (Grade 10 C+14 HR-0) for 32 starts. Reliever Bryan Baker (Grade 11 C-15 HR+45 F6) picks up the final two starts as an opener level pitcher.

The next four starters are a grab bag of similar arms. Kevin Gausman starts most often (Grade 7 C+36 HR+24, 31 starts). Tyler Wells (Grade 9 C+16 HR-21), Chris Flexen (Grade 9 C-12 HR-0), and Mike Clevinger (Grade 9 C+13 HR-24) combine for the final 67 starts. The Generals will need a little luck and will have to go to the pen often to hold leads as they vie with the Jets and Dragons.

BULLPEN. Hudson has a deep bullpen, although its fatal flaw could be the ragged control peripherals. It grades out well and most of the arms keep the ball in the park. With proper management, however, this pitching staff could surprise teams. Nick Sandlin is the closer (Grade 19* C-52 HR+44), augmented by the almost equally wild Bryan Abreu (Grade 17* C-35 HR+52) and providing 104 innings. Raisel Iglesias (Grade 15* C+26 HR+24) and Dylan Lee (Grade 15* C+34 HR+15) add 112 innings in the middle to bridge from the starters to the closer tag team. Andrew Wantz (Grade 15* C-33 HR-23) will harken back to how Earl Weaver felt when Don Stanhouse toed the rubber for the O's back in the day. XC Jake Cousins chips in only 13 innings this season (Grade 13 C-52 HR+32).

The bottom half of the staff can be mixed and matched to get to the better options. Baker has 66 innings in relief (Grade 11*), and Mychal Givens adds 60 more (Grade 11*). Josh Hader tumbles from his lofty grade 30 last year (Grade 8* C-25 HR-16) and best serves as an early inning loogy. Nick Vespi will provide some

early lefty help as well (Grade 6* C+21 HR-31) but will throw some big flies.

Some lower end starters will fill in bulk innings. While it is not the strongest bullpen in the league, a manager who uses his entire 26-man roster in every game will maximize the pen's effectiveness.

Offense: 7.0
The batting decline hits Hudson too.

Everyone is likely to struggle offensively this season in TBL. Hudson hitters are not immune to this factor as his TQ numbers are down as well. His catchers, however, are better than most. Sean Murphy (1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks+42) and Jonah Heim (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks) combine some pop with good defense on a daily basis. C. J. Cron rakes as the first sacker (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks). Jake Cronenworth suffers from a down year (3 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks+42), but he is a behemoth in comparison to third sacker Max Muncy (1-0-0, 7 hits, 6 walks), who has somehow become a Bearded Lady. Brian Anderson will also get some playing time at third (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+42). Ha-Seong Kim provides great defense and some hitting chops this season (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks).

Reynolds: Every day

The outfield is a mish mash of playing time according to the instructions. Reynolds plays every day in right field (1-4-5, 9 hits, 2 walks+42). Grichuk (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks), McCutchen (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks) and Greene (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks) share left, and Greene shares center with Pollock (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks). J. D. Davis is the primary DH (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks).

It's got some bats, but it'll take a skilled manager to get the most out of them.

Defense: 4.0
Infield picks; outfield suspect.

The infield is more than adequate. Murphy (C9) and Heim (C8) are solid, although both have negative arms. Cron (1B4), Cronenworth (2B8), Kim (SS9) and Muncy-Anderson tandem (3B4) stack up nicely. Pollock is the only OF3, and Reynolds-Grichuk are both OF2. Greene (OF2, 30) has a subpar arm, and McCutchen is now an OF1 regularly. It's a solid defense, but not a great one.

Cronenworth: Fielding One

Bench: 2.5
Not a normal Hudson bench.

Super sub Luis Guillorme (3B4, 2B8, SS7, 2 0s, 4 wa;ls) is also still an on base machine. Marcano provides some speed but not much in the stolen base area. Tyler Freeman has limited plate appearances and weak defense to contribute this season, another project for the future like Marcano.

3rd The *Annual* staff knows better than to count Hudson out of this season's Mantle Division race. While the Generals have taken a step back from their glory days, they are still capable of winning on any given day. They will push Columbus and Rocky Mountain to play their best to surpass them in the division. Mr. Beard will find ways to maximize his monthly roster to wring every win possible out of his team. We think he's a few players short of any guarantees for playoff positioning in 2023, but the Generals should not be taken lightly by any of their TBL opponents.

For the future, plenty of questions remain. Age is a factor in the outfield as McCutchen

hudson GENERALS

and Pollock are getting ancient, and Grichuk is in his middle age years. The success the Generals have maintained over the past eight years means that Clay has been patching around the edges for a while with lower draft positions. The Generals appear to be in the Third Quarter, ready to step down for a bit as a more thorough rebuild will have to occur. Clay is a masterful fixer-upper, however, so even this is a close call at present. Nothing surprises us here at the office when our esteemed Hall of Famer works his magic so often and so well.

Still has the magic.

TQ: **22.5**

2022 munich MARAUDERS in review

Content to wait, you must be.

by Paul Montague

2022 in Review
Final Record: 58-104 (3rd, Mantle)

"Low expectations, low results. Simple." That's how the *Annual*'s Munich Year in Review for 2021 led off – and it still applies – but with an upbeat tone this time. Certainly, nobody could look at the 2022 roster and expect it to win a lot of games. But with a bit of a squint, one could perhaps see a turnaround coming. Especially as there was a supremely valuable trade target in Jacob deGrom, so a lot hinged on what could be done with him.

What went right?

Jose Altuve had himself a season. He led the team in all three triple-slash categories, with a .275/.348/.507 line; also in home runs (36), RBI (83), hits (164), runs (87), games and at bats. The team had one of its best power seasons, socking 231 homers, not bad for a 100+loss season. Six hitters hit more than 20 dingers, and another three were in double digits.

Altuve: Had a season

On the pitching side… Well, let's just move on. Suffice it to say, even the presence of a Grade 29 starter for part of the season couldn't rescue this walking sieve collection.

But *off* the field, now, that's a different story! DeGrom was turned into Justin Verlander and a couple front-end draft picks during the mid-season trading period. Then in the off-season, Verlander and a few of the aging hitters transmogrified into even more prime picks in the 2023 and 2024 drafts. It remains to be seen what those picks will be able to do on the field in coming years – but there is tangible evidence of a turn-around on the way.

What went wrong?

The pitching. Bad as it was in 2021, it got even worse. A team ERA of 5.07, and 869 runs given up (approaching a 10% increase over the year before). That'll negate a bunch of home runs on the offensive side. (One oddity – there were several *very* innocuous relievers used who had to be used, and they managed somehow to win 10 games and save 9 between them.) As a result of the general pitching malaise, avoiding 100 losses wasn't possible.

But ... the losing wasn't enough to finish in the bottom two, thus missing out on the two top prizes in the rookie draft. Instead of Adley Rutschman, the team got Bobby Witt – certainly a nice consolation prize, of course.

3 Things

1. Yout'! TBL touts wrote that the Munich roster was the youngest in the league – and that was *before* the 2023 draft, which yielded no fewer than nine rookies age 24 or under. There are only three hitters and two pitchers age 30 or older on the Marauders' roster. Of those, only Anthony Rizzo (and perhaps Kyle Hendricks) are expected to be major contributors to Munich's future.

2. Speed! The Marauders are traditionally a power/on-base mode of offense. But, with the drafting of the likes of Witt, Corbin Carroll, and Alek Thomas, to go with some previous speedy rookies, perhaps that is changing. Munich will start flexing its (leg) muscles on the base paths in 2023, and perhaps even moreso in the future.

3. Anticipation! Fans in Bavaria and beyond are beginning to dream again, dream of pennants and a fourth TBL championship in the foreseeable future. But, they are also reminding each other of the old German adage "Zählen Sie Ihre Hühner nicht, bevor sie schlüpfen" (in English, "don't count your chickens before they hatch"). Or, as the sage Yoda might put it, "content to wait, you must be".

munich MARAUDERS

Paul Montague (40th year); Hall of Famer

This is going to be good, very, very, very good…

We have seen this at the *Annual* before, TBL friends. Hall of Fame manager Paul Montague tears down an aging team by finding a win at all costs opponent (Midwest's Guru-V-Mart combo this time around) and trading for a huge cache of high ranked draft picks. Take the losing seasons in stride (two years so far, one more to go), and then crank out several seasons of greatness with a young corps of players that are the pride of TBL. Welcome to what should be the final bad year on this cycle for the Marauders. Carroll, Witt, Spencer Torkelson, Nick Lodolo, Seiya Suzuki, Roansy Contreras, Alek Thomas, four possible relievers for the future, and two number ones, three number twos, and high placed picks the rest of the way in the 2024 draft. Yep, Paul knows how to do this right!

Pitching: 6.0
Not this year – but what names!

