

# The TBL Baseball Annual

A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

## **Dynasties**



2024 Edition

Walter H. Hunt

Robert Jordan

Mark H. Bloom

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



# The TBL Baseball Annual

**A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League**

by

Walter H. Hunt  
Robert Jordan  
Mark H. Bloom

with contributions from TBL's managers,  
including Joe Auletta, Gordon Paul Montague and Craig Musselman

and extra help from Rich Meyer, Gordon Rodell and Ray Murphy

This book was produced using a Macintosh with Adobe InDesign and Adobe Photoshop.

I can be reached by mail at

**3306 Maplebrook Road,  
Bellingham, MA 02019**

or by e-mail at

**hotc@walterhunt.com.**

All material in this book is Copyright ©2024 by Walter H. Hunt, except the panel insert on Page 23, which is from Big Panda and Tiny Dragon, by James Norbury, © 2022 by James Norbury; and *And Death Shall Have No Dominion* by Dylan Thomas, which is © 1951 by the Thomas estate.

---

# the TBL baseball annual

Welcome to the 2023 *TBL Baseball Annual*. This is the thirtieth year of the *Annual* in the book format, and TBL's forty-third year – the forty-first that we have on record. Our editorial team from 2023 is mostly back and excited to bring you lots of new content. We had a great World Series and another terrific, deep draft, held in Arizona in March (so we're just a little behind in bringing this book to you.) We're missing the Guru this year on our production team, but look forward to having him back next year when his eyes are back in proper function.

Once again we are marking the sudden loss of a long time manager, and you'll find a memorial for him here.

This year we're talking about dynasties in TBL. Joe Auletta provides us a look back at the great dynasties in our history, with a careful definition of what constitutes a dynasty. He also offers a little analysis on the return of the speed game. In between, our senior member, Paul Montague, provides a narrative history of the entire league, and what makes it special for us.

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

Enjoy the *Annual* and enjoy the season.

Walter, Robert, Mark  
May, 2024

## The T.Q. System

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

<b>Pitching:</b>	20 points
<b>Offense:</b>	17 points
<b>Defense:</b>	8 points
<b>Bench:</b>	5 points

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

# table of contents

## FRONT MATTER

Future Drafts		6
TQ Summary		7
Manager Roll Call		8
2024 Computer Pre-Play	Clay Beard	9
Hall of Fame		10
Dynasties in TBL's First 40 Years	Joe Auletta	12
Who Are We, Anyway?	Paul Montague	16
Moon Phases and Their Meanings: Reprise		25
MLB Rule Changes	Joe Auletta	26
SNTs		28
Commissioner's Report	Ray Murphy	29



## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Clemente Division			<i>Riverwoolf Has Entered The Chat</i>	30
Riverwoolf	32		Strong City	40
Whitman	36		Blue Hill	44



Mays Division			<i>Print the Playoff Tickets</i>	48
Gotham City	50		Rye	58
Maracaibo	54		New Westminster	62



Ruth Division			<i>Someone Wins</i>	66
Hoboken	68		Brobdingnag	76
Knoxville	72		Midwest	80

2023 TBL World Series	Walter Hunt	84
-----------------------	-------------	----



## NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Aaron Division			<i>Like Aaron Island, But Smaller</i>	86
Calusa	88		Kansas	100
Melrose	92		Vegas	104



Mantle Division			<i>Four Possibilities</i>	104
Hudson	106		Rocky Mountain	114
Columbus	110		Munich	118



Williams Division			<i>Two Up, Two Down</i>	122
Grand Cayman	124		Northboro	132
Zion	128		Warrenton	136

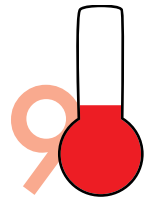
## FINAL WORDS

Breakthrough		140
Future		141
Captain Jack	Craig Musselman	142

# 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 2025; above the middle line is excess, while below means something's missing. No new graphics this year.



base

## haves



**WARRENTON.** Three #1s (their own, Strong City, Calusa); three #2s; two #3s. The bad news: there's a lot of team to rebuild.



**BROBDINGNAG.** Four #1s (their own, Knoxville, Zion, Melrose); one #2; three #3s.



**NEW WESTMINSTER.** Four #1s (their own, Midwest, Riverwoolf, Rocky Mountain), one #2, one #3.



**MUNICH.** Two #1s (their own, Vegas), #2, two #3s.



**MARACAIBO.** #1, two #2s. Three #4s.

## balanced



**BLUE HILL, RYE, NORTHBORO.**  
Their own drafts, with higher #1s.



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

## have nots



**WHITMAN.** Missing their #3.



**VEGAS.** No #1, #2, two #3s.



**MELROSE.** No #1 or #3; two #2s



**GRAND CAYMAN.** Missing their #2.

**KNOXVILLE, ROCKY MOUNTAIN, ZION.**  
No #1; #2, #3.

**MIDWEST, CALUSA.** A #3.

## all in



**STRONG CITY.** Pick in the 4th.  
**RIVERWOOLF.** Pick in the 5th.

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

# t.q. summary

TEAM (DIVISION)      OFFENSE      DEFENSE      PITCHING      BENCH      TOTAL

## The Cream of the Crop



Grand Cayman (Williams)	10.0	5.0	12.5	3.0	30.5
Gotham City (Mays)	9.0	5.5	13.0	3.0	30.5
Riverwoolf (Clemente)	9.5	4.0	12.5	3.0	29.0
Hudson (Mantle)	7.0	4.0	13.0	3.0	27.0
Zion (Williams)	10.0	4.5	9.0	3.0	26.5

## The Solid Performers



Calusa (Aaron)	12.0	5.5	7.5	3.0	25.0
Hoboken (Ruth)	11.0	4.0	9.0	2.5	25.0
Columbus (Mantle)	8.0	5.0	9.0	2.5	24.5
Rocky Mountain (Mantle)	8.0	6.0	7.0	3.0	24.0
Melrose (Aaron)	10.0	4.0	7.0	2.0	24.0
Knoxville (Ruth)	9.0	5.0	8.0	2.0	24.0

## The Transitional Teams



Kansas (Aaron)	8.0	5.5	7.5	2.5	23.5
Munich (Mantle)	8.5	4.5	8.0	2.5	23.5
Brodingnag (Ruth)	11.0	4.0	6.0	1.5	22.5
Whitman (Clemente)	6.0	4.0	10.0	2.5	22.5
Strong City (Clemente)	8.0	5.0	6.5	2.5	22.0
Maracaibo (Mays)	7.5	5.0	6.0	2.5	21.0
Rye (Mays)	8.0	4.0	5.5	3.0	20.5
New Westminster (Mays)	6.5	4.5	7.0	2.0	20.0

## The Rebuilders



Vegas (Aaron)	8.0	4.0	5.0	2.5	19.5
Blue Hill (Clemente)	7.0	3.5	6.0	2.5	19.0
Northboro (Williams)	6.5	3.5	3.5	2.5	16.0
Midwest (Ruth)	5.0	5.0	3.5	2.0	15.5
Warrenton (Williams)	4.0	3.0	2.0	2.0	11.0

International	281.5 (23.5 average)
National	275.0 (22.9 average)

Division Totals			
Mantle (NC)	99.0	Mays (IC)	92.0
Ruth (IC)	97.0	Aaron (NC)	92.0
Clemente (IC)	92.5	Williams (NC)	84.0

# manager roll call

<b>Munich Marauders</b>	Mantle Division	<i>Paul Montague</i>	41st year
<b>Hudson Generals</b>	Mantle Division	<i>Clay Beard</i>	40th year
<b>Elders of Zion</b>	Williams Division	<i>Richard Meyer</i>	40th year
<b>Gotham City Batmen</b>	Mays Division	<i>Anton Greenwald</i>	39th year
<b>Knoxville Outlaws</b>	Ruth Division	Pat Martin	38th year
<b>Maracaibo Rumrunners</b>	Mays Division	<i>Walter Hunt</i>	38th year
<b>Brobdingnag Barbarians</b>	Ruth Division	<i>Joe Auletta</i>	36th year
<b>Hoboken Zephyrs</b>	Ruth Division	Steve Powell	35th year
<b>Grand Cayman Havens</b>	Williams Division	Mark Bloom	34th year
<b>Melrose Avengers</b>	Aaron Division	Mark Freedman	31st year
<b>Warrenton Giants</b>	Williams Division	Ray Murphy*	30th year†
<b>Blue Hill Mudslides</b>	Clemente Division	Mark Ludwig	29th year
<b>Whitman River Rats</b>	Clemente Division	Brian Hanley	29th year
<b>Northboro Phoenix</b>	Williams Division	Robert Jordan	25th year
<b>Midwest Mongrels</b>	Ruth Division	Darrell Skogen	23rd year
<b>Northboro Phoenix</b>	Williams Division	Steve Stein	22nd year
<b>Strong City Statesmen</b>	Clemente Division	Eric Sheffler	21st year
<b>Rye Herons</b>	Mays Division	Craig Musselman	20th year
<b>New West Whiskeyjacks</b>	Mays Division	Jim Jeatt	20th year
<b>Columbus Jets</b>	Mantle Division	Vic Vaughn	18th year
<b>Kansas Koyotes</b>	Aaron Division	Bill Schwartz	17th year
<b>Rocky Mountain Dragons</b>	Mantle Division	Dave Jaskot	13th year
<b>Calusa Indians</b>	Aaron Division	Gordon Rodell	10th year
<b>Riverwoolf Sharks</b>	Clemente Division	Daniel Dumont	8th year
<b>Vegas Gamblers</b>	Aaron Division	Rob Skogen	2nd year

Ray Murphy is serving his eleventh year as our Commissioner.

\* We mark the loss this year of **Jack Chapman**, who was one of our managers for 15 years. See his memorial near the end of this book.

† **Ray Murphy** has been associated with TBL since 1994, and his seniority is reckoned by that date.

Hall of Fame managers in *Bold Italic*.





# 2024 computer pre-play

by Clay Beard

At Craig's suggestion, Buck Miller II makes an appearance in the driver's seat for all 24 teams. The usage looks reasonable, but none of these managers are geniuses.

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.

So much for "Printing Playoff Tickets"! It may be the new manager, but this pre-play actually shows considerable parity in TBL. Will it be reflected when the games actually start? The only exception is the doormat in Warrenton, which got rolled in all ten seasons. For the first time since I've been doing this, there are no dominant teams. Teams that made the playoffs in all 10 seasons? – Zero. Riverwoolf came excruciatingly close with a 3-way tie for the two wild-cards in one season. There were only four 100-win seasons total out of the 240 team seasons. Outside of Warrenton, there

were only three 100-loss seasons. Only five teams failed to make the playoffs in all ten pre-plays.



In the International, the big news is in the Clemente, where Whitman finally takes a step back and is replaced by the completely rebuilt Sharks in Riverwoolf. They, as well as Gotham City in the Mays, are solid favorites, but catchable. The Ruth Division has a solid 3-team race with Knoxville in the driver's seat. The wild-card race may include as many as six teams. Brobdingnag gets the nod as the second wildcard with just one more win than Strong City over the ten seasons.

In the National, every division is in play again. Hello Mantle Division! Four solid contenders and possibly both wild cards! This will be fun. And the Aaron Division is almost as strong. It also appears Sensei has devalued his club in the knockdown. As outside of this exercise, Grand Cayman is considered a solid favorite. This looks to be one of our most competitive seasons



## International Conference

### TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Clemente	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
RIVERWOOLF	91	71	--	98	82	8	1.7
STRONG CITY	82	80	9	99	65	2	2.3
WHITMAN	79	83	12	90	72	0	2.3
BLUE HILL	70	92	21	85	62	0	1

Mays	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
GOTHAM CITY	85	77	--	96	75	8.5	0.5
RYE	77	85	8	83	71	1	0
MARACAIBO	75	87	10	87	67	0.5	2.7
NEW WESTMINSTER	68	94	17	75	62	0	0

Ruth	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
KNOXVILLE	88	74	--	96	75	8.5	0.5
HOBOKEN	84	78	4	83	71	1	0
BROBDINGNAG	82	80	6	91	75	2	2.3
MIDWEST	69	93	19	76	62	0	0

## National Conference

### TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Aaron	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
CALUSA	90	72	--	106	79	5.5	1
MELROSE	86	76	4	92	81	3.5	0
KANSAS	81	81	9	87	73	1	0
VEGAS	80	82	10	87	68	0	0

Mantle	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
HUDSON	91	71	--	102	79	5	1
MUNICH	90	72	1	96	82	2	6
COLUMBUS	89	73	2	99	80	2	4.5
ROCKY MOUNTAIN	85	77	6	97	72	1	1.5

Williams	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
ZION	94	68	--	101	81	8	1
GRAND CAYMAN	88	74	6	97	79	2	5
NORTHBORO	72	90	22	83	65	0	0
WARRENTON	48	114	46	53	42	0	0

fractions reflect ties. Also see the note above on the Wild Card in each 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 enshrinee 2024



## **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.

HALL OF FAME

# 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 twelfth year of eligibility. He appeared on 12 ballots in 2023, and fell one vote short of election.*

**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 or more strikeouts in 7 seasons.

*This is his third year of eligibility. He appeared on 4 ballots in 2023.*



**Robinson Cano, 2B** 2006-2021  
Wakefield, Detroit, Las Vegas

A professional hitter, he put up some great numbers, hitting over .300 five times. He hit 300 homers in TBL and notched 571 doubles, 2,621 hits and 1,236 RBI. His best season was 2010, when he hit .316-23-105 with 211 hits and 50 doubles.

*This is his first year of eligibility.*

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

The dominant power hitter 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 fourteenth year of eligibility. He appeared on 5 ballots in 2023.*



**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 fourteenth year of eligibility. He appeared on 9 ballots in 2023.*

**Trevor Hoffman, RP** 2002-2020  
Munich, Brobdyngnag, 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 third year of eligibility. He appeared on 9 ballots in 2023.*



**Players with carryover votes:** Andy Pettitte 6, Trevor Hoffman 5, Don Mattingly 3, Sammy Sosa 3, Will Clark 3, Jake Peavy 3, Jason Giambi 3, Albert Belle 3, Dennis Eckersley 2, Roy Halladay 2, Tim Hudson 2, Jamie Moyer 2, Juan Gonzalez 2, Cole Hamels 2, Troy Percival 2, Andruw Jones 2, Jeff Kent 2, thirty-two players with 1.

*Dynasty: A team or individual that dominates their sport or league for an extended period. Whether a team or individual has achieved a dynasty is subjective, but usually a team is required to win at least two titles over a short period of time to be considered a dynasty. – Wikipedia*

TBL is now 40 seasons old, and whether we have consciously thought about it or not, the term “dynasty” has come up in conversations for years. Talking with Walter this off season it seemed like a reasonable time to look at what it means in our corner of the universe. Propose a more quantifiable definition, count the instantiations, and see if those teams that are “dynastic” have changed across the eras of TBL. And if they have changed, what might be driving that?