This is not a staff to measure for this year. If we did, however, we would say the starting is good with great upside. The bullpen is horrible, but also with good upside. This is a team that is not going to fare well in the pitching rich TBL of 2023. But look out for the years that follow and remember that Mr. Montague still has five top end picks awaiting in the next draft. Oh my!

Waxing Crescent. Almost as much in the bank as the Barbarians, the current roster will be even younger and even more full of talent at this time next year. They could be a serious contender in 2025 or even 2024.

SNT:
Corbin Carroll.

What's not to like about a speedy outfielder who has pop and plays great defense? Did we mention that he's only 23?

Turnover Rate: 44%

Arrived: Matt Brash, Corbin Carroll, Roansy Contreras, Matt Festa, Yasmani Grandal, Carlos Hernandez, Sam Huff, Brandon Hughes, Nick Lodolo, Glenn Otto, Seiya Suzuki, Alek Thomas, Spencer Torkelson, Rowan Wick, Bobby Witt, Jr., Alex Young.

Departed: Jose Altuve, Willson Contreras, Lewin Diaz, Buck Farmer, Chi Chi Gonzalez, Nick Gordon, Spencer Howard, Ha-Seong Kim, Matt Peacock, Manuel Rodriguez, Kyle Schwarber, Andrelton Simmons, Wander Suero, Yoshi Tsutsugo, Justin Verlander, Luke Weaver.

Gilbert, Webb: Logans

ROTATION. The Marauders already have the top two aces in place in the Double Logan collection—Mr. Gilbert (Grade 10 C+22 HR +15) and Mr. Webb (Grade 11 C+22 HR+36). They are on the precipice of many years of ace status to come. There are three more youngsters coming up who could round out a fantastic five-man rotation quickly. Josiah Gray (Grade 8 C-32 HR-51) is the biggest project, needing to improve

munich MARAUDERS

his command but with tremendous upside. Nick Lodolo (Grade 11 C-16) is 25 and the number one starter in Cincinnati after the Reds traded away their more mature aces last season. Roansy Contreras (Grade 11 C-23 HR-13) is the future ace of a young Pirate staff at age 24. Wowza!

Veteran Kyle Hendricks (Grade 6 C+15 HR-25) and Ian Anderson (Grade 6 HR+15) round out the starters for this season. Glenn Otto would start on many teams (Grade 9 C-35 HR-16) but takes the bulk relief role for the Marauders this season…

BULLPEN. …and that is necessary, of course, because the bullpen is young and a work in progress this season. Brandon Hughes will close out games that can be won (Grade 15* HR-33) despite that shaky homerun peripheral. Pitching in the middle innings is not a whole lot better this season, but remember, this is an upside decision completely by Mr. Montague. Michael Rucker (Grade 10* C-15 HR-15), Matt Festa (Grade 11* HR-32), and Matt Brash (Grade 9* C-62 HR+41) all are future bets who will get their chances to audition for larger roles in future seasons. Otto provides 136 innings on a semi-regular basis all season. And then there are the truly horrible options in Duane Underwood (Grade 6* C-23 HR+61), Carlos Hernandez (Grade 4* C-44), and Rowan Wick (Grade 4* C-23) who have all had some past success and cannot be counted out in the future. This, however, is not quite "Back to the Future" time, and this bullpen will struggle to keep the Marauders in games. The upside? Better draft placement for those five picks in the first two rounds next season. The "Munich Plan", as we all know well after last seeing it in 2013, when a five-year drought resulted in successive seasons winning 84, 103, 113, 92, 80, 100, and 101 games. Yeah, Paul knows what he is doing.

Offense: 6.5
Built for the future.

Once again, this year is not the one that counts. But what a future these players have. Young, talented, and about to be deep. All they need is playing time in real life to create a juggernaut for the Marauders.

For now, ancient wonders Yasmani Grandal (2 0s, 8 hits) and Victor Caratini (3 0s, 7 hits) man the catching spot. Old-timers Anthony Rizzo 1-1-0-0, 8 hits) and Miggy Cabrera (2 0s) will split time. Second base still needs an upgrade due to the departure of Jose Altuve; Josh Rojas (3 0s, 10 hits) and Owen Miller (3 0s, 9 hits) have limited futures there. Third base and shortstop are manned by the trio of Emmanuel Rivera (1-4-6, 9 hits), Bobby Witt, Jr. (1-4-6, 10 hits, 30 SB), and Nico Hoerner (3 0s, 11 hits), all of whom have excellent upsides.

Witt: What a future

In left field Lars Nootbaar (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 14s) platoons with Alek Thomas (3 0s, 9 hits). Center field belongs to another platoon, Suzuki (1-6-6, 10 hits) and Carroll (1-0-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42) spelling each other. Lane Thomas is the right fielder (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 14s).

We're going to need our scorecards with this team – two pitchers named Logan, two outfielders named Thomas, all of them seeing lots of playing time! Meanwhile, let's not forget that three youngsters are sitting on the bench waiting to get future playing time –first baseman Torkelson, catcher Sam Huff, and outfielder Jarred Kelenic, who is tearing up MLB as we are working toward press time. Torkelson shares the DH spot with Austin Meadows this year. Wowza again!

Hoerner: Good glove

Defense: 4.5
These guys already play defense.

Grandal and Caratini are both C8s with weak arms. Rizzo (1B5) continues to sparkle at first, while Miggy (1B2) takes his retirement run through TBL. Miller and Rojas are both 2B7s. Rivera (3B4), Witt (3B4, SS8), and Hoerner (SS9) are good on the left side. Alek Thomas and Carroll are OF3s as rookies, while Nootbaar, Suzuki, and Lane Thomas are OFs. All have arms in the low 30s.

Catcher and 2B look like the areas of concern for the future, but again, the Cubbies have moved Hoerner back to 2B after signing Dansby Swanson, so the Marauders look to be just fine there next season.

Bench: 2.0
Platooning options.

There are plenty of platoons to make the team legal for starts this season. The bench suffers from lack of depth, but again, this does not matter. Kelenic can steal a base and is an OF2. Meadows has some hitting ability (4-6, 9 hits) but lacks homerun power. Chad Pinder plays every-where for 111 games, and Huff can hit a bit out of the catching spot, although he is a C6 Th-4.

4th Though repetitive, our position is that you need to pay attention. Yes, this is a bad team this year. Yes, you will beat it up. Yes, it will be ugly

Ages of players on the Munich roster, as of 07/01/2023:

40: M. Cabrera
34: Grandal
33: Hendricks, Rizzo
31: Pinder
30: Festa, Wick
29: Caratina, J. Rojas, Rucker
28: Meadows, S. Suzuki, Underwood
27: Hughes, Otto, E. Rivera, L. Thomas
26: L. Gilbert, C. Hernandez, Hoerner, O. Miller, L. Webb
25: I. Anderson, Brash, J. Gray, Huff, Lodolo, Nootbaar
23: R. Contreras, Kelenic, A. Thomas, Torkelson, Weathers, Witt
22: Carroll

on a daily basis. That is not the point. This is potentially a behemoth in the making. Within two years, we predict, TBL will quaking and shaking as they face the Marauders. With five more high picks available in the upcoming draft, the job of putting things into place should be close to finished. This won't be a one to two and then off rebuilds like other teams often do. This is meant for the long haul, and we should be looking at the same kind of run Munich made from 2014 through 2020. Watch out, TBL—this is the next super team in our little band of merry managers.

Like they used to say on the old Billboard 100 lists, this team hopes to be number one with a bullet. At the *Annual* office, we never act as nay-sayers when Mr. Montague does his thing. This is going to be good, very, very, very good.

TQ: **19.5**

32

Horse Race

2022 Williams Division
Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Warrenton*	114	48	.704	—
Grand Cayman†	84	78	.512	30
Zion	71	91	.438	43
Northboro	64	98	.395	50

Lost to Hudson in Conference finals.
† Lost to Warrenton in Conference semifinals.

The 2022 campaign was a disappointment for *Mark Bloom*'s **Grand Cayman Havens**. The Warrenton club was too much in the regular season, and too much in the playoffs as well; but that won't be the case this year. There's a clear path from April to December; expect the Havens to be standing at the end.
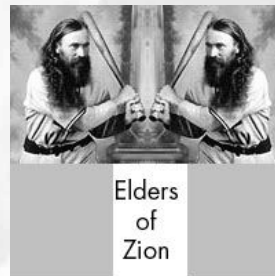
There's certainly competition in the Williams: this will be a horse race all year, but Grand Cayman is back, baby, and it should be a good campaign.

After the championship season, 2022 was a letdown for *Robert Jordan* and *Steve Stein*. There was a lot to fix after the run to the Series; some of it has been sorted out, including the acquisition of a fine veteran player to fill a long-standing hole. The **Northboro Phoenix** will be competitive this year, and though the *Annual* thinks they'll finish second, they'll be pushing all season.