As with most such lists, I find it easier to throw the net wide to start. Loosen up the criteria and see what we get, then tighten it up. I have found that often gives a bit of clarity to what “is” and “is not”. That happened here, and led to finding at least one troubling anomaly I’ll talk about.

## The First Culling

At a minimum I would argue any dynasty has to win, and win fairly consistently. And – though it is not anywhere in the definition above – there should be some key players who become the face of that team for an extended period of the dynastic era.

For “Win consistently” I took several measures: average wins over the years involved; number of 100 win+ seasons; number of Division titles; number of Championships. For the more subjective “face of the team” I used the simple test: if I think of the franchise is there one or more star that immediately came to my mind. The most prototypical examples would be “Zion – Maddux” or “Whitman – Kershaw” or “Rochester – Bonds”. I also set the minimum duration to be a six year period. No magic reason, I just did.

With those, I identified all the teams who had a six year+ period where they:

1. Averaged at least 85 wins a year and
2. Either won 100+ games half or more of those seasons, or won the Division at least half of those seasons, or made it to the World Series at least one third of those seasons.
3. Won at least one championship.
4. Had at least one heroic player that was synonymous with the dynasty.

Having done this scrub I came up with 13 such runs of years that needed further examination. In some cases there was a judgement call as to the start/end seasons in which case I tended towards highlighting the “excellent” seasons and chopping off a few at one end or the other. Sorted by the initial season, they appear in Table 1 at right.

## The Second Culling

Do these all fit? They are certainly all sustained periods of “very good”, but are they all “dominance”? I kept coming back to the part of the definition that says “at least two titles” in the period. If we keep to that, then the 13 are reduced to 7, as shown in Table 2.

Somehow this doesn’t feel right. Three of the franchises removed seem to deserve a bit of recognition above and beyond being removed at this point.

**Shangri-La/East Anglia:** This predates my joining TBL but the numbers tell of dominance BZ (Before Zion) in the first six seasons of the league. They are the only dynasty contender to make the world series half of those seasons, 3 in 6 years. Pro-rating the 1984 season, they averaged over 100 wins a year and only once had less than 98. In a precursor to Aaron Island, they won 102 games while finishing 3rd in their division in 1989. But in the end, having only one championship tosses them out.

**Portland/Strong City:** To me, this is the oddest duck. I had to start this in 2006 because that was

Team	Years	# Years	Championships	WS	Div Title	100+ Wins	Ave # Wins
SLA/EA	1984-89	6	1	3	3	3*	92
MAR	1986-05	20	4	5	8	10	97
MUN	1986-97	12	1	2	4	6	88
ZIO	1989-14	26	6	8	17	15	98
AMH/MLR	1989-01	13	2	5	5	5	92
ROC	1992-05	14	3	6	10	11	101
BRO	1994-08	15	4	7	11	10	96
GC	2001-18	18	1	5	8	4	92
POR/STM	2006-15	10	1	1	6	4	91
MLR	2009-15	7	2	3	4	4	94
WHI	2010-23	14	1	3	10	10	103
BRO	2013-22	10	4	4	8	6	97
MUN	2015-20	6	1	2	2	4	100

TABLE 1

Team	Years	# Years	Championships	WS	Div Title	100+ Wins	Ave # Wins
MAR	1986-05	20	4	5	8	10	97
ZIO	1989-14	26	6	8	17	15	98
AMH/MLR	1989-01	13	2	5	5	5	92
ROC	1992-05	14	3	6	10	11	101
BRO	1994-08	15	4	7	11	10	96
MLR	2009-15	7	2	3	4	4	94
BRO	2013-22	10	4	4	8	6	97

TABLE 2

the franchise's lone title until the one in 2018 after moving to Strong City. But after the first WS victory, the next three years were a major step back. If we remove 2006-2009 and replace them with 2016-2018, again it is only one world series. If we go from 2006-2018, then the two championships are there, but five sub-par seasons make the entire 14 year period something short of dynastic.

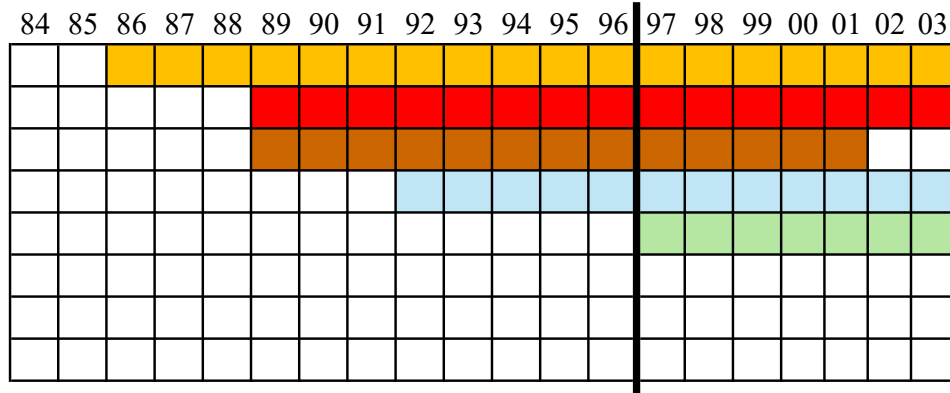
However, if we look at the stretch from 2011-2016 it is difficult to find a more dominant five year stretch by any team. They averaged a ridiculous 106 wins, never reaching less than 97. Four division titles in 5 seasons. Arguably the most dominant regular season team over a half decade—sort of the Rogers Hornsby of TBL. Sadly there were no trips to the championship round in that period. So no matter how I try to fit them in, the Portland run was not a dynasty.

**Whitman:** For me, this one hurts even more than the Portland cut. Maybe because it has been so long: fourteen seasons and counting. They have a championship. And year after year it seemed I had to face them in the playoffs so I got a very up-close view of how good they have been. And they are a realistic contender again in 2024; get one more ring and they go onto any short list of dynasties. 14 seasons, 10 division titles, 10 seasons of 100+ wins, and an average of 103 wins—more than any other franchise that made the first cut. If Portland's five year run was the most dominant short run, Whitman's is the most dominant long regular season run. *(Note: OK, I talked myself into it. Since this is my article I get to give myself an exemption: because the Whitman streak—the only one currently active—could still get a 2nd title I will leave them on the list. And maybe this way Brian will take*

*it easy on me the next time we meet in the playoffs.)*

### A Time Line In Three Parts

Laying those seven Dynasties on a timeline: the data splits roughly into three periods, each about one third of TBL's 40 year history.



*1984-1996. In the Beginning.* Three dynasties that defined this period, each running the majority of the thirteen years. Maracaibo, Zion, and Amherst/Melrose. Among them they won 8 of the 13 championships, . Along with Munich and Shangra La/East Anglia and Munich these five franchises were the royalty for first third of the league. Among them these five franchises owned 18 of the 26 world series appearances in this 13 year period. Hold that thought and compare it to where we wind up this section.

*1997-2008. Middle Earth, TBL Style.* Toward the end of the first era, another dynasty was in its ascendance in Rochester. They had been good, and won a title in 1994, but that was just the beginning as they made the World Series six times in eleven seasons, winning three. Zion and Maracaibo remained dominant teams during the Rochester dynasty, but the Express were a couple of steps ahead. But that did not mean Rochester was alone at the top. Unlike Rochester, the Brobdingnag dynasty erupted abruptly in the middle period of TBL: from 65 wins in 1996 to six World Series of their own and four titles in the next next eleven years. Rochester and Brobdingnag dominated the middle period and split a pair of World Series when they faced each other.

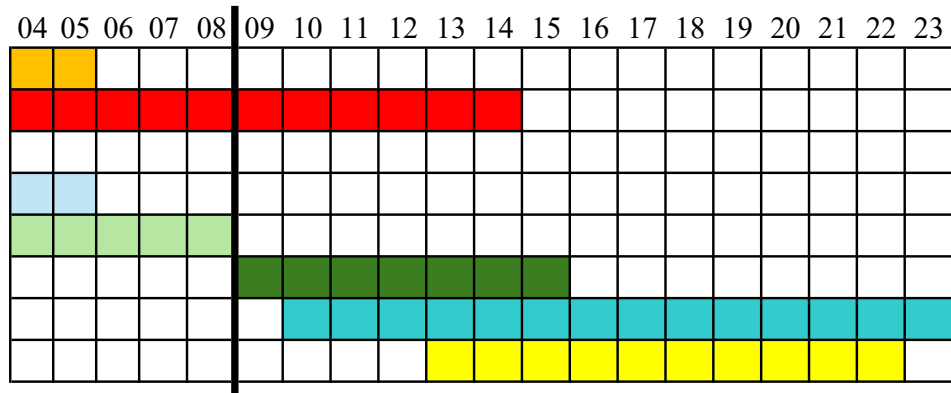
*2009-2023: Modern Times.* As the third epoch started there was one consistency—Zion was still up on Olympus. The dynasty that started in 1989 was alive and kicking well into Modern Times of TBL.

Rochester had faded. Brobdingnag was descending. But the Sensei was doing his energizer bunny impersonation for another six seasons. But there were new challengers—more accurately one new one, Whitman, and a pair of resurrected adversaries in Melrose and Brobdingnag who both reappeared in 2010 & 2013 respectively with their second dynasty runs. Add in a second glory period for Munich with a six year stretch that included their third title, and it had distinct déjà vu undertones. But while there were dynasties in Modern Times, there were decided differences as well. The biggest of these was the diversity of teams making it to the world series—in 15 years, 16 franchises got to the series, and 11 different franchises won it.

### Where To Next?

This will be a little bit of a winding road. We will start by going back into the past and looking at specific players. Any real dynasty is more than wins and losses and championships. It is players who give dynasties a face, a tenor, and humanity. The 8 year old doesn't say, "I want to go see Zion", or recite Whitman's team stats from memory. They want to see Barry Larkin, and Barry Bonds, and Clayton Kershaw. So who are the key players/ faces of these dynasties? Yes, there is a lot of subjectivity—but if you stop reading here and make your own lists of three players from each of the eight dynasties we have identified, I bet out lists will be more common than different.

- *Maracaibo:* Palmiero, Hamels, Ichiro, Rivera. Balanced with two hitters, two pitchers.
- *Zion:* Maddux, Glavine, Barry Larkin, Adrian Beltre. Balanced but with a heavy tilt to pitching.



- *Amherst/Melrose*: Sheffield, I-Rod, Papi, Alou. It’s the bats, stupid. Big, scary bats.
- *Rochester*: Bonds, Randy Johnson, Nomar, Billy Wagner. Balanced.
- *Brobdignag*: Griffey, A-Rod, Frank Thomas. Smokin’ Joe’s guys bashing in heads.
- *Melrose II*: Gonzalez, Braun, Uggla. It’s Melrose—of course it’s the bats.
- *Whitman*: Kershaw, Goldschmidt, Ramirez. Two of three are hitters, but the BIG guy is Kershaw.
- *Brobdignag II*: Mauer, Betts, Strasburg, Kimbrel. Balanced

What is there to see from this? I see three reasons.

1. Other than the steroid era bludgeoners of Melrose and Brobdignag, all the other dynasties had stable aces in the rotation. The last “beat them into submission” dynasty ended in 2015, almost a decade ago. Add to that the increasing fragility of starting pitchers for whatever reason you chose to believe, and it argues strongly that dynasties will be harder to come by. Starting pitchers who can anchor a 100 win or World Series contender for six, eight, or ten years in a row will become a thing of myth, or an anomaly. Eight dynasties in forty years doesn’t seem like much, but I will wager we do not see less than that moving forward.
2. The stability of managers. We have literally gotten to the point that managers under 10 years in TBL are rare. You have to be over 30 years in the league to think about being “one

of the senior fellows”. That is a lot of time to observe how other people do things, a lot of post draft analyses, and a lot of just picking brains and talking TBL as well as baseball. Two thirds of the league has made a world series in the last eleven seasons. The reality is the managers as a group have just gotten better and that makes the league more competitive.

3. “You have to be over 30 years in the league to think about being “one of the senior fellows” means something else as well. We are getting old. We no longer have the same time horizon to slowly build a team into a dynastic collection of talent (other than one particular Skogen Kid). When they get within reach of winning they are more likely to trade some of the future to grab the ring—and that inherently shortens the odds of a six+ year run.

Eight dynasties in forty years doesn’t seem like much, but I will wager we see less than that moving forward. Which is not necessarily a bad thing.



---

# who are we, anyway?<sup>1</sup>

by Paul Montague

(with assists from several others)

*Walter asked me to do a 'retrospective' article about TBL's history. I knew I didn't want to do a simple narrative – if nothing else, my memory isn't that good. So I wanted an organizing theme. The more I thought about it, the more I realized – "gestalt"<sup>2</sup> was that theme.*

*So, this article is my attempt to tease out the gestalt<sup>2</sup> of TBL through various milestones, memories, and memes<sup>3</sup> about TBL. The structure though, comes from popular cultural references, not from TBL or baseball at all. These cultural references will hopefully be familiar to you, as they come from within most of our lifetimes (with apologies to our younger owners).*

*Ed. Note: There are footnotes. They're at the end. (Every Montague article has footnotes.)*

## **In the beginning... – Long Ago (and Far Away)<sup>4</sup>**

I won't repeat the full story of the league's founding here (perhaps you can dig up the 2014 email where I included an article titled "In the Beginning"; if you haven't been around that long, or aren't an email packrat, I can re-send it). Suffice to say, a couple afternoons in the furnace room of a dorm at Virginia Tech, drafting six teams from the 1981 APBA card set, morphed over time into the current 24 teams with now 40 years and counting of baseball games, World Series titles, statistics and records that in some cases exceed MLB's accomplishments.

From small acorns, mighty – and amazing - oaks do indeed grow.

## **I Will Survive<sup>5</sup>**

The most amazing thing we have done is simply survive. As the LRFM (*Lone Remaining Founding Member*), I can confidently state that nobody who started the league envisioned it becoming what it is today. We were just three college kids seeking a short-term respite from stud-

ies and gave only passing consideration that the teams we were drafting to play one season might actually represent the start of a continuing league. There is no earthly reason the enterprise shouldn't have died aborning after a few days or weeks.

Even after it lasted a little while, and we added three more owners and six more teams after one season, it shouldn't have gone on much longer. Most APBA leagues fold very soon after starting, no more than a year or three. If you read or listen to the touts talk about strategies for dynasty leagues, they almost always say "go for it early, because you can't be sure the league will be around for a long-term building plan to work." Leagues that last four decades? If not true unicorns, such leagues are at least exceedingly rare.