The **Elders of Zion** have been on the rebuild train for longer than *Rich Meyer* wanted or expected. Some of this is due to bad luck in the draft, and some is just due to entropy. It is even more amazing to consider how good they were when they dominated TBL, and just how long ago that was. This is a transition year, perfectly in sync with this year's theme, but better days are ahead.

Then there are the **Warrenton Giants.** Trader *Jack Chapman* had a great season and fell just short, falling to the Hudson club in the conference championship. On draft day, the Giants were in the Williams Division scrum, but the big trade that brought Adley Rutschman and Xander Bogaerts also sent away Trea Turner, Kyle Tucker and Corbin Burnes. We won't know who won that trade for a while, but it makes Warrenton a rebuilder in 2023.

Williams Division

Yordan Alvarez,
Grand Cayman

1. **Grand Cayman** **29.0**
2. **Northboro**   **27.0**
3. **Zion**   **23.0**
4. **Warrenton**   **18.5**

2022 grand cayman HAVENS in review

Is it enough to win?

by Mark Bloom

2022 in Review
Final Record: 84-78 (2nd, Williams)

The Havens floundered to a 28-41 record, but after July 9, the team rebounded to go 56-37 and grab the last Wild Card spot. It marked the first time making the playoffs since their World Series run in 2017, five loooong years ago. The momentum carried the Havens past the 94-win Rocky Mountain Dragons in the Wild Card Series, but they couldn't get past the Warrenton Giants, a team they couldn't beat all year (3-16, including the playoffs).

What went right?

Power. The team hit 220 homeruns, led by Yordan Alvarez' 45 (tied for 6th all-time in franchise history). Tyler O'Neill hit 29, Brandon Lowe 28, Robbie Grossman 22, and Luis Urias 21. O'Neill scored 98 runs, and Alvarez batted in 118 (10th all-time). No one stole 20 bases, but the team collectively stole 83. Trevor Rogers sparkled with a 3.08 ERA, although Max Fried (3.19) led the team in wins with 14. Jordan Romano saved 36. The team improved to a 3.90 ERA from last year's 5.20, which made a huge difference.

Fried: 14 wins

What went wrong?

The team scored almost 800 runs, but its batting average was just .239, the same as last year. While six players hit 15 or more HR, four finished under the Mendoza line, including waiver acquisition Abraham Almonte (.165). Grossman (182) and O'Neill (178) finished right behind Larry Parrish's franchise record for strikeouts in a single season (187). Anthony Bender, the set-up man all year, disappointed: 3-8, 4.24, with a save. Despite his ERA, Rogers walked 72 and struggled to a 12-8 record.

3 Things

1. *Deciding to fill holes.* When the first base platoon fell apart, it left a gaping hole at the cold corner. Boomer Wells moved quickly to fill it, providing lineup protection for Alvarez at the same time. Welcome to the island, SNT Matt Olson. Veterans were also brought in to fill in the rotation, the bullpen, and the outfield.

2. *Not afraid of age.* Drafting and trading for players older than 30: this is … different. The roster has two 37-year-olds in Johnny Cueto and David Robertson. That would have been unheard of a year ago. While the core of the team is still young, injuries forced Boomer to add experienced players to compete in a tough division and conference.

3. *Is it enough?* The Havens kicked off its off-season with a blockbuster 13-player trade that netted Matt Olson, Michael Brantley, Marcus Stroman, and Wandy Peralta. A series of minor trades followed to fill holes. Then they stood pat, drafting what was available. Is it enough to win?

grand cayman HAVENS

Mark Bloom (33rd year)

The Havens are ready with a solid core for years to come.

Mark "Boomer" Bloom has been wandering in the desert for the TBL version of forty years. After winning the Williams Division with 99 victories and lasting through seven games in the World Series loss to the Evil Empire in Brobdingnag, the Havens went down, down, down into a deep rebuild that produced season win totals of 77, 51, 52, and 77 before the rise above .500 to 84 in 2022. Standing on the precipice overlooking the promised land, Grand Cayman had no choice but to go big. Matt Olson, Michael Brantley, Marcus Stroman, and Wandy Peralta come to the island and the 2024 number one and two picks join the 2023 pick in heading to Melrose.

TQ predicts an edge to the Havens in the Williams this season by a small margin over Northboro. Clay's pre-play says it's an average ten game advantage with a decisive six pennants compared to two for the Phoenix. Here at the *Annual,* we think Boomer gets back to the playoffs this year as a division champ in a close race with the Phoenix that should play out all season. This is a team built for this year, but it is still a young one, with the primary catcher at age 28, first baseman 29, second basemen 26 and 29, third baseman 26, shortstop 28, centerfielder 28, rightfielder 27, designated hitter 26, three of the four guys on the bench 25 to 27, and the ace of the pitching staff 23. Yeah—young and good for certain! The Havens have drafted well, traded wisely, and are ready with a solid core for years to come.

Pitching: 13.0
Capable starters, deep bullpen.

This looks like a pitching staff capable of producing a 100-win season. Alek Manoah, Tyler Anderson, and Max Fried lend 89 starts of grade 13 or better with strong peripherals. Marcus

Full Moon. Here we go. The Grand Cayman team has reached cohesion, and the core is actually not very old. They could keep this status for a while to come - and it's been a while in coming.

Turnover Rate: 44%

Arrived: Michael Brantley, John Brebbia, Johnny Cueto, Jarren Duran, Kyle Garlick, Kevin Ginkel, P.J. Higgins, Tyler Kinley, Matt Olson, Wandy Peralta, Rob Refsnyder, David Robertson, Marcus Stroman, Peter Strzelecki, Drew Waters, Austin Wynns.

Departed: Jorge Alcala, Abraham Almonte, Anthony Bender, Marcos Diplan, Clint Frazier, Ralph Garza, Sam Howard, Jordan Luplow, Trevor Rogers, Joe Ross, Tony Santillan, Josh Sborz, Kyle Seager, Nick Senzel, Dominic Smith, Alex Wood.

Stroman and Johnny Cueto are capable fourth and fifth starters for 49 more starts. John Brebbia, Dane Dunning, and Brusdar Graterol are openers for the remaining 24 starts. This cast of starters is backed by 555 relief innings, including 221.7 of Grade 17 or higher. The opposing teams are going to have problems scoring off this staff.

SNT: Matt Olson.

A big trade with Melrose snared a power source for the middle of the Grand Cayman lineup.

grand cayman HAVENS
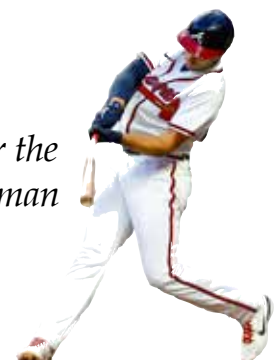
ROTATION. Manoah is the ace (Grade 16 C+21 HR+24) with 31 starts. Tyler Anderson (Grade 13 C+32 HR+35) and Max Fried (Grade 13 C+35 HR+33) are tremendous second and third starters. What's not to like about control pitchers who keep the ball in the yard?? Stroman is a more than capable fourth man (Grade 10). That's 114 starts where Grand Cayman can expect its hurler to last into the later innings of the game.

There is a bit of a drop off after that. Cueto is good enough as the fifth man for 24 starts (Grade 8 C+32 HR+21). Brebbia is an interesting opener with good peripherals but short fatigue (Grade 8 C+25 HR+32). Dunning will be knocked around a little (Grade 6 C-23), while Graterol fills in the 162nd start.

BULLPEN. Tyler Kinley and David Robertson share the closer roles as the season starts. Kinley is great (Grade 20* C+23 HR+62) but is only available for 24 innings. Most of the work goes to the control-challenged Robertson (Grade 20* C-62 HR 21). Together they provide 87 innings. They are backed by a three-headed monster in A.J. Minter (Grade 17* C+25 HR+31), Jordan Romano (Grade 17* C+16 HR+34), and Andres Munoz (Grade 16* C+32 HR+24) for 199 total innings. Those provide nice seventh and eighth inning options while also pitching well enough to close games as needed.

With the number of opener starts the Havens are using this season, they need good early men, and again we see the need addressed well. There are eight relievers who can be used in the early to mid-innings, and they total 268 innings

Manoah: The ace

for mix and match purposes. Anderson and Cueto provide a few innings, while Brebbia adds 57 more in addition to his 11 opener starts. That leaves Wandy Peralta (Grade 14* C+13 HR+51), Pete Strzelecki (Grade 12* C-16 HR+41), and Brusdar Graterol (Grade 12* C+33 HR+35) for middle innings. Miguel Castro (Grade 9* C-45 HR+35) and Kevin Ginkel (Grade 10* C-16 HR+52) are the early birds. The entire relief staff keeps the ball in the park, so opposing hitters will be frustrated often as they look for their big flies.

Offense: 9.0
A nice blend of power and speed.