We are all blessed to have connected with – and in – this Survivor.<sup>6</sup>

## **"It's bigger on the inside"**

I'm a fan of "Doctor Who", the long-running and quirky BBC science fiction show. The Doctor is the (almost) sole surviving member of a race called Time Lords, and he travels through time and space in a ship that looks like a British telephone box, called the TARDIS<sup>7</sup>. One of the most frequent memes on the show is the phrase "it's bigger on the inside," uttered by almost every person who is invited into the TARDIS. This is because while the TARDIS looks like a British telephone box, when you step into it, you find it is not the size of a British telephone box; it has multiple levels, corridors, rooms, engines, furniture, storage spaces, gizmos, and doodads – it is BIG, it has unforeseen depth. More than just another telephone box.

TBL is more than just another APBA league. We can post a league notice in the APBA newsletter



---

emails, or offer a brief description of the league to someone we know, and realize that it in no way conveys the actual magnitude of what we are about. We travel together in a virtual baseball ship that is far more than it may appear to someone who isn't part of the league.

TBL, like the TARDIS, is bigger on the inside.

### **I Heard It Through the Grapevine<sup>8</sup>**

Communication matters.

In the early days of TBL, when it was three of us all at the same college, it was easy. Even when we became six owners and 12 teams, five were able to meet in person, so it was “mostly” easy. “Mostly” included a lot of phone calls, as even for the core five we couldn't get all of us in the same place at the same time all the time.

But we began to implement some other communications that became a regular heartbeat for the league. Those communications were less ephemeral than in-person or by-phone conversations, and this in turn helped the league become an enduring entity.

We started using snail mail to get series results and stats, and very soon decided to produce a monthly printed newsletter. As we went through the second expansion to 12 owners, with several now not in southwest Virginia, we standardized a monthly rhythm with dates for series instructions, games to be played, and reports due back to opponents and the ‘league office’ (commissioner's mailbox). The commish compiled those reports into the newsletter, which brought everyone up to date on standings, stats leaders, and any coming events, league news, etc.

This rhythm kept the league connected and moving forward in the days before email and provided a tangible record of league history in our pre-website years.

Once email was widely available, it became the norm, and printed newsletters were a thing of the past. TBL quickly embraced electronic communications for pretty much all league matters, from private trade discussions to public rules debates to standings and stats. We're used to it now – but it's worth remembering that our connection was once a glorified “grapevine.”

Communications pushed us to realize “we're in it for the long haul.”

### **So Happy Together!<sup>9</sup>**

The Winter Meeting began as an offhand suggestion by Jim Collins not long after he joined the league. Jim managed a watering hole in downtown Washington, D.C. – think TV's “Cheers” cut in half the long way, and you have a good sense of the main bar on the entry level. The downstairs had a meeting room, and Jim asked if using it would streamline the draft process provided enough owners could attend in person. (This is when the telephone – complete with long-distance charges – was still the main method of quick contact for us.)

The idea was floated to the ownership, the Boston contingent of the time signed up to drive down, plus a few others, so we had a solid majority drafting face-to-face. (For those not in DC, we used a “call, let it ring twice, owner calls back” process to update them on the draft picks made, and get their pick. This meant quite a few calls coming into a big-city bar on a Saturday afternoon – but Jim had prepped the staff, and it worked.)

When it was over, everyone agreed it had been a great time of meeting guys who had previously just been names on paper or voices over the phone – and that we should definitely do it again the next year. Thus was born a TBL institution that continues to the present, with no interruption. It's that big a deal.

(At this point, I'll let Boomer take the con to finish our brief look at the Winter Meeting phenomenon.)

*It's a highlight of the year ... The camaraderie, hijinks, and last-minute trades are the stuff of legend, ... My favorite memories came from the drafts at the Thayer Hotel in West Point. Others will tell this story, but my version is this: Rich, Walter, and I (and others?) left Massachusetts on the Thursday before the draft. We drove all night to get as close to Lancaster, PA as possible.*

*The next morning, after a night in a motel, we arrived at APBA [to purchase the new cards]. From there, we found a Denny's for breakfast and card-ogling and -marking. We spent the rest of the day driving back north to West Point, arriving always in time for the traditional pre-draft dinner at a pizza restaurant.*

*The draft was held in a long conference room, which, far from corporate, embodied the atmosphere of a fraternity house. There were rooms on either end and sofas lining the walls, where some of us slept – I was younger and thinner then.<sup>10</sup> The mechanics of those drafts still strike me with nostalgia, although I remember the irritation (and subsequent jokes) while waiting for someone to call back to make a pick<sup>11</sup>. Saturday night dinner was at a steak*

*place, the Park Restaurant in Highland Falls. These meals were as much fun as they were tradition. Sunday meant the long drive home (not that long, but it was the last act of the great trip).*

## Express Yourself<sup>12</sup>

This thing you're reading – not just this article, the entire publication – is truly remarkable; unique, to the best of my knowledge, among APBA leagues. To be sure, some other leagues have some sort of yearbook. But they are pale and listless things compared to the *TBL Annual*. TBL has been blessed with several professional writers among its ranks for many years. One of them, Walter, came up with the idea of doing an annual publication for the league in 1980-or-90-mumble (I don't remember the exact year, but it was soon after he joined TBL in 1988). *Our first published review was in 1994.* – Ed. He volunteered to edit it, and wanted to model it after the then-still-being-published Mazeroski magazine for MLB baseball. The format clicked, and Walter drew in several other owners as regular contributors. The publication of our flagship journal is consistently a highlight of each season since then.

To say that doing the *Annual* year after year matters to TBL is a gross understatement. In some ways, it is the backbone of our collective existence. In its pages, to be sure we find information about our teams and our league, but more - in a very real sense, we find our soul. The *Annual* includes voices from across the league. It's baseball, but it's *our* baseball, and in its pages we have a lens on ourselves as persons extending beyond baseball.

To say that putting the *Annual* together is a herculean effort would also be a gross understatement. I am in awe



2015 Post-Draft Dinner. Clockwise from left: Beard, Bloom, Musselman, Jordan (standing), Hunt (standing), Powell, Auletta, Vaughn, Greenwald, Harrington, Chapman, Skogen (standing), Freedman, Jaskot, Meyer, Montague, Martin. Two people in this picture – Harrington and Chapman – have passed on since this picture was taken.

---

of the hours Walter spends on this, along with his fellow scribes. But it's not just the quantity that stands out, it's the quality. If there is a better fantasy / simulation baseball publication in existence, I'd be very very surprised. (And this isn't just my opinion – others in the APBA community, in academia, and indeed Fritz Light from APBA itself, have recognized and stated in public what a gem we have being cut and polished for us, year after year.)

Never, ever, take for granted what you have in your hands!

### **Always Something There to Remind Me<sup>13</sup>**

Something else not to take for granted – the TBL website. Baseball is all about its statistics and records. Many APBA leagues don't keep track of their history very well, if at all. TBL is different – we have a (more or less) permanent repository for our history.

Indeed, the word “repository” does not do it justice. Want to know who won the World Series in a given season? Which team has won the most games in a season? Which pitcher leads in strikeouts for his career? Which batter has the highest batting average? On the website, you can easily and efficiently find the answer to questions big and small about TBL's history.

The website is a true one-man wonder – that man being Steve Stein, of course. Without his technical wizardry and willingness to spend time and energy on it, we wouldn't have such a fabulous tool for delving into TBL's substance. Not only did he set it up, he is constantly tweaking it to improve its ability to deliver information at the push of a (mouse) button. We owe him an enormous amount of thanks for this, and we should never take it for granted.

This isn't strictly part of the website, but a recent nifty tech tool from Steve Stein – the TBL Chat Portal – extends our ability to connect in virtual

reality. The portal provides, as the name suggests, a chat space, but also a dice-rolling capability to generate play result numbers. Quite a few of us have used it for playoff games the last few years, and some have begun using it for regular season games. In some sense, this lets us return to our face-to-face play roots, overcoming our geographic dispersion.

Our records are a key part of our identity.

### **The One with Some Numbers<sup>14</sup>**

And, speaking of records, no history of the league (even as rambling and subjective as this one) would be complete without a few quantitative facts. Not stats from baseball players and teams and seasons – as noted, you can look those up on the website. The numbers I want to deal with briefly here are about us, the owners.

In TBL's history, no fewer than 91 individuals have been sole or co- owners of a team. Quite a few of those came and went quickly, wisps in the night.

Now consider: five of our current 24 teams have had only one owner in their existence. If we look only at the last 20 years, an astounding 16 teams – that's 2/3 of the league – have had only one owner since 2004. Those numbers speak to stability. Our early years may have seen significant turnover, but sometime during the 1990s and early 2000s, we gained a sense of who we are collectively, and that sense was somehow passed on to new owners, and was powerful enough that they wanted to stay around.

So strong was this 'glue' that quite a few guys have left, but after a while have found their way back – dare one say back “home” – to TBL. If my memory and research are correct, there have been at least six of these “once and future” cases; these include Eric, Boomer, Jack (RIP), and now Ray, among others.

“The cat came back, 'cause he couldn't stay away”, indeed.

---

**“If You Build It,  
[Championships] Will Come (maybe)”<sup>15</sup>**

“Titanic” was the big box office hit of 1997. Among other memes, it bequeathed us the image of its main character, Jack, leaning off the prow of the giant ship, shouting into the wind, “I’m the king of the world!” Since then, there have been all sorts of references and uses of that simple phrase.

So, why not for TBL? I daresay all 19 of us who have won a TBL championship have felt like “king of the world” in the moment (six of us more than once, led by Rich and Joe at 8 apiece). There is a definite adrenaline rush when one wins the final game of a TBL postseason. (*Can confirm. – Ed.*)

But there’s more to it than just the winning proper. There is the process, the engrossment in baseball, the researching of players, and all the many small steps leading up to the winning, or at least the attempt at winning. I believe that in many ways the process and the approach to team-building is far more important than the outcome.

We have certainly seen any number of team-building strategies in TBL over the years. Some owners prefer drafting (such as Rich and myself). Piling up draft picks becomes *The Way*<sup>16</sup>. Rich recalls perhaps the most extreme build-by-draft example - one year Greg Hamburg traded for so many picks that he emerged from the draft with enough players that he could have fielded two full teams!

Others of us are trade-centric; in fact, over the years, we’ve had three who traded so often they earned the nickname “Trader \_\_\_\_”. In the early years, Jim Miller was dubbed “Trader Jim” when within his first month of joining, he turned his entire roster over (twice, actually). In the frenzy of dealing, Trader Jim more than once lost track of what he owned in the moment and traded a player or pick he no longer had, with resulting consternation and confusion. More recently, of



“Trader Jack” and “Trader Daniel” at last year’s Winter Meeting.

course, we’ve had “Trader Jack” (RIP), though he seemed actually sedate by comparison. Currently, Daniel is apparently bidding for the moniker of “Trader Daniel.”

Most of us actually employ both of those ways of acquiring players, of course. Similarly, most of us either consciously or unconsciously adopt a relatively balanced approach to our rosters. A bit of power, a bit of hitting for average, a bit of base-stealing, a decent amount of pitching. But, a “lean” in one of those directions can produce a distinct team look.

My own team, Munich, has traditionally been a “three true outcomes” bunch – even before that phrase became known in the industry. Joe’s Barbarians have typically been behemoths of bash. By contrast, Hudson historically had a preponderance of base-stealers as the basis of its offense, although this tendency has become less pronounced over time, whether Clay consciously decided to change or not. Darrell has always famously favored “small ball”, riding it to a championship in 2009. For a pitching-centric approach, think back to Rich’s Elders of the 1990s, with a pair of aces (mirroring real-life’s Braves) as the basis of a winning hand that brought four league titles in a decade. And, Jack persisted in advocating for a non-DH approach, eventually refusing to use it in TBL on principle, and he made it work sometimes.

---

TBL's ownership over the years has come up with some strategic or tactical methods that MLB has since adopted (not suggesting that MLB has copied TBL, but that we have arrived at some smart approaches before our professional brethren). For example, I believe the idea of pitching "caddies" emerged in TBL sometime in the early 2000's; I don't remember who pioneered it. [*The relief valet was a Brian Hanley innovation. – Ed.*] And what is an early removal of a weaker starting pitcher in favor of a long reliever caddy but the "opener" strategy that has become widespread in MLB in the last few years?

Another of these TBL-pioneered ideas is the controversial concept of voluntarily giving up present assets to accumulate future ones, i.e. postponing the winning. We have several franchises who have practiced this to perfection, in a few cases multiple times over the years. TBL owners did it many years before MLB teams did, and if I may say so, we do it better (though we have to admit we do not have real people on our rosters or in our 'stands' that we have to try to keep happy).

I could go on, but these examples are sufficient to make the point: one of the ways that TBL takes hold of us is in the matching of wits over the intellectual challenges of team-building, roster-balancing, and in-game management that it presents.

### **Culture Club<sup>17</sup>**

This league has a culture of its own. Some of it is seen in things already discussed – the Winter Meeting, the *Annual*, the website. But there are other cultural elements that bind us together, things that only TBLers would even recognize.

There is a lingo in TBL, for example. Anton began saying "pitcha, pitcha, pitcha" one draft, and it immediately took on a life of its own. It can mean 'look out, there's a lot of pitchers gonna be drafted soon', or it can mean 'this team has to draft a bunch of pitchers', or it can just be a general opinion that a good pitcher was just drafted. (There isn't a corre-

sponding 'hitta, hitta, hitta' for whatever reason.) There are other expressions unique to this league. "The Bounce" – never heard that in any other league, although other leagues have owners who have employed the concept. As already mentioned, "caddy" is an idea that TBLers pioneered. And who among us has never owned a "bearded lady"?

Culture includes shared memories of "oops" moments, too. Rich reminded me of the 1994 draft, when I (drafting remotely) selected Manny Ramirez relatively late in the first round with a comment "I can't believe he's still available" – only to find out his limited playing time meant he was uncarded, so not in fact "available". (I didn't get dibs on him for the following year's draft, either...)

The next year, Farmville took Bob Hamelin with the first pick in the draft. Hamelin was the AL rookie of the year and had a decent card, but was far from the best choice for #1 – thus prompting one of the most emphatic uses of "The Sign"<sup>18</sup>, which is itself a part of our culture.

Another cultural element is the league 'geography' and team names. In the first couple of years, when there were few owners and each had two teams, we had half the league in the Americas and the other half 'abroad' (interpreted liberally – hence we allowed a team in Shangri-La). We soon relaxed that geographic requirement. But team names were always "roll your own", so over time we have seen some derived from their locations (e.g. Brazil Hurricanes), others from personal associations (Hudson Generals), others based on alliteration (Munich Marauders). Eric confesses that his team was named through sheer chance: "I couldn't think of a team name so as Clay, Sheri, and I were driving down to our first draft, I saw a billboard for The Statesmen Inn. Well, that sounded pretty good - better than anything I had come up with - so The Statesmen were born. Where were they from? Well, "The" of course!"

We also have as part of our culture a distinct – and distinguished – set of personalities. I don't

---

mean personalities of our actual owners (although some of our real-life personalities are indeed memorable). I'm referring to the host of fictional representatives in our front offices or field staff. Here's a quiz – see if you can match the imaginary TBL personalities to the real TBL owners they stand in for (some owners match more than one nickname):

- |     |  |                   |
|-----|--|-------------------|
| 1.  | The Sensei                                       |                   |
| 2.  | The Guru   |                   |
| 3.  | Vlad   | a. Joe Auletta    |
| 4.  | Whitey Bulger                                    | b. Mark Bloom     |
| 5.  | Wasp and Ant-Man                                 | c. Mark Freedman  |
| 6.  | Roberto<br>at the Margaritaville                 | d. Rich Meyer     |
| 7.  | Giuseppe   | e. Paul Montague  |
| 8.  | Boomer Wells                                     | f. Darrell Skogen |
| 9.  | The 24<br>season ticket holders                  | g. Rob Skogen     |
| 10. | The Stat Drunk<br>Computer Nerd                  | h. Steve Stein    |
| 11. | Willie Mays /<br>Gary Carter /<br>Orel Hershiser |                   |

Answers in the footnote.<sup>19</sup> (By the way, this list is by no means comprehensive or complete, just hitting a few highlights.)

The point is that our alter egos, and ways we talk about and through them, are part of who we are as a collective. Our most recent new owner, Rob, captured this perfectly: "I heard many tall tales over the years with larger than life characters and epic story arcs<sup>20</sup>. Much like the Tim Burton film *Big Fish* (check it out if you've never seen it), these stories brought this beautiful game of ours to life in a way I had not yet imagined. I was hooked. And here I now find myself part of this TBL universe, with my part yet to unfold."

If you think this stuff doesn't matter, consider that Ray, in recently announcing that he was going to return as an owner, felt constrained to say that he would have to develop a more glamorous way of announcing his trades...

Cultcha, ya see, cultcha!

## Just the Two [25] of Us<sup>21</sup>

In 1981, "My Dinner with Andre" was a surprise hit movie. It was just two people discussing various 'deep' subjects over dinner. Well, I don't know anyone named Andre, but I do know Ray – and one of my most enduring memories from TBL involves "my dinner with Ray".

In the mid-1990s, the business project I was part of involved a fair amount of travel. Our customers' main headquarters was in the Boston area. On one occasion I was due to be there for a couple of days of meetings, with the evening in between free. Ray and I were circling on a possible trade involving the first pick in the upcoming draft. *Hey, Ray, I'm gonna be in the area soon – how about we meet for dinner and get this thing decided?* Our schedules aligned, so we decided to meet at a certain restaurant (I don't remember what it was, but it was a good one), and had a leisurely meal. We did indeed resolve the trade, but the conversation ranged over a lot of other stuff, some TBL, some baseball in general, and some just life. Good food, convivial talk, a genial friend. It's hard to think of a better way to spend an evening.

That sort of relationship-building is intertwined inextricably with TBL. People generally don't join at random – most of us entered the league due to an existing relationship, be it family or friends. And most of the owners that stick around are ones who either already have one or more relationships with guys in the league, or they quickly develop such relationships once they join. Clay is an example of the latter case. He wrote, "I purchased the '82 set and began a replay that stalled a month in. At about that time I also discovered the *APBA Journal* and saw Paul's ad. I actually never knew such leagues existed. I knew no one in the league except Eric, who I managed to drag into it with me. 40 years later, ... I'm still here."

---

Nominally, the glue is baseball, but what keeps owners is actually – well, the owners. To mention Ray again – he didn't decide to act as non-owning commissioner for a decade because of the pay (there ain't none, as any of our former commishes can testify), but for the people.

Back in 2013, Walter made a post on Facebook about getting ready to leave for the Winter Meeting (in Fishkill, NY that year). The core of what he said was this: *"I joined the league in 1988 and my friendship with its members has grown as we have . . . matured . . . and watched each other's families grow and our lives evolve. Many of us have been doing this for 20 or more years, and it has become more than a common interest or even a common passion. Communities are fragile, sometimes transient things, these days hard to establish and even harder to maintain."*

Indeed, it is "the company". In this league, we have owners from all across North America – it truly is the "Transcontinental" league – and all walks of life. Likewise, we have Red Sox fans and Yankees fans, Cubs fans and Cards fans – but in TBLdom, those MLB rivalries almost never even get brought up. We also have a wide range of political, religious, and social positions.

But we value our associations within the league more. We regard each other as more than just some external and ephemeral labels. Our relationships within TBL transcend baseball; perhaps as much as baseball transcends mere life... the gestalt of TBL, in a nutshell, is our company, our community.

**"...in the end..."**

The movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" tells the story of Toula Portokalos, a second-generation

Greek-American woman, who falls in love with Ian Miller, who is from a very buttoned-down WASP family that could not be more different than Toula's loud, boisterous, emotive relatives. The Portokalos clan is presided over by Toula's father Gus (played by the incomparable Michael Constantine). Gus is very proud of his Greek heritage, and spends the movie informing other characters how any given word in English is derived from some Greek word.

Gus is in many ways bewildered by America, even as he seeks to become more American. In particular, he doesn't understand why Toula wants to marry a non-Greek boy. Conversely, Ian's parents are shocked and put off by Toula and her family. The two families collide in many ways, but in the end, the wedding happens, as

both sets of parents begin to see that Toula and Ian really do love each other.

Gus demonstrates his internal growth when he stands up to toast the young couple during the reception. "You know, the root of the word Miller is a Greek word. Miller come from the Greek word "milo," which is mean "apple," so there you go. As many of you know, our name, Porto-

kalos, is come from the Greek word "portokali," which mean "orange." So, okay? Here tonight, we have, ah, apple and orange. We all different, but in the end, we all fruit."

Well, gentlemen, there you have it: We all different, but in the end, we are all TBLers....



---

# who are we, anyway? – footnotes

[There are always footnotes. – Ed.]

1. Modified from “Who Am I Anyway?”, song in the musical Chorus Line, 1975
2. Gestalt: “*n.* an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts”. Like most formal definitions, this one is only the beginning of understanding the word.
3. Meme: “*n.* ... 2. An element of a culture or system of behavior passed from one individual to another by imitation or other nongenetic means”. (Think much of the content of Facebook and other social media.)
4. Song by Ira Gershwin in the 1944 movie “Cover Girl”. Yes, I immediately brought up a culture reference outside the lifetime of any of us, I believe. So, sue me...
5. Song by Gloria Gaynor, 1978
6. I didn’t think of this as a cultural reference for quite some time...
7. Acronym for *Time And Relative Dimension In Space*. Now you know.
8. Song by Marvin Gaye, 1967
9. Song by The Turtles, 1967
10. Paul – weren’t we all?
11. “An-tici-pay-ay-shun – it’s makin’ me wait!”
12. Song by Charles Wright & the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band, 1970
13. Song by Dionne Warwick, 1963
14. Adopting the episode title style of the TV series “Friends” 1994-2003
15. Of course, the most famous line from the iconic baseball movie “Field of Dreams”; modified a bit for context.
16. Indirect reference to The Mandalorian TV series
17. English pop band formed in 1981 – interestingly, this makes it co-existent with TBL.
18. The Sign: one of the cards found in some hotels that say “Did you forget something?” as a reminder for guests not to leave belongings behind when they check out. One year, Walter picked up one of these signs and began to deploy it during the TBL draft to say slyly that a given draft choice was probably a reach. It has been used less often in the last 10-20 years – either we have become a kinder, gentler group, or a more astute one... [I vote for “kinder, gentler,” for well-known reasons. – Ed.]
19. 1f, 2c, 3e, 4a, 5d, 6b, 7e, 8a, 9c, 10g.
20. Paul – this sounds distinctly like a line from “Second Hand Lions”...
21. Song by Bill Withers, recorded by Grover Washington, Jr., 1981



---

# moon phases and their meanings: reprise

Not wanting to abandon an interpretive method after one year, we're going to use this feature again to describe the state of TBL teams. Dynasties are built by teams that can get to Full Moon and stay there for a while.

This year is interesting, as there aren't any real juggernauts, and we're not expecting any to emerge for at least a year.



**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.

**THIS YEAR:** Midwest, Warrenton



**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.

**THIS YEAR:** Gotham City, Grand Cayman



**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.

**THIS YEAR:** Blue Hill, Brobdingnag, New Westminster, Northboro, Rye, Vegas, Zion



**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.

**THIS YEAR:** Calusa, Hoboken, Hudson, Kansas, Riverwolf, Rocky Mountain, Strong City



**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.

**THIS YEAR:** Columbus, Knoxville, Maracaibo, Melrose, Munich, Whitman



**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.

**THIS YEAR:** None.



## *A Thought Piece On One Of Them*

MLB is hard at work making changes, and they have the audacity not to talk with us first! Don't they realize that what they do can cause great angst to those of us in more important leagues than theirs? Having pointed out that obvious truth, I want to focus on one particular one which I believe could actually affect TBL more than the ones we have talked about the most in the last twelve months.

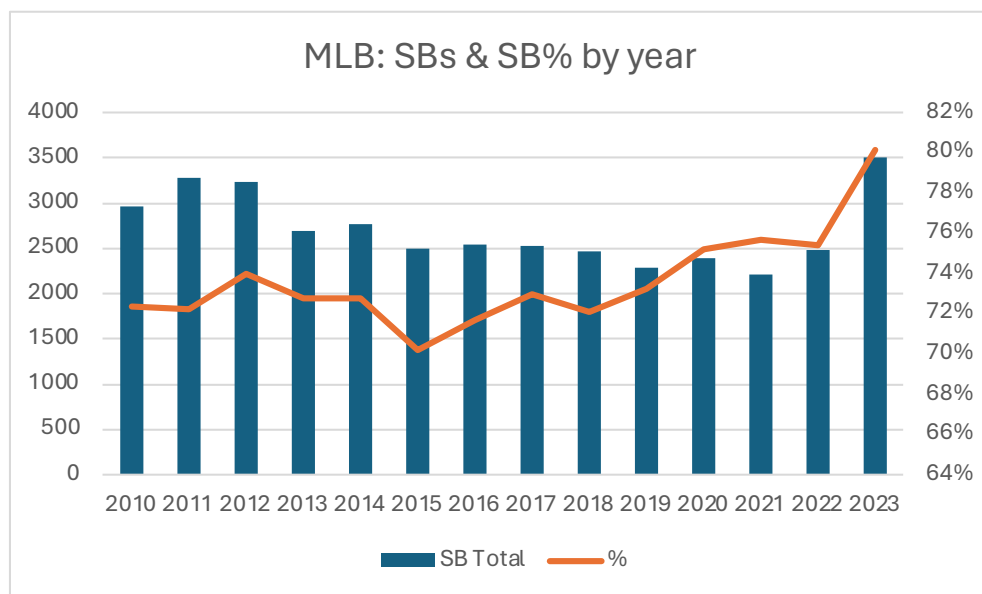
It was easy for us to vote down the "Ohtani Rule" because (1) it was a dumb rule to begin with, and (2) it would add a non-trivial amount of complication to our instructions, etc., for little to no gain. After all, our stadiums sell out game after game anyway.

The "3 batter minimum" rule I personally believe is dumb (but not as dumb) in our league because it does nothing to speed up our games since we don't give relief pitchers eight warm-up throws, and we use high speed carts to get them to the mound almost instantaneously—though I can see the appeal to some managers.

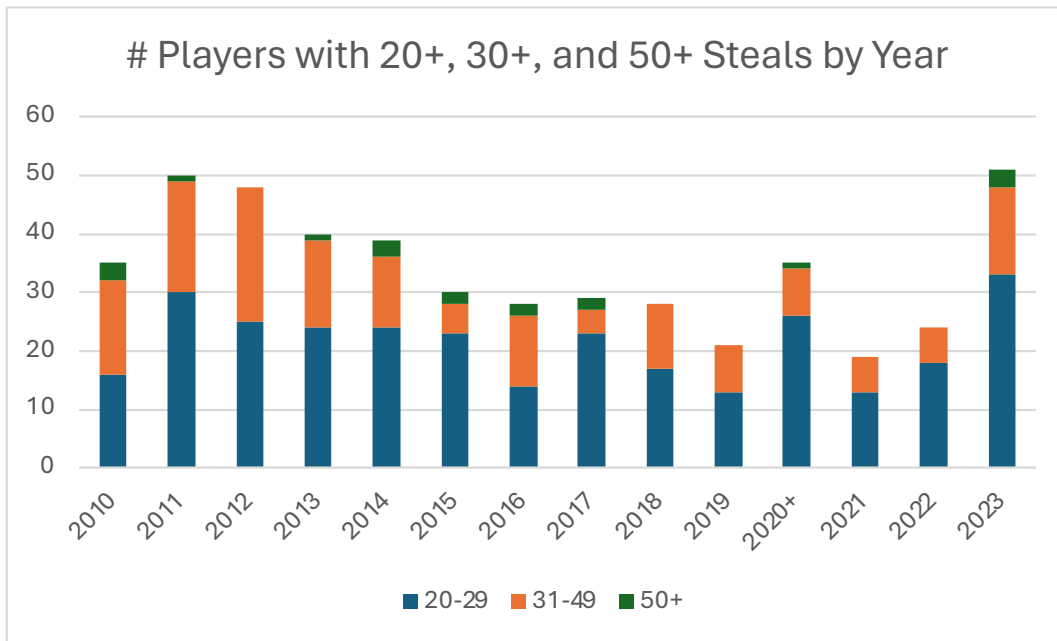
No, that's one I won't really address here either. The same with the pitch clock—I have not even installed them in Brobdingnag and don't intend to!

The one rule I see as making a significant impact on TBL thinking, is the extra two inches for the bases. Yes, the one that makes zero change to roster sizes, dice rolls, or our rules. Let us look at why we say this.

First, some data. Let's look at total SBs per year from 2010 to 2023:



To no one's surprise both the number of steals and success rate went up. Significantly. One more graph showing how many players had 20-29 steals, 30-49, and 50+ (see opposite page):



.194 batting average, they likely weren't going to hit anyway. But the Mike Piazza types would start the game because there weren't enough base stealing threats to care about his Th-4.

Now, maybe not. Sue, Piazza starts anyway. But does

Again, no surprises in the numbers. So what?

Looking at this, and looking at our instructions, these will increase the number of players who have enough straight steals to actually start having them steal earlier in games (maybe 30+, certainly 50+).

Even more, it increases the number of players who have enough attempts to H&R earlier and more often (let's say 20+ steals). Add to this the significant SSA increases for these players, and Though I have not looked at this season's instructions I expect it has started to reflect this.