In a season when we expect few teams to have truly frightening offenses, this is certainly a capable offensive team. There is a nice blend of power and speed on this predominantly young team. Other teams would love to have four catchers who all can put the bat on the ball.

There is a monster DH on the squad this season in Yordan Alvarez (1-1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 5 walks). The lineup is build around him. The Havens play one catcher in right field (Daulton Varsho, 1-5-5, 9 hits, 3 walks, 22 SBA with a 28 SSN, L-9) and reserve catching time for Danny Jansen (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks) vs. lefties. Austin Wynns (2 0s, 10 hits, 42) and P.J. Higgins (3 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks) bat against righties. Olson cements the first base position for 162 games (1-5-5-6, 9 hits, 4 walks). Gavin Lux (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks) and Brandon Lowe (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, 22) platoon at second. Ke'Bryan Hayes (3 0s, 9 hits, 25 SBA with a 31 SSN); Amed Rosario (3 0s,, 11 hits, 18 SB) complete the infield.

Alvarez: Monster

In the outfield, Michael Brantley (3 0s, 10 hits, limited to 64 games) and Robbie Grossman 0-6, 8 hits, 4 walks) platoon; Tyler O'Neill (1-0-0, 8 hits) is listed as the starting CF but he only has 96 games and will have to be replaced by a group of others in some combination of Drew Waters and Jarren Duran, making this the weakest link on offense. Rob Refsnyder (1-0-0-0, 11 hits. L+5 R-4) will get some playing time.

This is an offense that will score runs easily.

Defense: 3.5
Stalwarts everywhere.

Jansen is C8 but has a Th-0, but Varsho can come in from RF (C7 +4). The infield is stellar with Olson (1B5), Lux and Lowe (2B8), Hayes (3B5), and Rosario (SS9) playing every day. Brantley, Refsnyder, and Lux all have OF2 ratings, but Grossman, O'Neill, and Varsho are OF3. None of the arms are especially strong.

Hayes: Stellar

Ages of players on the Grand Cayman roster, as of 07/01/2023:

38: D. Robertson
37: Cueto
36: Brantley
33: T. Anderson, Brebbia, Grossman
32: Kinley, Refsnyder, Stroman, Wynns
31: Garlick, W. Peralta
30: Higgins, Romano
29: Fried, Ginkel, Minter, Olson
28: M. Castro, Dunning, Jansen, B. Lowe, O'Neill, Strzelecki
27: A. Rosario
26: Alvarez, J. Duran, Hayes, L. Urias, Varsho
25: Lux, Manoah
24: Graterol, A. Munoz, Waters

Bench: 3.5
Key pieces.

Luis Urias plays all three infield spots (3B3, 2B7, SS7) and hits well enough (1-0-0, 8 hits, 42) to find time on the diamond. Duran (0-0-0-0, 9 hits), Kyle Garlick (1-1-0, 9 hits), and Waters (1-4-5-6) all provide pop and are OF2. Lux can switch to SS as well as OF late in games if needed.
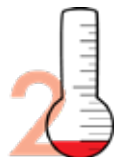
1st The Havens are a solid team.

They feature top to bottom strong pitching both in the rotation and the bullpen, tremendous defense everywhere, and a capable lineup with power and speed, backed by players on the bench who can also play well when called upon. This team should win the Williams Division if it matches expectations and fends off Northboro in head to head play.

Grand Cayman is in the Full Moon phase, a team at its pinnacle after a long rebuild. There may be some up and down in coming season based on injuries, but this is a young team with a great future that should contend for several years to come.

grand cayman HAVENS

TQ: **29.0**

Lux: Future prize

2022 northboro PHOENIX in review

We didn't expect the step [back] to be so large.

by Steve Stein

2022 in Review
Final Record: 64-98 (4th, Williams)

After our 2021 championship run, we knew we were going to take a step back in 2022. We just didn't expect the step to be so large. The offense sputtered and the pitching hemorrhaged.

2023 should be better – the offense will recover and the bullpen should be stellar. The starting pitching will be feast or famine (with way too many sub-Grade-8 starts.)

What went right?

Power hitting. Even though scoring only 766 runs, we had 3 players over 30 HRs (Teoscar had 41, Mike Zunino 36 and Dansby Swanson 31) for the first time since the franchise moved to Northboro.

Will Smith was very productive – 128 games behind the plate posting a .300/.407/.501 slash line. Hernandez' was .299/.340/.585, also not too shabby.

Nestor Cortes, Jr had a promising rookie year (3.73 ERA, 1.14 WHIP). Alex Vesia chipped in 26 saves, and Ian Anderson won 10 games in 24 starts.

The defense was decent (under 100 errors for the second season in a row after 7 bad fielding seasons).

That's about it.

What went wrong?

Getting on base – we didn't. The power was there, but all too often there was no one on base. The team OBP was .318 – way too low. We got sub-300 OBP performances from Dansby, Jesus Aguilar and Cavan Biggio and a paltry .309 from Yandy Diaz.

But mostly, the pitching was horrendous. The top 3 starters, Richards, Senzatela and Lynch, were a combined 18-50 with an ERA over 6.

Other than Cortes' 14 starts, no starter recorded an ERA under 4. There was too little relief – when your closer has a 3.55 ERA (Vesia). Noe Ramirez was effective (2.61 ERA) but the pen mostly got beat up.

3 Things

Hernandez: 41 homers

1. Former regulars have aged out, and deadwood has been jettisoned. Longtime Phoenix regulars Kole Calhoun and Garrett Richards have left the building. Ian Anderson, Anthony Senzatela and Daniel Lynch have gone in trades.

2. Trades! In a rare development, Bob and Steve have mortgaged a lot of their future for a couple of very good but probably past-their-prime players – Jacob deGrom and Jose Altuve. They will help in 2023, but we need their fortunes to continue at least 3 years for these trades to be successful.

3. Pitchers need to perform. In addition to a healthy deGrom (not the safest of bets), a lot of the future will depend on the success of Joe Ryan and Bailey Falter and continuing strong performance of Nestor Cortes Jr. Corey Kluber is not yet gone, but he's on his way out.

northboro PHOENIX

Bob Jordan (24rd year) / Steve Stein (21st year)

The Phoenix are rising from the ashes before our eyes.

If you truly read the *Annual* carefully, you will remember that we promised you last season that the decline of the Phoenix would be short. Hey, truth is truth, and the Phoenix have risen yet once again. Will the rise be enough to catch the Grand Cayman Havens? Maybe not, but don't count the crafty managing duo of Mr. Stein and Mr. Jordan out of this pennant race.

TQ gives a slight edge to the Havens, and the pre-play suggests that edge could be ten games. Our mantra this year, however, still stands – there are no great teams but a number of teams that are good enough to compete for the playoffs everywhere we turn this season. How do we interpret those TQ differences? The Havens are

Turnover Rate: 33%

Arrived: Jose Altuve, Jalen Beeks, Huascar Brazoban, Dylan Coleman, Jacob DeGrom, Bailey Falter, Dylan Floro, Nick Gordon, Dany Jimenez, Nomar Mazara, Joe Ryan, Garrett Stubbs.

Departed: Ian Anderson, Jacob Barnes, Ryan Burr, Kole Calhoun, Daniel Castano, Justin Dunn, Yonny Hernandez, Daniel Lynch, Noe Ramirez, Garrett Richards, Antonio Senzatela, Cody Stashak.

SNT: Jose Altuve.

Munich sends an offensive machine to plug the 2B hole. He'll be a major contributor for the next few years.

the better hitting team, with a better defense and a better bench. The Phoenix' bullpen is arguably a bit stronger while being about the same depth in innings. And the dynamic duo has lots of interchangeable parts on the playing field with the expertise to use them to their best advantage. We shall see; if this were an election, the stat nerds would be delaying the call until more precincts have reported.

Pitching: 9.5
Strong pen supports the starters.

Even the practiced Phoenix can rise only so much in one season, and the starting pitching-staff is where work remains for seasons to follow 2023. There are some good names here, but either there are not quite enough starts from those names or they are still in developmental stage. A full season of Jacob deGrom would have been nice, but the team only gets 11 starts.

Nestor Cortes makes up for that with a breakout season, but Justin Steele, Joe Ryan, and Bailey Falter are still young stars rising.

Cortes: Breakout ace

Full Moon. The Altuve trade means they're serious. The Phoenix have gone mostly all in this year; there's no draft until the fourth round in 2024, and they're putting their gains on the field. No time like the present.

ROTATION. The top four starters compare well with the Havens. deGrom (Grade 16 C+43 HR-21) would be an ace any other season, but the 11 starts and a somewhat uncharacteristic HR rating mute his season long effectiveness. Cortes (Grade 16 C+22 HR+13) is a true ace, however, and the anchor of the rotation with 28 starts. Justin Steele (Grade 11 C-26 HR+34) and Joe Ryan (Grade 12 HR-14) add 51 more, giving Phoenix 90 pretty solid beginners.

Then it gets dicey. Bailey Falter (Grade 8 C+32 HR-32) is a strong hope for the future; Corey Kluber (Grade 4 C+44) is the definition of a classic innings eater. As we know in TBL, those innings seldom taste good. Hudson (Grade 7 C-33 HR+35) is wild, but he will be there for 26 starts.

BULLPEN. As fate would have it, the Little River Band is lining up to play

Bard: Control challenged

"Hang on, help is on the way." Closer Daniel Bard (Grade 22* C-26 HR+43) is another in a long line of control-challenged Phoenix arms, but he will get the job done in his 60 innings. There are another 72 solid but wild innings from Caleb Ferguson (Grade 20* C-52 HR+53) and James Karinchak (Grade 22* C-62 HR+42); they will capably fill the setup role.

But then there is a "group of seven," including three lefties: Jose Alvarado (Grade 14* C-24 HR +46), Jalen Beeks (Grade 14* C-16), and Alex Vesia (Grade 17* C-33 HR+51) for 154 innings total, and righties Huascar Brazoban (Grade 14* C-62 HR+23), Dylan Coleman (Grade 17* C-56 HR+32), Dylan Floro (Grade 11* C+25 HR+31),

and Dany Jimenez (Grade 15* C-31 HR+36) for 190. There are even some mopup men – Matt Foster (Grade 8*) and Ryan Thompson (Grade 9* C+31 HR+22). It will be a wild ride but outlasting a few walks that are not followed by three-run homers will help in the late innigs.

Offense: 10.0
No monsters: they'll score runs.

We think this offense will be plenty good enough in a year where offense is challenged all around TBL. As the Jordan/Stein duo mentions in their instructions, however, there is tight usage and few moves that can be made off the bench. Their hitters are capable, and they have guys everywhere who log 125-135 games except at 3B, where there is a platoon based on splits.

Will Smith is excellent at catcher (1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks), and so is his backup Garrett Stubbs (1-4-5, 9 hits, 4 walks). Yandy Diaz is fine at first base (3 0s, 10 hits, 5 walks, 22). Altuve fixes very well what had been a glaring hole at second base (1-5-5-6, 11 hits, 4 walks). Aledmys Diaz (1-0-0, 9 hits) and Nick Gordon (4 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+42) capably fill the third base spot in the lineup. Dansby Swanson is superb at shortstop (1-5-6, 10 hits, 25 SBA with a 28 SSN). The everyday outfield once again features Teoscar Hernandez

Hernandez: Once again

(1-5-5-6, 10 hits). Joc Pederson (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+42) and Jurickson Profar (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks) are out there as well. When this lineup can play together, good things will happen.

Defense: 4.0
Average, with few moves.

Smith (C8 Th-4) and Stubbs (C7 Th+1) will have to go all the way in the games they start. Yandy Diaz (1B4, 3B4) is good, but his main replacements are only 1B3s. Altuve suffers in the field

late in his career (2B7), and Aledmys Diaz is above average at the hot corner (3B4 2B8 1B4 SS7 OF1) but is needed almost exclusively there to offset Swiss jack-knife Gordon (3B3 2B6 SS7 OF2). Swanson is the gold standard (SS9), but it is not enough to make this a top notch infield.

Hernandez, Pederson, and Profar are all OF2. Ramon Laureano (OF3 A37) is the only move the Phoenix can make that improves the defense.

Bench: 2.5
Oh boy.

Nothing jumps out from this bench. Mike Zunino (C8 Th-2) struggles on offense (1-5, 6 hits). Jesus Aguilar provides infield options (1B3 3B3) and a little pop at the plate (1-0-0, 9 hits, 22) for 129 games. Cavan Biggio is still trying to find himself a starting spot in the field (2B8 1B3 OF2 3B3) and at bats (3 0s, 7 hits). Laureano is a four tool guy, and amazingly the missing tool is the ability to actually hit on a regular basis (1-5-6, 8 hits, 17 SBA, 25 SSN). The other three outfielders are all OF2; Jake McCarthy (3 0s, 10 hits, 26 SBA, 34 SSN) is a good pinch runner at this point, while Kyle Isbel is a good bet for the future (3 0s, 8 hits). Nomar Mazara is a reclama-

Swanson: Gold standard

tion project for the time being (3 0s, 10 hits). The whole bench is filled with guys who can do a bit of something depending on good dice rolls.

2nd As noted earlier, the Phoenix are rising from the ashes before our eyes. The question a betting man would have to ask himself is the one George Brett asked about the Twins in 1987 when Kansas City came to the Metrodome to duke it out for the AL West title late in September. "Do you really want to bet on those guys to win?" Well, history tells us George should have made that bet on the Twins.

The Phoenix are real contenders, not to be dismissed lightly in a season where so many good teams all have flaws. We just can't predict whose flaws are fatal yet.

The team appears to be in the Full Moon phase – a team that has arrived. But then, is that not the persona of the Phoenix throughout most of the history of mankind – to come back to life?

right side vertical title

northboro PHOENIX

Ages of players on the Northboro roster, as of 07/01/2023:

38: Bard
37: Kluber
35: DeGrom
33: Aguilar, Altuve, Brazoban
32: Al. Diaz, Floro, Zunino
31: Y. Diaz, Pederson, R. Thompson
30: T. Hernandez, Profar, Stubbs
29: Beeks, D. Jimenez, Swanson
28: Alvarado, Biggio, Cortes, Foster, Hudson, Laureano, Mazara, W. D. Smith
27: N. Gordon, Karinchak, Ryan, Steele, Vesia
26: Coleman, Falter, Ferguson, Isbel
25: McCarthy

TQ: **27.0**

2022 in Review
Final Record: 71-91 (3rd, Williams)

There was a time when the Elders of Zion were a powerhouse in TBL. As recently as 2013 and 2014 they won over 100 games, won a World Series and got into the playoffs. Then . . . something happened. It was mostly the pitching that went south, though they didn't hit very well either. Then there were drafts that didn't yield the new cornerstones, and there were more struggles and . . . well. It's been a decade since then and the high points have been an 87-win season (lost to Strong City after winning a weak Williams Division) and an 84-win season (lost to Munich after winning a weak Williams Division). The rest of the seasons were not high points.

62-100 isn't Zion: and 70-92 isn't Zion either. Last year is in the books, and there were a few positives and a few more negatives. Time to look forward to the future. It's time for the Sensei to get to work.

Baddoo: Came through

What went right?

The surprise choice in last year's (admittedly shallow) draft was Akil Baddoo, and he came through in a big way – he hit .272 with 57 extra-base hits and 13 steals in 14 attempts. Corey Seager hit .307 with 18 homers in 94 games; Andrew Benintendi had a great comeback season with a .270 average and 26 homers. Mitch Haniger hit 29 to lead the team.

On the mound, Kenley Jansen had an outstanding year, with 28 saves and a 1.41 ERA. Alex Cobb went 10-4, 3.34. John King won 6 games in relief also with a 1.41 ERA. Jon Gray led all starters with 11 wins.

What went wrong?

For all that Baddoo was an offensive force, he managed to drive in only 39 runs. Kyle Farmer played way too much. Five players struck out more than 100 times, led by Haniger's 134 (and a .211 average). They walked only 470 times as a team, less than 3 per game – a very un-Zion statistic.

On the mound, Gray's 11 wins came with a 5.20 ERA and a 1.52 WHIP. Dylan Bundy came in at 5.17; Johnny Cueto at 7.16. There was altogether too little "there" there; they hit 205 homers and scored 752 runs, while giving up 764. 72-90 is nine losses that could have been wins, so it was roughly ten percent away from a dead average season.

3 Things

1. The Sensei hates dead average. The *Annual* said years ago that in TBL you should be good or bad, and not in between; you're either waxing or waning, but there's no point in the in between. Zion isn't comfortable there, and they shouldn't be.

2. The drafts simply haven't gotten Zion to where it wants to be. That will start to change. Gunnar Henderson and MacKenzie Gore are two big parts of that future direction. It's possible that too much information is getting in the way of just enough; time for Mr. Meyer to focus again on what TBL needs.

3. Go get 'em. Serious contention – more than 84 or 87 wins – is still at least a season away. But it's time for teams to consider facing Zion a challenge again. It's time for the Sensei to show his stuff, as he's done for so long.

ELDERS of zion

Rich Meyer (39th year); Hall of Famer

…scratch and claw to get to .500.

There are several ways to build a team. Some TBL managers turn over their roster at the margins year after year via trade to be or stay competitive. Others play the boom or bust cycle, taking big drops to improve their draft status. And then there is the Sensei, who is the king of "draft and follow." Mr. Meyer likes the guys he drafts, and he just doesn't trade them once they become Elders. Analyzing his teams is difficult because he sees things we mere mortals can't – hey, we don't call him the Sensei for nothing!