So ... what does that do to catchers? Most contenders wanted a catcher with a big Th positive to bring into the games with a small lead in the late innings to counter the instructions that said "H&R starting in the 7th...., Steal in the 9th ....." It did not matter if it was a Maldonado with a

a slightly above average catcher with a Th-3 get the starts over the weak hitting Th+4? Not as clear how much the pivot point moves, but it will move.

If this year's MLB rule changes and trends accelerate (if teams trade a bit of power for SB in their lineups), then how much does the pivot point move?

In practical terms, look at Diaz, Moreno, and Alvarez. I would argue that 5 years ago the order might well have been Diaz, Alvarez, Moreno. And if the 2024 number continue, 5 years from now it may well be Moreno, Diaz, Alvarez. And a Patrick Bailey is an early 2nd round pick, not a mid 3rd. and an older .195, Th+6 catcher goes to a contender for a 3rd, not a 5th.

Just something thrown out there to think about. Or not, as you wish.

# 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 2024.

*Blue Hill Mudslides:*  
*Brobdingnag Barbarians:*  
*Calusa Indians:*

Yainer Diaz, C  
 Elly de la Cruz, IF  
 Xander Bogaerts, SS

*Columbus Jets:*  
*Gotham City Batmen:*  
*Grand Cayman Havens:*

Anthony Volpe, SS  
 Josh Jung, 3B  
 Nelson Velazquez, OF



*Hoboken Zephyrs:*  
*Hudson Generals:*  
*Kansas Koyotes:*

Spencer Steer, 1B  
 Triston Casas, 1B  
 Kodai Senga, P

*Knoxville Blue Thunder:*  
*Vegas Gamblers:*  
*Maracaibo Rumrunners:*

Grayson Rodriguez, P  
 Brayan Bello, P  
 Ezequiel Tovar, SS



*Melrose Avengers:*  
*Midwest Mongrels:*  
*Munich Marauders:*

Logan O'Hoppe, C  
 Royce Lewis, SS  
 Austin Riley, 3B

*New West. Whiskeyjacks:*  
*Northboro Phoenix:*  
*Riverwolf Sharks:*

Zach Neto, SS  
 Jordan Westburg, IF  
 Gerrit Cole, P



*Rocky Mountain Dragons:*  
*Rye Herons:*  
*Strong City Statesmen:*

Justin Verlander, P  
 Evan Carter, OF  
 Jarred Kelenic, OF

*Warrenton Giants:*  
*Whitman River Rats:*  
*Elders of Zion:*

Michael Harris II, OF  
 Freddie Fermin, C  
 Matt McLain, SS



---

# commissioner's report

by Ray Murphy

I'm back! For the second straight year in this space, I lead off by acknowledging the loss of a member of our fraternity. Jack Chapman was a TBL fixture across multiple membership stints, the first of which pre-dated my arrival in the league. My first TBL trade was actually with Jack, in what I would estimate to be the winter of 1992-93. As was required in any of Jack's transactions, a Bay Area player was involved (Terry Steinbach, as I recall.)

His predilection for Bay Area players was just one piece of what made Jack such a character, even by our own (fairly high) standard for character development. His disdain for the designated hitter rule was, of course, another piece of that character. Together, though, those pieces of Jack's TBL DNA are two key pieces of the lesson I learned from Jack over the years: our enjoyment of this league can't be tied to competitive success. Simply put: in a league with 24 franchises, only one can win every year, if you can't find enjoyment and pleasure in the non-winning seasons, this hobby is a terrible way to spend your time. Jack played our game the way he wanted, with the players he wanted.

Jack's passing ended up being the unfortunate trigger for a transition that I teased in this space a year ago: my own return to active manager status. Last month, I managed my first TBL games in nearly a decade, after spending the offseason reshaping (read: stripping down to the studs) the Warrenton franchise.

Some aspects of the active-manager role came back to me more easily than others. Clearly, trading came back quickly. And why not? Obviously I have a handle on the MLB player pool. And the vagaries of TBL-specific player valuation were still seared into my brain from 20+ years as an active manager, and then a decade of reading (over-)written trade announcements from you guys and trying to figure out what each of you were thinking, and which side of the deal I favored. And as far as understanding the personalities of the league: well, given how little turnover there has been during my decade on the sidelines, I still have a pretty good handle on our membership!

Other parts of the gig have come back less easily. I knew that writing emergency instructions would be a chore, but that chore ended up being worse than I thought: it took three drafts to get past Darrell's fine-toothed review of my instructions, and then during April games, Steve Stein found another batch of errors that had evaded Darrell. (Or, far more likely, Darrell took pity on me after draft #3). Hopefully my revised post-waiver instructions are in full compliance now!

Game-play came back surprisingly easily. I guess after managing more than 2000 games in this league, the muscle memory is pretty well-developed. By the second inning of my first game, I had re-mastered the *P+Enter* keystroke combo that keys off the next play in BBW 5.75. I scored my games, I don't think I missed any pitchers fatiguing, and most importantly I think I gave the visiting teams a fair shake in their trip to Warrenton.

Of course, trips to Warrenton aren't particularly daunting for road teams this year. But with a nice stockpile of draft picks for 2025 accumulated in my teardown this past winter, hopefully Warrenton will be a less-hospitable venue for road managers in future years. We put some of the foundational pieces of Warrenton's next good team in place this past winter, and a bunch more will arrive next year.

For me, that's the fun of this league, when not winning. I don't mind playing the games or keeping the stats, but for me it's the long game that brings me the enjoyment: the building of a roster from the ground up, the cultivating of pieces that fit into a puzzle: you start with some kind of teardown, try to rebuild a new core, nurture it into contention, patch where you need to each year, and then try to hold it together for as long as you can, until it's time to start the process over.

I'm excited to be back "in the game" with you all, and looking forward to a few more of those building cycles in the years ahead. Good luck on the field in 2024! While you're beating up on the Giants, I'll be scouting Jackson Chourio, Paul Skenes, and the other potential top picks in next year's draft. It's good to be back!

– Commish

# Riverwoolf Has Entered the Chat

For year, *Daniel Dumont's Riverwoolf Sharks* have been swimming at the bottom of the Clemente pool, in part because of the musical-chairs nature of Sharks



management. They turned over an astounding 86% of the roster that went 57-105 last year, and we think they are good enough to win this pennant.

Now it's up to Monsieur Dumont to follow through and do it.

The Clemente pennant has belonged largely to the *Whitman River Rats* since it was created in 1998. Last year they won it again, and were only prevented from going to the big

show by a comparable team that was just a bit better. We thought there might be a build-down, but it looks like *Brian*



*Hanley* is giving it one more shot with the current crew. They will certainly give Riverwoolf a run for their money, but we believe that they will fall short.

## 2023 Clemente Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Whitman*	109	53	.673	—
Strong City	82	80	.506	17
Blue Hill	69	93	.426	40
Riverwoolf	57	105	.352	52

\* Lost to Maracaibo in the Conference semifinal.

As for the *Strong City Statesmen*, *Eric Sheffler* wasn't able to make too many



moves. They're good in places, and they're deficient in places; interestingly, the cards that may come through for the team are not the ones belonging to the perennial stars. Do they have enough? To overtake Whitman, maybe; to get past Riverwoolf? Maybe not.

The *Blue Hill Mudslides* didn't have the cohesion, or the luck, that the *Annual* predicted. So sue us. We think highly of *Mark Ludwig* and we like some of their players, particularly the cream of the crop; but the pitching is only half there, and the lineup has problems at bat and in the field. We'd



like to see them come through, but do not think it will be this year. We could be wrong; so sue us.



# Clemente Division

J. D. Martinez,  
Riverwoolf

<b>1. Riverwoolf</b>	<b>29.0</b>
<b>2. Whitman</b>	<b>22.5</b>
<b>2. Strong City</b>	<b>22.0</b>
<b>3. Blue Hill</b>	<b>19.0</b>

# 2023 riverwoolf SHARKS in review



*Change . . . it couldn't be more welcome.*

by Daniel Dumont

## 2023 in Review

**Final Record: 57-105 (4th, Clemente)**

There wasn't much to brag about in Riverwoolf in 2023, and it turned out to be a long season. There's only so much of that to take before management looks for change. It couldn't be more welcome.

### What went right?

There were a few good performances at the plate. Michael Harris hit .266-21-54 with 25 doubles; Gleyber Torres hit 32 homers and drove in 79; Austin Riley had 37 with 95 RBI. In limited playing time Jordan Luplow hit 14 homers with 31 RBI.

On the mound, Erasmo Ramirez was the best pitcher on the team, winning 10 and saving 10 with a 1.84 ERA. Paul Blackburn had a 3.41 ERA, best among the starters.

### What went wrong?

Nearly everything else. No starter reached the 10-win plateau; overall they went 28-68. Jordan Lyles, acquired to bolster the rotation, went 3-16, 5.61. The bullpen behind Ramirez worked too often and was worked too hard.

The offense hit a paltry .215 and struck out 1,372 times (the pitchers only struck out 1,210 opponents). Six regulars were over the 100 mark, and Luplow's 14 HR came with 85 Ks in half a season. They scored only 579 runs; too many hitters had bad seasons, and produced far too little and far too infrequently.

## 3 Things

1. *Out with the old, in with the new.* Nearly every regular player from the 2023 squad is gone – Harris, Riley, Torres, Nimmo, Stott, and Kepler are all wearing different uniforms, along with many part-timers. Only a few remain. A whole new pitching staff was needed as well.

2. *Speaking of pitching . . .* An entirely new rotation has been installed for 2024. Gerrit Cole, Charlie Morton, Yusei Kikuchi, and Mike Clevinger will be regular starters; the only starting pitcher from last season's rotation is Blackburn.



Ramirez: Best pitcher

The pen will be very solid with Alzola, Armstrong, and Castro, Hoffman, Martin, Milner, Stephenson and Thielbar. They'll get lots of chances to deliver in the late innings.

3. *Hitting, pitching and even a bench.* The Sharks dealt the 2024 and most of the 2025 draft to acquire many, many new players. Among the highlights: Cody Bellinger, J. D. Martinez, Harold Ramirez, Ryan O'Hearn, Jon Berti, Ezequiel Duran, Manuel Margot, Justin Turner, Garrett Hampson, Mitch Garver, and Stone Garrett, joining holdover Wander Franco. They're very solid on defense as well, and the bench is an excellent option with some bona fide versatility – a new feature for Riverwoolf fans.

As for future drafts: there won't be much new to see next year, so it'll be up to management to make 2024 an excellent season for the Sharks.



# riverwoolf SHARKS



Daniel Dumont (8th year)

*This is not a dynasty team – not yet, at least.*

There comes a time for every team when its management decides that it's time to surge forward and win some games. In 2018, in his second year in TBL, Daniel Dumont pulled out the stops and won 94, losing in the conference semifinal to Blue Hill. The next year the club went 48-114, and the next four years after that were no better. At the *Annual*, we suggested that in order to get better it would be necessary to settle on a core group of young players and build from there. We suggested it several times, in fact; each time, we assumed that this was key to long-term success. Well, what do we know.

This year's surge required the expenditure of all of the 2024 *and* 2025 drafts. Well, not quite all of 2025: they get to pick in each round from the 5th on (and three times in the 9th, woo hoo!) But if the very solid team they put on the field this year falls apart, those picks will not fix it. This is not a dynasty team – not yet, at least – but they will do some damage this year and are rated well enough to go deep into the playoffs. But it took an 86% turnover to make it happen, and there'll be a lot of ex-Sharks players and ex-Sharks picks playing for other teams, in some cases for years to come.

## **Pitching:** **12.5** **Among the best in the league.**



Morton: Mercenary

Riverwoolf had been good for hitters in the past, but that's all changed this year. The rotation is decent, and the bullpen is lights out.

**ROTATION.** The presence of Gerrit Cole (Grade 15 C+25 HR+21, 33 starts) is a huge benefit. He is joined by mercenary Charlie Morton (Grade 12 C-41 HR+32, 30 starts) who has been with

## **SNT: Gerrit Cole.**

*One of the best starting pitchers in baseball. He is the new anchor of a newly solid rotation.*



## **Turnover Rate: 86%**

**Arrived:** Shawn Armstrong, Christian Arroyo, Cody Bellinger, Jon Berti, Miguel Castro, Ernie Clement, Mike Clevinger, Gerrit Cole, Brenton Doyle, Ezequiel Duran, Chris Flexen, Stone Garrett, Mitch Garver, Garrett Hampson, Kyle Higashioka, Yusei Kikuchi, Manuel Margot, Chris Martin, J.d. Martinez, James Mccann, Owen Miller, Hoby Milner, Charlie Morton, Ryan O'hearn, Harold Ramirez, Robert Stephenson, Caleb Thielbar, Jose Trevino, Justin Turner, Will Vest, Ryan Weathers.

**Departed:** Graham Ashcraft, Kris Bubic, Willi Castro, Jharel Cotton, Wil Crowe, Reid Detmers, Ben Gamel, Amir Garrett, Austin Gomber, Marwin Gonzalez, Michael Harris, Jonathan Heasley, Max Kepler, Shea Langeliers, Jordan Luplow, Jordan Lyles, Casey Mize, Brandon Nimmo, Michael Perez, Konnor Pilkington, Tanner Rainey, Erasmo J. Ramirez, Austin Riley, Eddie Rosario, Gary Sanchez, Hirokazu Sawamura, Bryson Stott, Gleyber Torres, Touki Toussaint, Taylor Walls, Spenser Watkins

Midwest, Brobdingnag, Melrose and Strong City since his last time with this franchise. The number three is Mike Clevinger (Grade 10 C+15 HR+13, 24 starts); Yusei Kikuchi (Grade 9 C+16 HR-15) adds 32 more. That's three-quarters of what's needed. The rest go to Vince Velasquez (Grade 10, 8 starts), Paul Blackburn (Grade 6, 20 starts) and Ryan Weathers and Chris Flexen (Grades 2 and 1). The bullpen will work harder on those days.

**BULLPEN.** There's a lot to like. There are five closer grades, led by the designated one, Chris Martin (Grade 18\* C+51 HR+51, 51 innings;



that's a lot of 51s, including the uniform number for the Braves!). He's joined by Jeff Hoffman (Grade 21\* C-12 HR+42), Shawn Armstrong (Grade 20\* C+31 HR+51), Robert Stephenson (Grade 19\* C+16 HR-21) and Hoby Milner (Grade 18\* lefty, C+32 HR+32). That's 220 more innings Grade 18\* and above. The instructions restrict their use, but if they're employed properly they'll shut down a lot of rallies.



Martin: 51

To go with them there's a quartet of solid middle guys – Caleb Thielbar (Grade 15\* lefty, C+32 HR-43 *ekk*), Adbert Alzolay (Grade 14\* C+32 HR+32), Will Vest (Grade 13\* C+24 HR+41), and Miguel Castro (Grade 11\* HR+12). That's 208 more innings that will help everyone but Cole.