The Elders are slowly but surely improving; 67 wins in 2021, 71 wins in 2022, and the pre-play suggests another jump to 80 this season. From our porch at the *Annual* office, that looks like a third place finish in the Williams this season. Last year we hinted that perhaps the Sensei could coax 80 wins out of his team despite a lower prediction by that pre-play. Alas, the team performed as predicted instead, and we think that is what will happen again in 2023. There are some nice names on this team, but they are like tarnished silver that needs a good cleaning to return to their former sparkle. There are some sparkling pieces that are not quite ready to move to the front of the display case yet. And there are some gems that have maintained their luster year after year. Yes, a typical Zion melding of shiny newer and older things.

Turnover Rate: 31%

Arrived: Manny Banuelos, Andrew Bellatti, Nate Eaton, Scott Effross, Mackenzie Gore, Gunnar Henderson, Charles Leblanc, Michael Massey, Alfonso Rivas, Brendan Rodgers, John Schreiber.

Departed: Ehire Adrianza, Jhoulys Chacin, Johnny Cueto, Andy Ibanez, John King, Steven Matz, Oscar Mercado, Roberto Perez, Tanner Rainey, Magneuris Sierra, Tony Watson.

SNT:
Gunnar Henderson.

One of the best young players in the 2023 draft. He's the breakout star Zion has been hoping to acquire for some time.

Pitching: 7.0
Who are these guys?

Remember Butch Cassidy asking the Sundance Kid that famous question back in the day? The bad guys were inexorably chasing the heroes, never quitting, never backing off. Kind of like the eight-headed starting group Zion has assembled and its corresponding list of no-name relievers. Sure, Luis Castillo is a stud and Kenley Jansen was one for a long time. But who

Waxing Crescent. This team has been working to get back to its glory days for several years, but the drafts haven't worked out. This year may bear fruit, and contention may not be far away.

Castillo: Stud

are the rest of these guys? Despite their no-name status, it looks like they will keep coming after TBL hitter this year; maybe not as well as some other staffs do, but still relatively capably.

ROTATION. The first five starters are all guys who would be third, fourth, or fifth starters on most contending teams in a normal TBL year. Jesus Luzardo (Grade 14 C-15 HR+15) and Castillo (Grade 13 C+13 HR+24) provide 43 top tier starts. Then three guys split 74 starts as roughly the same kind of guy. Miles Mikolas (Grade 11 C+32) takes 32 of those starts. Jon Gray (Grade 11 HR-13) and Mike Lorenzen (Grade 11 C-36) round out the top five. That's 117 starts that will keep the Elders in the game most days.

Gore: Youngster

Things become more problematic over the final 45 starts. Youngster MacKenzie Gore (Grade 8 C-52 HR+22) has 13 starts. The "Elder Statesmen" (we meant that pun) Alex Cobb (Grade 7 C+15 HR+36) and Dylan Bundy (Grade 4 C+33 HR-24) fill out the rest. These gents will need some serious relief help to keep the Elders near .500.

BULLPEN. The Elders have two closer candidates in Jose Cisnero (Grade 24* C-62 HR+62) and Paul Sewald (Grade 21* C+25 HR-25). One gives up too many walks, and the other yields too many homeruns; together they throw 89 innings. The set up men include John Schreiber (Grade 16* HR+43), former closer Kenley Jansen (Grade 14*) and Scott Effross (Grade 13* C+26 HR+41). They combine for 186 solid innings. Four more hurlers, all sharing weaker peripherals, take the early and middle innings for

226 innings of work. Genesis Cabrera (Grade 13 C-43 HR+51), Andrew Bellatti (Grade 12 C-35 HR+23), Manny Banuelos (Grade 11 C-45 HR+44) and Luis A. Garcia (Grade 9 C+16 HR+43) all keep the ball in the park. The staff is a bunch of no-names, to be sure, but they will grind out games on a regular basis and give their hitters a chance to eke out wins.

Offense: 9.0
Mix and match offense.

While there are no real superstars in the lineup this year, there are four or five platoons that will help the Elders adjust to starters and pitching changes.

There are two solid catchers in Alejandro Kirk (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks) and Travis d'Arnaud (1-0-0-0, 10 hits), and with 246 games between them, they will share DH duties with ageless ultimate Elder Charlie Blackmon (1-4-6, 10 hits). First base will be shared by Trey Mancini (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42), Keston Hiura (1-5-5, 8 hits, 3 walks+42), and Alfonso Rivas (2 0s, 9 hits). Brendan Rodgers (3 0s 10 hits) and Michael Massey (3 0s, 9 hits) share the

Blackmon: Ultimate Elder

second sack. Third base is collection of four part time players. Kyle Farmer (3 0s, 9 hits, L+10 R-5); Gunnar Henderson (1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11 R+2); Charles Leblanc (3 0s, 10 hits) and Jeimer Candelario (1-0-0, 8 hits). Thankfully Corey Seager (1-5-5, 9 hits, 3 walks, 22) plays 151 games at SS.

In the outfield, Austin Hays (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42) plays almost every day, while Leody Taveras (3 0s, 10 hits) and Nate Eaton (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks) share a position and Andrew Benintendi (3 0s, 11 hits) and Mitch Haniger (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks) share the other. It will take opposing managers longer to determine the

starting lineup and stay abreast of pinch-hitting opportunities to maximize those platoons than anything else as they square off with the Elders in 2023.

Defense: 4.5
Strong outfield, good infield.

Catchers Kirk and d'Arnaud are both C7 with average arms. Mancini and Hiura (1B3) will be spelled late by Rivas (1B4). Rodgers (2B9) and Massey 2B8) team well with Seager (SS8) up the middle. Henderson and Candelario are 3B4, but Leblanc and Farmer (SS8) are a weaker 3B3.

Hays and Eaton are OF2, while Taveras, Haniger, and Benintendi are all OF3. The arms are average across the board.

Ages of players on the Zion roster, as of 07/01/2023:

37: Blackmon
36: L. A. Garcia
35: Cobb, Jansen
34: Cisnero, D'Arnaud, Mikolas
33: Sewald
32: Banuelos, K. Farmer, Haniger
31: Bellatti, J. Gray, Lorenzen, Mancini
30: Bundy, L. M. Castillo
29: Candelario, Effross, Schreiber, C. Seager
28: Benintendi
27: Hays, LeBlanc
26: G. Cabrera, N. Eaton, Hiura, Rivas, Rodgers
25: Luzardo, Massey
24: Baddoo, Gore, Kirk, Taveras
22: G. Henderson


Bench: 2.5
Platoons rule the day.

The platoons and various choices make this a capable part of the team. It's a little hard to characterize, but the usage limits aren't too harsh, and if there is anyone who knows how to maximize use of the roster, it's the Sensei.

3rd The Elders just nosed out the Giants for third place according to TQ. But the pre-play gives the Giants the edge by two games. Perhaps this is the difference the big trade Jack Chapman made after the draft. These two teams are going to duke it out for the third spot in the Williams all season. Both managers use their benches and bullpens well, so this is going to be a spirited battle to stay out of the cellar.

Given their preponderance of youth, the Elders are a team still on the rise. The Williams is one of the most competitive divisions this year, and the Elders will have to scratch and claw to get to .500. Things look good for the future, however, with a young core of position players in place. The Sensei continues to show us all how to draft and follow to build a team that can win regularly without taking the big bounce.

TQ: **23.0**
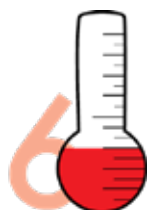
2022 warrenton GIANTS in review

It was a great season. It was almost an awesome *season.*

2022 in Review
Final Record: 114-48 (1st, Williams)

Jack Chapman got what he wanted – two years out from a 55-107 season they jumped all the way to 114 wins. It was a great season. A *great* season. They had a great pitching staff and a powerful lineup. They hit, hit for power, ran (a little), struck out (a lot), struck out other people (a lot), and closed out a lot of games with a lot of people. And they did it all without using a DH, because, well, *Jack Chapman*.

It was a great season. It was almost an *awesome* season (a trip to the World Series) and it was almost a *superlative* season (a TBL championship.) But it was great.

What went right?

Kyle Tucker had a big season (.312-34-115, 52 doubles.) Buster Posey hit .319 with a .394 OBP in his farewell season. Brandon Crawford was very solid (.300-28-108). Trea Turner hit 23 homers and stole 24 bases. Justin Turner hit 28.

Corbin Burnes was a first-class ace (21-4, 2.55, 204 strikeouts.) Yu Darvish went 14-5, 2.58 and struck out 226 in 202 innings. Robbie Ray was 16-6, 3.46, and struck out 260 in 213 innings. Five relievers had ERAs under 2.00 with a fair number of innings.

What went wrong?

They struck out a lot, but pitchers batted, so that contributed. Mike Yastrzemski and Patrick Wisdom both hit about what was expected, which wasn't much.

There wasn't enough Mike Trout, and Buster Posey retired.

And, not to put too fine a point on it, the 114-win Warrenton club fell to the 102-win Hudson Generals in 5 games.

This isn't to put any shade on Hudson. Jack Chapman is an excellent manager; Clay Beard is an excellent manager. A short series between two good teams with two excellent managers can end just about any way: consider this year's World Series or last year's, for that matter.

Burnes: First class

3 Things

1. The catcher. Buster Posey is gone, as noted. Rather than settle for second-best, Trader Jack went out after first-best: Adley Rutschman, whose Vegas jerseys were just about to go on sale in the pro shop. Next thing you know Jack was living up to his name, executing a ten-player trade with six blue chip players and some draft picks, and there are now Rutschman jerseys for Warrenton fans.

2. There's no sense in tanking it if you don't have a draft. The Giants get into the draft in 2024 in the fourth round. If things were different, stripping down might have taken place – it could've been Rutschman and some Little Leaguers instead of a near-.500 team.

3. Never underestimate. We don't. Jack Chapman earned his nickname a few years ago. He had an earlier tour in TBL before returning in 2013 and winning 96. They've won 90 or more four times and lost 100 or more three times. Win or lose (and there's been some of both), there's always something happening with the Giants.

warrenton GIANTS

Jack Chapman (15th year)

It could be ugly from time to time.

There are verities in life, and one of them is that if you have a nickname, you likely have a reason someone gave you that moniker. "Trader Jack" Chapman; well, we all know that he lives up to that name. Lest we forget, he gave us another reason after the draft, trading away his SNT of last year (Trea Turner) along with some other shiny pieces to get the rights to his new franchise catch, young Mr. Rutschman. It won't be enough to win a division championship this year; it's unlikely the Giants will qualify for the playoffs. But the Trader lives in a world where you just keep changing the names on the uniform until you get a season like his 114 win one last year.

The TQ says Warrenton will be a fourth place finisher, just behind the Elders. The pre-play disagrees, showing the Giants averaging 82 wins and 80 for the boys from Zion. Hey, the Williams is a tough division this year. If the Giants are to win at the .500 pace or better, the offense is going to be the reason why. Team pitching is down substantially this season, so the Giants will depend on the proverbial walk, bloop, and three run blast to stay in games. For now, the spectacle is the forced acquiescence of the Giants with the DH after MLB changed its rules last season. The

Waning Crescent. The draft cupboard is bare, and while the big trade has brought the big prize, this is a period of unbuilding and reconstruction. But you don't get to be called "Trader Jack" for nothing.

relatively weak starting pitching is not supported by a strong bullpen, so if the bats don't bludgeon the opponents into submission, the Giants could well fall to the four spot predicted by the TQ. Of course, the Giants won those 114 games using the DH last season, so don't count the Trader out just yet. We shall see what happens as he makes the adjustment!

Pitching: 8.5
Smoke and mirrors.

There are two good starters, a wild closer, and no help to bridge from the middlemen to that fireman. The Giants will be using smoke and mirrors to work their way through games in 2023. This is the weakest pitching in the Williams and it will put the Giants at a disadvantage all season.

Turnover Rate: 47%

Arrived: Jose Azocar, Jake Bird, Richard Bleier, Xander Bogaerts, Aroldis Chapman, Jesse Chavez, Gerrit Cole, Tyler Danish, Jason Delay, Joey Gallo, Lucas Giolito, Jonathan Hernandez, Alejo Lopez, Matt Reynolds, Adley Rutschman, Ryne Stanek, Ildemaro Vargas.

Departed: Austin L. Adams, Jose Alvarez, Scott Barlow, Lewis Brinson, Corbin Burnes, Edwin Diaz, Steven Duggar, Chad Green, Josh Harrison, Tommy La Stella, Dillon Maples, Jack Mayfield, Jake McGee, Buster Posey, Kyle Tucker, Justin Turner, Trea Turner.

SNT:
Adley Rutschman.

A once in a generation talent takes over for Buster Posey, and will be there for years to come.

Darvish, Cole: Two aces

ROTATION. Yu Darvish (Grade 13 C+32) and Gerrit Cole (Grade 13 C+21 HR-25) are the aces with 63 starts. Cole will be battling the long ball all season.

After that, they fall off a tall cliff. Robbie Ray (Grade 11 HR-24) also will struggle this season as the third starter for 32 games. Yusei Kikuchi (Grade 7 C-61 HR-36) is someone you don't want "tusei" for 20 starts, but there it is. Lucas Giolito also struggles (Grade 5 C-14 HR-15), and then there is the ageless Zack Greinke (Grade 5 C+33 HR+16) who will battle ferociously against that low grade thanks to the good peripherals. It is not an awe-inspiring list of starters, although it would have been in past years. Clearly the Giants are hoping all of these guys will have better seasons in the future, but in 2023 they will make long winning streaks unlikely.

BULLPEN. Ryne Stanek (Grade 23* C-62 HR+51) is the real life version of Nuke LaLoosh. His 54 innings will be eventful in those games when his arm can make the difference in the final result. Getting to him, unfortunately, will be a major challenge. The three best choices for late inning set up are Jonathan Hernandez (Grade 13* C-42 HR+34), Aroldis Chapman (Grade 12* C-62 HR+15), and Joe Barlow (Grade 12* C-16 HR-15). They have only 102 total innings. There are four middlemen, and they too are perhaps not ready for this task. Wild men Trent Thornton (Grade 10* C-21 HR-21) and Lucas

Gilbreath (Grade 10* C-62 HR+45) are the "better" choices, while Jesse Chavez (Grade 8* C+15) and Jake Bird (Grade 7* C-25 HR-14) will see lots of work as well. That's 205 more innings, and there are some mops beyond that. There will be some stapling of starters to the mound this season, and it could be ugly from time to time.

Offense: 11.5
The DH: the final frontier.

The offense is not as good as last year, but it has enough power to put a hurt on opponents more often than not. Rutschman (4 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks) is a nice hitting catcher, but Max Stassi (2 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks) will have to start 49 games. Patrick Wisdom will be the Giants' first choice as DH (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks). Christian Walker (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks) plays 160 games at first base. Swiss Army knife Charlie Culberson (3 0s, 10 hits) and Brandon Crawford (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+42) platoon at second base. Evan Longoria

Bogaerts: Settles in

(1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks) holds down 3B for 89 games, but there will have be some serious patching to fill out that spot. Xander Bogaerts (0-6-6, 11 hits, 3 walks) settles in at shortstop.

Mike Yastrzemski (1-6-6, 8 hits, 3 walks) mans left field in a down year. Mike Trout (1-1-5-5-6, 10 hits) is a monster in center, but he is limited to 119 games. Adam Duvall (1-1-0-0, 8 hits) has some pop in right, but for even fewer games (86). Given the instructions posted for Warrenton, it appears that some combination of catcher Jason Delay (2 0s, 8 hits), third base candidates Alejo Lopez (2 0s, 10 hits) and Ildemaro Vargas (3 0s, 10 hits), and outfielders Adam Engel 3 0s, 9 hits) and Joey Gallo (1-0-0, 6 hits, 5 walks) will play plenty of games at home this season.

Defense: 5.0
Nice glove work the norm.

Rutschman (C9 Th+3) and Stassi (C8) are solid behind the dish. Walker (1B5) and Bogaerts (SS9) are fantastic, while Longoria and Vargas (3B4) are better than average. The black hole is second base, where Culberson (2B7) and Crawford (2B6) can be spelled only by other 2B7 candidates on the bench. Yaz, Trout, and Duvall are all OF3s while Trout (33) and Duvall (35) have strong arms. Engel and Gallo are OF3, and Joey has that big 35 arm.

Walker: Fantastic

Bench: 2.5
Not much this year.

Game shortages mean the Giants will play some guys at home and others on the road, limiting moves off the bench. Jason Delay (2 0s, 8 hits, C6) is the third catcher option. Alejo Lopez gives fielding options (2B7, OF1), as does Vargas (SS7, 2B7). Jose Azocar is an OF2 with speed to pinch run. Most games will feature the lineup as set at the beginning of the game. A dispirited Trader Jack mentions in his instructions that there won't be many moves now that he is using a DH.

4th   TBL managers know that Warrenton's manager plays the game well and uses all his players to his best advantage. The parts don't fit quite as well this year as in others, but never count out his managerial ability.

Some guys seem to be able to will marginal players to do well, and Mr. Chapman is one of those guys.

We think that, after some success, the team is headed for rebuild land, and thus the *Annual* has assigned the "Waning Crescent" moon phase. But that doesn't tell the full story; with no draft, it means that there's a need for some of the peripheral players to have a good 2023 to give management something to work with as part of that rebuild.

We really can't fault a move to acquire the franchise catcher. After years of Buster Posey, it's only natural. But it's going to take a while to make the team whole again. But never say never.