Pitching alone doesn't get you all the way, whether the Guru thinks so or not, but this staff will help them go a long way. It's among the best in the league.

**Offense: 9.5**  
**They'll score runs.**

We always like to start with the big bat. There is a lot to like with J. D. Martinez (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-0-0-0) who will be in the middle of most lineups. He's joined by the recovered Cody



Martinez: Big bat

Bellinger, who liked the Chicago dogs in '23 (11 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, 26 SBA with 30 SSN) and Ryan O'Hearn (11 hits, 1-0-0-0). Jon Berti turned in a nice card (11 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, 22 SBA with 28 SSN), as did Wander Franco, one of the few holdovers from '23 (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, 40 SBA with 29 SSN). That's a pretty solid start.

The players around this group are quite decent. Manuel Margot (10 hits, 3 0s, 29 SSN); Ezequiel Duran (10 hits, 2 walks+42, 1-6-6, 26 SSN); Justin Turner (10 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-5-6); Garrett Hampson (10 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, 35 SSN), Harold Ramirez (11 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0) and rookie Stone Garrett (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-0-0-0, 29 SSN) are all nice complements to the core lineup. The only real deficiency is behind the plate; James McCann (8 hits, 4 0s) and Kyle Higashioka (9 hits, 1-5-6) are a little weak. Half the time Christian Arroyo (9 hits, 4 0s) will be manning second base.

This group will certainly score runs. They have very few platoon issues, and there are enough games and at-bats to provide for some creative substitutions.

**Defense: 4.0**  
**Average, again.**

There are some good high-lights. Wander Franco is an SS9; Cody Bellinger brings the A game (OF3, 34 arm, 1B5); Manuel Margot (OF3, 32 arm) can catch it, and Duran and Berti (OF2) are adequate. Brendan Doyle (OF3, 35 arm) may be on the roster for defense



Franco: Holdover

Ryan O'Hearn (1B4) is Fielding One, as are McCann (Th+4) and Higashioka (Th-2), with Alex Trevino (C9, Th+2) on the bench. Hampson is only average at second (2B7), though Arroyo is a 2B8. Turner (3B3) is weak, though there are several 3B4s to rescue him.

This is an average defense, with a few high-lights. Some days, due to game restrictions, there will be days where balls will get through and innings will be extended.



**Third Quarter.** They've gone all in with both the 2024 and 2025 drafts, and have built a highly-rated team. It might be this good next year, but it also might come completely apart.

**Bench: 3.0 Opportunities.**

Every contender needs a hitting toy, and there's one here: the .380 hitting Ernie Clement (13 hits, 2 0s, 5 7s, 52 PA, 26 SSN). Wowza.



Clement: Wowza

There'll be several other semi-regulars to be used as well, depending on the lineup; Riverwoolf also has Owen Miller (10 hits, 3 0s, 2 walks, 33 SSN for 15 SBA), Jose Trevino (8 hits, 2 0s, C9 Th+2), and Brenton Doyle (8 hits, 3 0s, 31 SSN for 27 SBA). Mitch Garver (9 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-5, L+7 R-4) also has a useful card in some situations.

The starting lineup isn't completely pat, so there should be opportunities to use the bench. Riverwoolf should encourage this, especially when faced with higher grade pitching.

**1st**

The TQ makes them the favorite. This division has belonged almost exclusively to Whitman for the past 97 years, but Riverwoolf's offseason roster turnover has made them likely to take that title away. The middle of the lineup, the top end starters, and the huge bullpen are all hallmarks

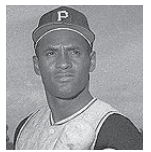
of a winning team. When the big arms aren't starting, though, it'll be important to go rescue whoever's out there (the instructions expect them to go deep, which almost suggest that those are days that Riverwoolf will concede). This is very Casey Stengel: win a third, lose a third, and work hard for the remaining games.

There are reasons for concern in the future: looking at player ages below, some of these guys are on the far side of 30. But in the meanwhile, they should do well in a division – and a league – that has no juggernauts. We expect them to win a lot.

Ages of players on the Riverwoolf roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 40: Morton
- 39: J. Turner
- 38: C. Martin
- 37: Thielbar
- 36: J.D. Martinez
- 34: Berti, Higashioka, J. McCann
- 33: S. Armstrong, Clevinger, Cole, Garver, Kikuchi, Milner
- 32: V. Velasquez
- 31: Hoffman, Stephenson, Trevino
- 30: Blackburn, Flexen, O'Hearn
- 29: Alzolay, Arroyo, M. Castro, Hampson, Margot, H. Ramirez, Vest
- 28: Bellinger, Clement, S. Garrett
- 27: O. Miller
- 26: Doyle
- 25: E. Duran
- 24: Weathers
- 23: W. Franco

**TQ: 29.0**



**riverwoolf SHARKS**



# 2023 whitman RIVER RATS in review

*The second ring was a fraction of an inch away.*

by Joe Auletta



## 2023 in Review

**Final Record: 109-53 (1st, Clemente)**

It was Whitman's sixth straight division title: another very balanced, very good team; they were second in runs scored (799) and second in ERA (2.95).

### What went right?

Offensively the traditional Big 2 of Goldschmidt (.846 OBP, 118 RBIs and 97 runs scored) and Jose Ramirez (.823, 115, 105 and 17 steals) were aided by lesser known Harold Castro who put up .334/.358/.486 numbers. The pitching was typical River Rats: a six-deep bullpen with every one of them under a 2.50 ERA saved a lot of games for a solid rotation headed up by future first ballot HoF ace Clayton Kershaw (15-2, 2.17 ERA).

### What went wrong?

It is hard to say that anything really did—other than a little bad fortune. All during the year Whitman was one of the three best teams in TBL, along with Maracaibo and Midwest. They each won 108+ games, but Brian drew the short straw and had to play 108 win Maracaibo in their first round playoff series—the only team with an even better pitching staff than Whitman. The series went seven games, but the Rats came up a game short to the eventual champions. The longest active dominant run in TBL continues, but the second ring was a fraction of an inch away.

## 3 Things

1. *Is there another gallon in the gas can?* To be honest, Whitman will again be a good team in 2024. They have won 12 of the last 16 Clemente pennants. Good, but not great this year. But neither are the other contenders great. And during that string most years the key names have been Kershaw, Goldschmidt, and Ramirez. 36, 36, and 32. Can they keep up the all star level play, especially with Kershaw starting the season on the IL?



Kershaw: First ballot

2. *How will this affect the future?* Dynastic runs always have to balance the current with the future, and the longer it runs the more "today" has to feed upon "tomorrow". Whitman added six draft picks for this season, but only two earlier than round eight. Can Gavin Williams take the long term torch from Kershaw?

3. *How well will the closer by committee bullpen work in Whitman?* One of the hallmarks of Brian's run has been a deep bullpen with multiple closer-quality arms that would protect most leads in the last few innings. This edition is composed of a number of set-up relievers, but only 23 innings of Dany Jimenez via trade with Northboro looks like a traditional "closer".

# whitman RIVER RATS

Brian Hanley (29th year)

*Roll with the punches.*



Whitman's instructions speak to the ebb and flow of fortunes in TBL. "Since winning it all in 2019," Brian Hanley writes, "the River Rats have had four straight playoff seasons and 3 with 100+ wins and nothing to show for it all. The window on this team is closing fast, but we will compete for a playoff spot again."

It could have been the other choice. Hanging on for one more shot is a reasonable decision: they were as likely to get to the World Series last year as any of those four successful seasons, but were stopped in a tense, tight series. For some managers that's the signal to tear it all apart. Snell and Kershaw and the bullpen arms, Ramirez and Goldschmidt and Verdugo would have brought some great returns. But rebuilding takes time

## Turnover Rate: **25%**

**Arrived:** Willie Calhoun, Freddy Fermin, Aaron Hicks, Dany Jimenez, Richard Lovelady, Eddie Rosario, Jacob Stallings, Emmanuel Valdez, Gavin Williams.

**Departed:** Alex Call, Ian Gibaut, Liam Hendriks, Jimmy Herget, Yadier Molina, Tyler Naquin, A.J. Pollock, Adam Wainwright, Kolten Wong.

## SNT: Freddy Fermin.



*Another contender to replace Salvador Perez as the Royals' catcher, he had a remarkable few weeks last summer. He can certainly drive the ball, but he's already 29 – so this is the best it likely will get.*

and is an emotional commitment, and maybe there really is one more shot. In the hands of a great manager, and (to reiterate) in the absence of any overwhelming teams in TBL, there's a path to the playoffs and maybe a championship. We don't rule it out.

## Pitching: **10.0** The Whitman hallmark.

Nothing is more characteristic of a River Rats team than a solid pitching staff. Half a season of excellent starts; a reasonably deep bullpen; and the skill of the manager (both handling the team and providing good and innovative instructions) should carry Whitman a long way. This isn't the best Whitman staff, but it's good enough to make them an outside contender.



Snell: Top notch, again

ROTATION. The starters are led by the top notch Blake Snell (Grade 20 C-62 HR+31, 32 starts). He's wild and has low fatigue, but should be a very effective five inning starter. He's joined by 24 starts of long time ace Clayton Kershaw (Grade 16 C+13 HR+14), 16 starts of Gavin Williams (Grade 14 C-32 HR+24), and 8 by Drew Rasmussen (Grade 14 C+23 HR+45). That's half a season of very decent grades.

The other half isn't quite as powerful. Michael Lorenzen (Grade 10 C+14) goes to the hill 25 times and Joey Lucchesi (Grade 9 lefty, HR+31) adds 9 more. Matt Strahm (Grade 12 C+24) is a low-fatigue starter 10 times, and the balance will go to Jose Urquidy



# Whitman RIVER RATS

(Grade 6, 10 starts) and a very mortal Lance Lynn (Grade 5 HR-36). The bullpen will rescue them.

**BULLPEN.** Speaking of which: this is a functional, but flawed, pen. They could really use one of the five closer arms up the road in Riverwoolf. Instead they are led by 23 innings of Dany Jimenez (Grade 23\* C-62) and 28 innings of Robert Suarez (Grade 17\* C+21 HR-15). One of them is the last inning option.

The bulk of the work will rest on the shoulders of three middlemen: Jake Diekman (Grade 16\* C-62 HR+44), Kendall Graveman (Grade 16\* C-35) and Emilio Pagan (Grade 16\* C+16 HR+33). They have nearly 200 innings between them. There are almost 80 additional from the left side – Strahm and Richard Lovelady (C-31), both Grade 14\*. Pierce Johnson (C-32) and Griffin Jax (C+22 HR+33), both Grade 10\*, have 128 early game innings between them, with Seth Martinez (Grade 5\*) as the mop.

As noted, this is not the best Whitman staff ever, but if used carefully, it will keep them in a lot of games over the course of the season.

**Offense: 6.0**  
**A lot of short innings.**

In the past, the middle of the Whitman lineup was dangerous. This season, there's really only one such card, and it's not as dangerous as in the past: Jose Ramirez (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, L-5, 34 SBA with a 32 SSN). Still very good, of course. The only other candidate for Guy To Pitch Around is OF Alex Verdugo, just arrived in town from New West (10 hits, 4 0s, L-7, 25 SSN). He's



Ramirez: Only one

the #2 card in the lineup. After these two come a variety of players who have pluses and minuses. Behind the plate rookie Freddy Fermin is solid in limited use (10 hits, 2 walks, 1-5-6), and Riley Adams (10 hits, 3 walks, 5 0s) is even better in even more limited use.



Verdugo: #2

But a lot of the lineup consists of cards that can do one thing or another, but have deficiencies. Long time stalwart Paul Goldschmidt (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-5-6, 32 SSN) is just okay, as is Ryan Mountcastle (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-5-6). Eddie Rosario (9 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0) and Hunter Renfroe (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0) are OBP challenged, as are Harold Castro (10 hits, 1 walk, 6-6), Miguel Rojas (9 hits, 2 walks, 2 0s, 28 SSN) and Tim Anderson (9 hits, 2 walks, 2 0s, 33 SSN). These can be pitched around, and there will be a lot of short innings.

This is simply not a scary offense, certainly not comparable to the one that put up 800 runs and hit 200 homers a year ago.

**Defense: 4.0**  
**A bit less than usual.**

The Rats are very strong at certain positions. At the infield corners they're superlative: Ramirez is a 3B5, and both Goldschmidt and Mountcastle are 1B5s. In the outfield, Rosario (35 arm), Verdugo (35 arm) and Renfroe (36 arm) are all OF3s; Harold Castro is a 2B8 for two-thirds of the season, though there's a 2B6 or 2B7 there when he's on the bench. Tim Anderson is the short-stop (SS8) a lot of the time, with Rojas a superior choice (SS9) but an even less impressive bat.

Behind the plate, Adams (C7 Th-3) and Fermin (C6 Th+2) are unimpressive defensively, as is M.J. Melendez (C6 Th-4). Jacob Stallings is a C9, but like many catchers this year he has a bad arm (Th-3).



Goldschmidt: Can pick it

For many years defense has been an important component of winning teams in Whitman, and this year it's less impressive. If some of the better gloves had some more playing time this would be a better rating.

**Bench:**  
**Some extra things.**

**2.5**

There are some options on the roster, though usage imposes restrictions. Willie Calhoun (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-6-6, L-11) is a good pinch-hitting option when the shift doesn't come into play; Ildemaro Vargas (9 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, L+4 R-5) is the same from the other side. Aaron Hicks (9 hits, 5 walks, 0-6, 35 SSN, L+9 R-5) is a valid choice in the days that the platoon doesn't matter – or on the computer, where it doesn't exist.

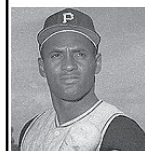
One thing is for sure: Mr. Hanley will make the best use of what's there.

**2nd** And by some distance. The better pitching will keep them in games, but the lack of offensive explosions – despite the presence of a number of 1-0-0-0 cards – will make the effort to get much above .500 a struggle.

There's a little bit in the draft tank, so if they look like they're close late in the summer, they might look to make a move. But given the age of the team, this might be a good season to just roll with the punches and start building the next version of the team.



**Half Moon.** They can still pitch, but the offense is lacking and they're just getting off. There was some speculation about a Whitman rebuild, but it may still be a year away while they try to get to the playoffs one more



**Whitman RIVER RATS**

Ages of players on the Whitman roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 37: Diekman, Lynn
- 36: Goldschmidt, Kershaw
- 35: M. Rojas
- 34: A. Hicks, Stallings
- 33: Graveman, P. Johnson, Pagan, R. Suarez
- 32: Lorenzen, Renfroe, E. Rosario, Strahm, I. Vargas
- 31: T. Anderson, Lucchesi, J. Ramirez, Snell
- 30: H. Castro, D. Jimenez, Winker
- 29: Calhoun, Fermin, Jax, S. Martinez, Urquidy
- 28: R. Adams, Lovelady, Rasmussen, Verdugo
- 27: Mountcastle
- 25: Melendez, E. Valdez
- 24: G. Williams

**TQ: 22.5**



# 2023 strong city STATESMEN in review



*Luck prevailed, as it turned out.*

by Eric Sheffler

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 82-80 (2nd, Clemente)

Last year's *Annual* suggested that there was a tension between entropy and luck, offering the idea that the 2023 club was the last good team of the current cycle and that 2024 would need to be a rebuild. Luck prevailed, as it turned out: there was just enough to get the team into the playoffs and to win a series before calling it a day.