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Ages of players on the Warrenton roster, as of 07/01/2023:

39: Chavez, Greinke, Stammen
37: Longoria
36: B. Crawford, Darvish, McGee
35: A. Chapman
34: Culberson, Duvall
32: Cole, Kikuchi, Stassi, C. Walker, Yastrzemski
31: Engel, Ray, Stanek, Trout, Vargas, Wisdom
30: Bogaerts
29: Gallo, Thornton
28: Danish, Delay, Giolito
27: Azocar, J. Barlow, Bird, Clemens, Gilbreath, Long, A. Lopez

</div>

TQ: **22.0**

breakthrough

There are fringe players on TBL rosters right now who might be important players on rosters in 2023. Some of those names appear in the list below. Some won't make it, but last year's list included Camilo Doval, Keibert Ruiz, Brandon Marsh, Daniel Bard, Matt Manning, A. J. Puk, Luis Rengifo, and Luis Garcia – as usual, a pretty good list.

1   **Corbin Carroll, OF, Munich.**

A real five-tool player: he has power and speed and an excellent glove (an OF3 from APBA is a good sign).

2   **Gunnar Henderson, 3B, Zion.**

The long-awaited successor to Adrian Beltre. Should be a Zion corner-stone for years to come.

3   **Vaughn Grissom, IF, Melrose.**

Not quite 23, he'll get his chance in Atlanta soon. Not enough playing time this year to interfere with the Melrose bounce.

4   **MacKenzie Gore, P, Zion.**

Hard throwing lefty, Gore could be Zion's #1 pitcher in a year. A great pickup for the Elders.

5   **Luis Campusano, C, Brobdingnag.**

An early injury will curtail his 2023 playing time, but Campusano is a long term investment for the Barbarians.

6   **Jarred Kelenic, OF, Munich.**

It's taken an extra year, but the young power hitter is having a breakout season in 2023.

7   **Shea Langeliers, Riverwoolf, C.**

The power is there and he's capable behind the plate. Riverwoolf may have snagged a real talent.

8   **Jack Suwinski, OF, Rocky Mountain.**

He's got power and has a good glove. When he puts it all together he'll be in the middle of the Dragons' lineup.

9   **Seby Zavala, C, Knoxville.**

While he's a little bit old for this list, the old maxim that "catchers take longer to develop" may apply. He'll fit in well with Knocville's future plans.

10*   **Oneil Cruz, SS, New Westminster.**

This one comes with an asterisk since he's already out for the season, but Cruz will be a big part of the Great White North offense for years to come.

Honorable mention: Riley Adams, Whitman; Gabriel Arias, Vegas; Graham Ashcraft, Riverwoolf; Jose Barrero, Gotham City; Kyle Bradish, New Westminster; Beau Brieske, Blue Hill; Jake Burger, Calusa; Oswaldo Cabrera, Maracaibo; Kerry Carpenter, Hoboken; Kutter Crawford, Rye; Yeury De Los Santos, Rye; Jarren Duran, Grand Cayman; Ryan Feltner, Rye; Nick Fortes, Columbus; Tyler Freeman, Hudson; Darick Hall, Kansas; Sam Huff, Munich; Nolan Jones, Vegas; Alex Kiriloff, KNX; Trevor Larnach, Midwest; Kyle Lewis, Gotham City; Daniel Lynch, Brobdingnag; Tucupito Marcano, Hudson; Michael Massey, Zion; Elehuris Montero, Vegas; Nick Pratto, Vegas; Kyle Stowers, Knoxville; Leody Taveras, Zion; Spencer Torkelson, Munich; Alan Trejo, Maracaibo; Bryse Wilson, Blue Hill; Josh Winckowski, Hudson.

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. Nine of our top ten last year were top 2023 choices (the tenth was taken in the second round), and our #1 was the overall #1. Seven of our honorable mentions made it to round 1 as well. You be the judge.

1 Jordan Walker, OF, St. Louis.

A top prospect on everyone's list, he's going to be great in all categories. It may take a little longer, but it'll come.

2 Josh Jung, Texas, 3B.

A solid power hitter, he's off to a good start. There are plenty of comparisons here, not just in Texas.

3 Masataka Yoshida, OF, Boston.

A big splash signing for the Red Sox, he's made quite an impact early in the season. An exciting talent.

4 Grayson Rodriguez, P, Baltimore.

Another fine arm, he's had a few stumbles early on but he's going to be a big time major league pitcher.

5 Elly de la Cruz, IF, Cincinnati.

A power hitting middle infielder, he's one of the top prospects in baseball.

6 James Outman, OF, Los Angeles (N).

A power hitter with plus defense, he's had a hot start in a very competitive environment.

7 Francisco Alvarez, C, New York (N).

Injuries have made room for him to play regularly with the Mets. Plus defense and power make him an attractive pick.

8 Eury Perez, P, Miami.

At age 20 he's already making an impact in the majors. He throws very hard, and has reached the majors very quickly.

9 Kodai Senga, New York (N).

He's got great stuff, and will gain better control as he gains experience.

10 Gabriel Montero, C, Arizona.

He draws some comparisons with some great young catchers of the past, and is getting a chance to play regularly.

Honorable mention: Addison Barger, IF, Toronto; Taj Bradley, P, Tampa Bay; Hunter Brown, P, Texas; Alec Burleson, OF, St. Louis; Triston Casas, 1B, Boston; Henry Davis, C, Pittsburgh; Jasson Dominguez, OF, New York (A); Bryce Elder, P, Atlanta; Christian Encarnacion-Strand, 3B, Cincinnati; Robert Hassell, III, Washington; Jack Leiter, P, Texas; Royce Lewis, IF, Minnesota; Bo Naylor, C, Cleveland; Andrew Painter, P, Philadelphia; Oswaldo Peraza, IF, New York (A); Esteury Ruiz, OF, Oakland; Spencer Steer, 3B, Cincinnati; Ezequiel Tovar, SS, Colorado; Brice Turang, 2B, Milwaukee; Anthony Volpe, SS, New York (A)

the vegas line

by Walter Hunt

We generally reserve this space in our book to memorialize a great figure from Major League Baseball who has left us in the last year. A few years ago, there were so many losses – largely from our collective youth – that it was wide-ranging, covering a great number of stars who lived on only in the APBA cards on our tables or our shelves, forever young.

This year's essay deals with a figure well-known to us, but with no APBA card or iconic picture, no Topps portrait, no All-Star appearances, no moment in baseball history except for his long association with TBL: Paul Harrington, who passed on to the Field of Dreams a few days before this year's draft. It came as a terrible shock, especially to those that knew him for many years. It goes without saying that he will be missed.

Those of us from Massachusetts knew Paul before his entry into TBL with an expansion club in 1997. It took a few seasons for his team to find its groove, but in 1999 and 2000 the Gamblers were post-season contenders, led by Vladimir Guerrero – the original one – and closer Keith Foulke, to whom Paul often gave a Hall of Fame vote when we began to ballot. Over the next quarter century, Las Vegas teams reached the playoffs half the time and dived to the cellar the other half. Paul was the absolute master of the bounce: tear down and build up, either dangerous or a doorstop, the very epitome of a gambler. No risk was too great, no reward too sweet. They never quite made the TBL World Series, but they were always entertaining. As a field manager, Paul knew all the tricks we all know, and was great fun to play against. He

made us all think, and often made us laugh. His contributions to this book were witty and well-written.

He was a private man in many ways, and it is almost impossible to give any account of his personal life – even if it was appropriate in this context. It is worth noting that he was honest and a loyal friend, generous to a fault, and had a strong sense of personal honor. He was reliable and trustworthy. He took a turn as TBL Commissioner and dealt with a few thorny issues during his time. His opinion and judgment were respected and his counsel was sound and insightful.

Recent medical difficulties complicated his life and his participation. That sort of thing is hard to overestimate, but it was never an excuse: the impact of the pandemic made it harder still, but it did not dampen his competitive spirit. Las Vegas notched two seasons of 100+ wins, taking Munich to six games in the conference playoffs in 2020 and Hudson to seven in the semifinals in 2021. 2022 was a down year, but it was preparation for the next bounce: another run in 2024 or 2025, a new crop of young players coming in to take another shot at TBL glory.

It didn't happen, and that goal now falls to another. The logo has changed, the approach will surely change, but the game and the league moves on.

We survive, we deal with the transition; we mark the life and mourn the death and accept that time never stops.

And death shall have no dominion.
Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean
 and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;
Though they go mad they shall be sane,
Though they sink through the sea
 they shall rise again;
Though lovers be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
Under the windings of the sea
They lying long shall not die windily;
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,
And the unicorn evils run them through;
Split all ends up they shan't crack;
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.
No more may gulls cry at their ears
Or waves break loud on the seashores;
Where blew a flower may a flower no more
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;
Though they be mad and dead as nails,
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,
And death shall have no dominion.

– Dylan Thomas, 1943

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-third 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.