There were certainly things to like, and there is – again – just enough to keep going. Will this be it?

### What went right?

The offense was led by a huge year by Vlad Guerrero, Jr.: 40 HR, 119 RBI, .274 / .341 / .517. Bo Bichette was also very solid: 50 doubles, 26 homers, .286 / .319 / .483. Evergreen star Nolan Arenado hit 48 doubles and 29 HR, with a .271 / .337 / .510 slash line. Randy Arozarena had 48 doubles himself (this is something of a theme) and led the team with 29 steals.



Guerrero: Huge

On the mound, Zack Wheeler had another great season (16-5, 2.05, 186 Ks in 175.7 IP). Emmanuel Clase had a 1.71 ERA and notched 31 saves.

Despite giving up 679 runs and only scoring 647, the team wound up with a winning record. They scored in bursts, and clearly when the big bats were active, they won games.

### What went wrong?

Some of the effectiveness of both the offense and the pitching was illusory. Other than surrender

starters Bruce Zimmerman and Spencer Howard, the rotation was all under 4.00 ERA, and there were some helpful relievers to support Clase. But when the team was losing and the hitters weren't hitting, there was little they could do about it.

Six members of the regular lineup struck out more than 100 times, led by Arozarena at 176. Other than him, no one really ran, and the 145 DPs led TBL by a wide margin. Their .243 / .308 / .400 team slash is 9 hits and 3 walks with three weak power numbers: not Bichette, not Guerrero, not Arenado – more like Mauricio Dubon. Luck trumped entropy for them to get to the 82-80 mark.

### 3 Things

1. *The StatesGuys are getting older.* A few of the key players – Vlad, Bichette, Clase – are very young and will survive until the next upswing, but far too many on the roster are plus years. This will catch up with the team sooner or later, likely sooner.
2. *There's not much draft.* There's more than there was in 2024, but the first pick is in the 4th round. If parts fall off the car, it'll take some quick moves just to fill gaps.
3. *The bullpen will have to work hard.* A lot of the starters on the roster have opener-style fatigue ratings, which will tax the bullpen.



# strong city STATESMEN

Eric Sheffler (21st year)

*Look, we get it. Rebuilding is hard.*



There is a certain amount of allure for a team, particularly an aging team, to keep the log rolling and to try and get just one more bite of the apple. The alternative is to go the other way and be bad. The Statesmen were bad in 2016, 2017 and 2019 (with a World Series win in 2018) and they've been all right-to-good before and since, peaking with 103 wins the year before last and falling just short of another Series visit.

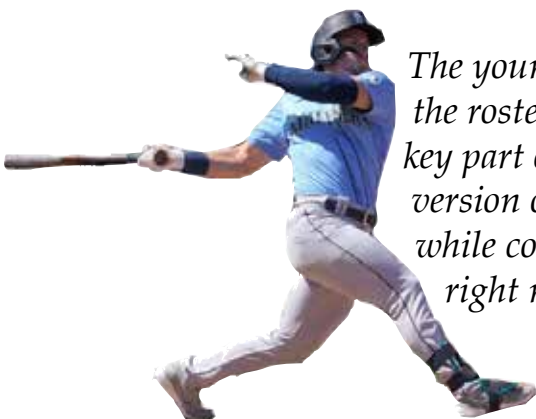
Look, we get it. Rebuilding is hard; friction and entropy means that you never quite get value on the way down compared to what you have to pay on the way up. The *Annual* has played that tune for years. With that admonition, hanging on if there's any chance of getting close seems like a better idea. You can always suck later.

## Turnover Rate: 36%

**Arrived:** Nick Ahmed, Chase Anderson, Aroldis Chapman, Jesse Chavez, Yu Darvish, Jarred Kelenic, Dustin May, Trevor May, Tom Murphy, Jose Quintana, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Tayler Saucedo, Christian Walker.

**Departed:** Brad Boxberger, Griffin Canning, Steve Cishek, Cam Gallagher, Yulieski Gurriel, Spencer Howard, Anthony Misiewicz, Adalberto Mondesi, Charlie Morton, Drew Pomeranz, Carlos Santana, Lou Trivino, Bruce Zimmermann.

## SNT: Jarred Kelenic.



*The youngest player on the roster, Kelenic is a key part of the next version of the team, while contributing right now as well.*

We thought last year was the last chance for Strong City to do just that, and predicted – incorrectly – that they'd be rebuilding now. As it turns out, there's one more chance. This is a good year for taking that chance, with no real dominant teams (there's no Great Divide: go back a few years of this book and read about that.) Can they win? It's not impossible. It's unlikely, but it's not impossible.

## Pitching: 6.5 Enough to get through the season.

There's certainly enough pitching for Strong City to get through the season; there are two full season starters and two closer grades, and there are a lot of pitchers that move in and out beside them during the course of the season. One of the advantages of a staff this size is that there are more chances for someone to be good in the coming year.

ROTATION. Chris Bassitt (Grade 11 C+16) and Zack Wheeler (Grade 11 C+33 HR+21) provide 65 very competent starts and will be on the mound regularly all season. Seven other starters have a chance this year (along with a Chavez opener in May). Yu Darvish is the most significant of these: he makes 24 starts as a Grade 8 (C+14). Dustin May has 9 excellent Grade 18 starts (HR+56); Hyun-Jin Ryu (Grade 10 C+23 HR-21), Jose



Bassitt, Wheeler: One, two



# strong city STATESMEN

Quintana (Grade 9 lefty, HR+36), Tanner Houck (Grade 7), Chase Anderson (Grade 6 HR-25) and Ryan Yarborough (Grade 4) will all get their chances as well. The instructions suggest that these guys might well serve as openers. It will require some careful management to make this all work.

**BULLPEN.** The bullpen is numerous, and has some depth. The two closer grades belong to Jesse Chavez (Grade 20\* HR+42), who at age 77 has returned to prominence (we're kidding; he turns a mere 41 in August); Aroldis Chapman, at 36, is the junior partner (Grade 18\* lefty C-62 HR+36). They have 91 innings between them.

The setup crew consists of three Grade 15\*s: Adam Ottavino (C-25), Trevor May (C-46 HR+31), and Reynaldo Lopez (C-43), who along with the extremely limited Jonathan Loaisiga (Grade 13\* C+62) give the Statesmen almost 200 innings of solid middle relief.



Chavez: Blast from the past

The rest of the bullpen consists of a quartet of decent pitchers: Tayler Saucedo (Grade 12\* C-33 HR+51), Buck Farmer

(Grade 12\* C-21), Will Smith (Grade 11\* C+25 HR+25) and last year's closer Emmanuel Clase (Grade 10\* C+34 HR+43). That's 250 innings altogether. They'll get lots of work.

**Offense: 8.0**  
**Good cards from lesser names.**

The logical thing would be to look at the cards for Guerrero, Arenado, and Bichette – the heart of the order. But the first two had good



Bichette: Potent on offense

but not great years; only Bo Bichette (11 hits, 1-6-6, 25 SSN) was truly potent. Vlad (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-5-6) is a big step down from last year, and

Nolan Arenado (10 hits, 1-5-6, L-6) now turns in serviceable, but not extraordinary, cards. Instead, the offense is relying on players like Nick Castellanos (10 hits, 1-0-0-0, 32 SSN), Christian Walker (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-5-5-6, 35 SSN), Jarred Kelenic (9 hits, 3 walks, 4 0s, 28 SSN) and Mauricio Dubon (11 hits, 3 0s, 30 SSN). They can't all play at once, and some days some of these players will be available from the bench.

The rest of the lineup is more pedestrian. Randy Arozarena (9 hits, 4 walks+42, 27 SSN) will play every day and is a real running threat; David Peralta (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s) will play a lot; Adam Frazier (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-6-6, 28 SSN) and Willson Contreras (9 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-5-6) will also be everyday players.

It's not a terrible lineup, and they'll score runs, but the lack of power and more particularly the lack of OBP will hinder them. Better pitching staffs will steal a lot of those 8s and 10s.

**Defense: 5.0**  
**They can catch the ball.**

This is certainly a team strength. Walker and Arenado (1B5, 3B5) are excellent on the corners, with top fielders in the middle as well (Bichette was promoted to SS9, and Dubon is a 2B8 while Frazier is a 2B9). Contreras is a C8, Th+2 for three quarters of the season.

In the outfield, Arozarena is an OF3 (31 arm) again, as is Peralta (32 arm) and Dubon (32 arm). Kelenic OF2 (32 arm) and by some miracle



Walker, Arenado: Solid gold

Nick Castellanos (31 arm) are decent out there. This is a very decent fielding club, especially in the infield; if Walker wasn't out there, Vlad (1B4) has turned out to be a better glove at first than his original position of third base.

This should really help the pitching staff, keeping innings from being extended. You can't win just on defense, but it makes a difference when there are other advantages on the roster.

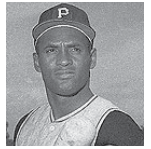
**Bench: 2.5**  
**At least a few options.**

With the various platoons and extra usage, there are plenty of decent options off the bench. In addition, there are some extra spare parts. The best of these is the backup catcher Tom Murphy (11 hits, 1-0-0-0-0, C7 Th-4). The other backup guy, Austin Hedges, is a C8 Th-3 but can't hit a lick and won't see much time in the majors.

The waivers brought Nick Ahmed, an SS9, and there are also Nick Madrigal (3B4 2B8, 10 hits, 32 SSN) and Kevin Newman (9 hits, 2 walks+2 22s, 5-6-6, 34 SSN) who can play adequately all around the infield.

**3rd**

We think Whitman is better, but not by a whole lot. The Statesmen have no single bat like Jose Ramirez, and of course no top starter like Snell (or second starter like Kershaw).



Whitman wants to win, and knows how to do it. So does Strong City. Neither of them are as good as Riverwoolf – *on paper*. Of course, the response to that is: baseball isn't played on paper. Of course, for us, it sure is; probabilities say that neither of these teams should win a pennant this year. But we've sure been wrong before.

Ages of players on the Strong City roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 40: Chavez
- 38: Ottavino
- 37: Carrasco, Darvish, Ryu
- 36: C. Anderson, A. Chapman, D. Peralta
- 35: Bassitt, Quintana
- 34: Ahmed, T. May, W. Smith, Wheeler
- 33: Arenado, Farmer, Murphy, C. Walker
- 32: Castellanos, Contreras, Frazier, Yarbrough
- 31: Hedges, Saucedo
- 30: R. Lopez, Newman
- 29: Arozarena, Dubon, Loaisiga
- 28: Houck
- 27: Madrigal
- 26: Bichette, Clase, D. May
- 25: Guerrero
- 24: Kelenic

**strong city STATESMEN**



**Third Quarter.** They're even older this year, there's no draft in the first three rounds, and most of the big names had less than stellar years. All of the warning signs from last year are still here – and yet here they are.

**TQ: 22.0**



# 2023 blue hill MUDSLIDES in review



*Twelve losses that could have been wins separated the Mudslides from .500.*

## 2022 in Review

**Final Record: 69-93 (3rd, Clemente)**

We thought, at this time last year, that Blue Hill had a chance to do some damage in the Clemente Division race. They'd added some good cards in the draft, including a top-notch closer and a talented rookie outfielder, suggesting that they were ready to make a move.

No move took place, unfortunately. Twelve losses that could have been wins separated the Mudslides from .500, and even that wouldn't have been enough given the competition between Whitman and Strong City. But it was still something of a disappointment – certainly for Mr. Ludwig, but also for the *Annual*. We're not predicting them to get to the playoffs this year, but we think they've got talent.

## What went right?

It was a nice comeback year for Christian Yelich (.279-25-76, 16 steals) who had provided some inferior performances in recent years. Steven Kwan also hit .279, and stole 15 bases – a nice return for a rookie pick. Rafael Devers delivered 18 homers and 41 doubles, driving in 92.

On the pitching side there were fewer feel-good stories, but Felix Bautista had a 1.77 ERA and 28 saves before he was dealt to Columbus, and Dillon Tate won 10 games in relief, more than any starter.

## What went wrong?

Lots of other things. Yelich's 25 homers led the team (Devers only managed 18), and he struck out 159 times to go with it. The club was out-scored 773-665, though they managed 6 more hits than the opposition – suggesting that a lot of those baserunners were stranded there.

The pitching was just not competitive. The starters won 9, 7, 6, 6, 5 and 3 games; the staff struck out only 1,232 batters, and the bullpen was overworked and (especially after the Bautista trade) understaffed. It was a long summer in Blue Hill.

## 3 Things

1. *Clemente Division = pitching!* To be competitive in this division means to have strong arms and lots of them. Blue Hill has made some moves in this direction, but needs to make more.
2. *Catch the ball.* Again, moves have been made to address the defensive liabilities; Kwan and rookie Yainer Diaz are among them. But the middle infield needs help.
3. *All in?* Not this year, but pretty soon, Blue Hill is going to have to commit to going deep. The core players aren't really old – yet – but they're in their late-20s prime, and that window only remains open for so long.



Kwan: Talented rookie

---

# blue hill MUDSLIDES

Mark Ludwig (29th year)

*We'd really like to be proven wrong.*



We thought, at this time last year, that the Mudslides had a shot at winning the Clemente. This might have merely been bright-eyed optimism or something, but they fell far short of our prediction. That's not unique; years ago, Mr. Clay Beard told the *Annual* editor that he dreaded a prediction of success because it functioned like some sort of curse, and we've often had trouble with accuracy about Hudson's success. Similarly, we don't want to take credit or blame for causing Blue Hill to fail. If we were wrong, we own that. Apparently, we were wrong.

This year we may be more accurate. Half of the pitching staff is a mess; half of the lineup is subpar. Riverwoolf has cashed in everything to contend, and Whitman and Strong City are working hard to stay in the playoff hunt. We think they wind up fourth again, and it'll be a long season in Blue Hill. But we'd really like to be proven wrong.

## **Pitching: Half staff.**

**6.0**

The pitching staff in Blue Hill is, both in the rotation and the bullpen, a tale of two groups. The first group is grades that can get people out and names you'd like to have on your roster, while the other group is other guys.



Berrios: Top starter

ROTATION. The top three starters in the rotation are very competent. The top guy is Jose Berrios (Grade 11 C+23), rookie Bryce Elder (Grade 11 HR+21) and Dean Kremer (Grade 9

## **SNT: Yainer Diaz.**

*A line-drive machine, he's a great addition to the Blue Hill lineup. If he's as good as his 2023 second half, he'll be playing here for a while.*



## **Turnover Rate: 39%**

**Arrived:** Will Brennan, Yainer Diaz, Bryce Elder, Sal Frelick, Maikel Garcia, Dominic Leone, Noelvi Marte, Scott McGough, Davis Schneider, Zack Short, Jared Shuster, Luke Weaver, Trevor Williams, Patrick Wisdom.

**Departed:** Trevor Gott, Yadiel Hernandez, Joey Krehbiel, D.J. Lemahieu, Austin Nola, Yohan Ramirez, Robert Stephenson, Kurt Suzuki, Justin Turner, Andrew Velazquez, Will Vest, Luke Voit.

C+14) give Blue Hill are very capable 94 starts. Tyler Mahle has 5 starts (Grade 13 C+33 HR-32) to get them to 99.

Then the fun begins. Six starters – Jared Shuster (Grade 6 C-41), Marco Gonzales (Grade 4 HR+24), Jose Urena (Grade 3 C-34 HR-52), Trevor Williams (Grade 2 HR-34) and Luke Weaver (Grade 1 C+15 HR-34) will take turns giving up runs. To be fair, Mr. Ludwig is completely realistic about these starters' chances of going very deep into games, but that's a lot of surrender opportunities spread over a season.

The problem here, as always, is that the bad starters will use up a larger proportion of the bullpen innings than desired, making it hard for the relievers to help out the decent starters.



# blue hill MUDSLIDES

**BULLPEN.** At the top of the relief staff is a big time closer, Hector Neris (Grade 24\* C-41 HR+21), with 68 innings of crunchy goodness.



Neris: Big time

He should be available in both the 8th and 9th inning, and even despite the control rating will get people out. His setup man is Bryse Wilson (Grade 15\* C+16 HR+14), who has 77 innings of his own.

Things drop off a little after that. Gregory Soto (Grade 11\* HR+23) and Michael Fulmer (Grade 11\* C-44) provide a decent lefty-righty middleman pair, and Scott McGough (Grade 10\* C-21 HR-26) is all right. Beau Briske (Grade 9\* HR+16) and Yohan Ramirez (Grade 8\* HR+35) have a few extra innings. The total innings are around 260, which is good, but not enough.

That means that waiver pickup Dominic Leone (Grade 10\* with a scary C-34

HR-45) and Grade 2\* Jorge Lopez will certainly have to pitch when one or another starter heads for the showers.

**Offense:**  
**Halfway to solid.**

**7.0**

There's half a solid lineup for Blue Hill this year. In addition to the big card for top rookie Yainer Diaz (11 hits, 1-1-6-6, L-10 R+2), there's hitting machine Bryce Harper (10 hits, 5 walks, 1-0-0-0,

30 SSN), stud slugger Rafael Devers (10 hits, 3 hits+42, 1-0-0-0), and returned power/speed man Christian Yelich (10 hits, 4 walks, 1-6-6, L-10 R+2, 35 SSN for 31 attempts). These four would be welcome in any lineup. To these we'd add last year's top rookie Steven Kwan (10 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 29 attempts, and rookie Maikel Garcia (10 hits, 3 walks, L+3, 30 SSN for 30 attempts.)

That constitutes about half of the regular at-bats for the season. The rest will be filled with some less stellar cards. Connor Wong (9 hits, 2 walks, 4 0s, L-8) will catch a third of the games; Will Brennan (10 hits, 3 0s, L-8, 28 SSN) will get time in the outfield; Gavin Sheets (8 hits, 3 walks, 1-6, L-14) will be the part-time DH; and bearded lady Patrick Wisdom (7 hits, 4 walks, 1-1-0-0, 26 SSN) will produce the three true outcomes for half a season.

The hope is that the solid hitters will bunch runs together, and there'll be some good rolls for the lesser ones.

**Defense:**  
**Not a lot of high points.**

**3.5**

There are three Fielding One performers in the outfield: OF3s Yelich (31 arm), Brennan (30 arm) and Kwan (29 arm). Other than Zach Short's 2B8, that's the limit of top fielders.

The infield is largely Fielding Two or below. Harper has settled into the first base role (1B3); Trevor Story is a 2B7/SS8, but is not available for many games, leaving second and short to inferior gloves – Garcia and Wisdom are both 2B6s, Garcia is an SS7. Devers is a perfectly adequate 3B4. There aren't any defensive replacements on the bench either.



Harper: Machine



Devers: Stud



Yelich: Returned

Behind the plate is at least a bright spot. Both Diaz and Wong are C7s, and both have positive arms – Diaz is a Th+4, Wong a Th+1.



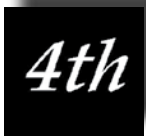
**Waxing Crescent.** This year is a bit of a step back, partially for reason beyond Blue Hill management's control. The core talent is actually quite solid, so there is hope for a better 2025. They'll need to draft well to fill in gaps.

**Bench: 2.5**  
**If only some of them could play more.**

The bench players actually provide some value to the lineup, but the lack of usage relegates them to part-time use. If only some of them could play more.

Zack Short has the most usage (110 games) but has a very weak bat (7 hits, 4 walks, 35 SSN, 1-6). He has a 2B8 and SS8 and can defend at least. Noelvi Marte, one of the youngest players in the draft, has a fine card (12 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, 29 SSN) though he is facing a PED suspension.

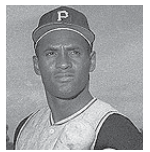
Davis Schneider (9 hits, 5 walks+42, 1-0-0-0, L+9 R-8) is a great situational pinch-hitter. J. R. Davis (9 hits, 3 0s, L+8 R-5) and Sal Frelick (8 hits, 5 walks, L-8, 0-6) are largely here to shag flies and drive the team bus.



Not by a lot, but we're reasonably confident that they end up here.

It's worth a look to determine why. The Blue Hill and Whitman franchises entered TBL at the same time, and they have had very different trajectories; generally speaking, Blue Hill has traded carefully, drafted thoughtfully, and managed capably – and has little to show for it. Look at the core of the team; we used the Greenwald method and picked out fifteen players – pitchers Berrios, Elder, Kremer, Neris and Soto; position players Devers, Diaz, Garcia, Harper, Kwan, Marte, Schneider, Story, Wong and Yelich. Elder, Diaz, Garcia, Marte and Schneider arrived this year; Berrios, Neris and

Soto were acquired last year, Kremer played his first full season last year, and Kwan and Wong were drafted. That leaves Harper, Story, Yelich and Devers as holdovers. (There are other team veterans such as Mahle, Kaprelian, Davis, Sheets . . . but not among the "core 15.")



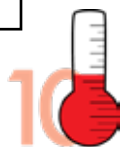
**blue hill MUDSLIDES**

So the guys from this list with the long-term leases in Blue Hill have been through multiple versions of the team. Harper arrived in 2013; Yelich in 2014; Story in 2017; and Devers in 2018. None have ever played elsewhere. All were excellent picks: but none has a championship ring. They have gotten to the conference final twice (2018, 2020) and were in the playoffs four straight years. It's clear that one big card is not enough. But there should be at least a few more chances for these guys to come together and contend. When will it be?

Ages of players on the Blue Hill roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 35: Neris
- 34: McGough
- 32: J. R. Davis, M. Gonzales, Leone, Urena, T. Williams, Wisdom, Yelich
- 31: Fulmer, Harper, J. Lopez, Story
- 30: Berrios, Kaprelian, Weaver
- 29: Mahle, Y. Ramirez, Short, Soto
- 28: Kremer, Sheets, Wong
- 27: Devers
- 26: Brieske, Brennan, Kwan, B. Wilson
- 25: Y. Diaz, Elder, Schneider, Shuster
- 24: Frelick, M. Garcia
- 22: N. Marte

**TQ: 19.0**



# Print the Playoff Tickets

The Mays is usually competitive, but it's simply not going to be anything like that this year. We're almost ready to print the playoff tickets for the **Gotham City Batmen**. Anton Greenwald has done all the necessary things to build a contender, while the other three teams have fallen back to rebuild (instead of trying to stretch it out to make one more run). It's not to say that any of the other three are helpless: there are a few teams in TBL that are a complete mess, but none of them are here in the Mays. But only Gotham City should win day in and day out.



The **Maracaibo Rumrunners** get to rest on their laurels after winning TBL in 2023. They need a rest, and the nap may last more than one year due to some

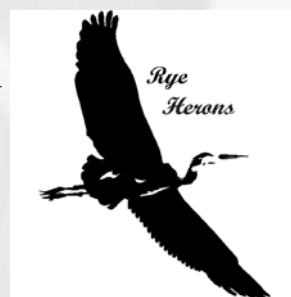
systemic problems. But it's not all gone down the drain; they have a little bit of pop and some (just not enough) pitching, and some of the *Annual* staff think that *Walter Hunt* can drag 90 wins out of them. [I don't think I can, by the way. – Ed.] But they're probably a little better than the other two teams in the division.

## 2023 Mays Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Maracaibo*	108	54	.667	—
Rye	81	81	.500	27
Gotham City	80	82	.494	28
New Westminster	43	119	.265	65

\* 2023 TBL Champions.

*Craig Musselman's Rye Herons* are based around "buy and hold". He's patient with the build strategy, and will have to continue to do so in order to get back to real contention. In the meanwhile, as down the road in Maracaibo, there is some talent on the roster. They can't catch Gotham City, but could easily finish second ahead of the defending champs.



As we so often seem to say, and then we come to *Jim Jeatt's New Westminster Whiskeyjacks*. They haven't finished at the top of the division since 2010, and even though they have a number of Guys We Like, they'll fall short this season. But there is talent, as there is elsewhere, to finish second – or third – or fourth. Are we hedging? With three teams within one point of TQ, damn skippy we are.





- 
- A photograph of a baseball player in a white uniform swinging a bat. The player is wearing a black helmet with a white 'M' logo, white batting gloves, and white shin guards. The uniform has 'ADT' on the sleeve and a marlin logo on the chest. The background is a blurred stadium.
- 1. Gotham City 30.5
  - 1. Maracaibo 21.0
  - 3. Rye 20.5
  - 4. New Westminster 20.0

# Mays Division

Luis Arraez,  
Gotham City

# 2023 gotham city BATMEN in review



*The team played about average.*

by Anton Greenwald

## 2023 in Review

**Final Record: 80-82 (3rd, Mays)**

It was a year of stall in Gotham City: the team went .500, outscoring its opponents 685-678, finishing 14th in batting average and 13th in ERA. There were no outstanding hitters or pitchers, but most of the players on the roster did their jobs. It was 5 games better than 2022, but the best was clearly a year away.

### What went right?

What went right started at last year's draft. We had to pick up almost a full slate of pitchers. Most of them worked out, giving Gotham City a shot for this year's playoffs; Hunter Greene was the one who delivered the best (12-9, 3.57) in 24 starts, 179 strikeouts in 161 innings. The team played about average and our record was near the middle of the pack, coming close but not getting a wildcard slot.



Greene: Delivered

There were some good individual performances – in MLB our second baseman won the batting title, no power but plenty of hits. Also, in MLB, our relief staff did well having 6 men over APBA Grade 13. Alas, they did not do as well in TBL.

### What went wrong?

Injuries plagued Gotham City staff in real life. Only one starting pitcher had a com-

plete season (30 or more starts). Our stopper had only half a season; good, but not enough use. Our star offensive player, the power to drive the team, missed half of the season and then showed lack-luster performance. Even in TBL, he missed getting to his MLB totals. Of four decent outfielders, only one had a full season. Our thirdbaseman had only one-third of a season. With two first basemen, neither got anywhere near playing a full season (150 or more games). In TBL our rookie pitching staff played like a rookie staff and so we finished in the middle of the pack.

### 3 Things

1. *Gotham City does not believe in "destroying" a team so as to get near the first pick.* That has never been a team trait. We have had some bad years, but 2023 was not one of them.
2. *Fix the problems at hand.* As a result, we were able to fix most problems and expect to be in the playoffs this year.
3. *Get old, get with the program.* There will have to be a further focus on young pitching in the future, but that's the future. This year's team is good, and we'll worry about next year afterward.

# gotham city BATMEN

Anton Greenwald (39th year, Hall of Famer)

*This will not be close.*



TBL Hall of Famer Anton Greenwald joined the Transcontinental Baseball League in 1986. He was a TBL manager before Walter Hunt, Pat Martin or Joe Auletta joined the league. He is fourth on the seniority list behind Chairman Montague, Clay Beard and Richard Meyer.

Anton has had a remarkable career, making five World Series appearances, including his ground-shaking 2001 TBL World Series winner. That team was led by Jeff Kent, who had 209 hits, 38 home runs and 107 extra base hits. Over nearly four decades, Mr. Greenwald has been a division winner 11 times. His last pennant came in 2018.

His most interesting club came way back in 1988. That year, the Batmen hit .301 as a team and scored a whopping 956 runs. Tony Gwynn hit .403 with 269 hits. Pedro Guerrero hit .356. Willie Randolph hit .350. They won...wait for it...68 games. The team ERA was a soul-destroying 6.37. The pitching staff allowed 1,904 hits. The 'ace' of the staff was Al Nipper, with 11 wins.

This year, Gotham City is back, and they're ready. They are the heavy favorite in a Mays division race

**Pitching: 13.0**  
**The staff is stacked.**

that may end early. The strength of this team is right here – a beautifully constructed pitching staff that will challenge even the best hitting attacks.



**Full Moon.** Gotham City has become the premier team in the Mays, perhaps the best in the International Conference. They hit, they pitch, they field, and they still have a 2025 draft. This team will be contending for a while.

## SNT: Josh Jung.

*He will be a rock at third base for this excellent team. Jung is 26. Currently hurt, but he's here for the long haul.*



## Turnover Rate: 31%

**Arrived:** Brennan Bernardino, Yonny Chirinos, Mike Ford, Tommy Henry, Tyler Holton, Josh Jung, Yuniur Marte, Keynan Middleton, Carlos Santana, Jared Triolo, Jordan Weems.

**Departed:** Keegan Akin, Sergio Alcantara, Tyler Alexander, Aaron Ashby, Jose Barrero, Ji-Man Choi, Nabil Crismatt, Kyle Lewis, Tom Murphy, Jose Ruiz, Tyler Wade.

ROTATION. Eduardo Rodriguez (Grade 13 HR+23, 26 starts), Michael Wacha (Grade 13 HR+15, 24 starts) and Edward Cabrera (Grade 13 C-62 HR+21, 20 starts) start the party. That's 70 starts of guys who steal 8s without help, with a nice balance of lefty and righty arms. Cabrera is a little wild, but he's really the only starter in the rotation that has control issues.

Behind the big three are Nathan Eovaldi (Grade 12 HR+21, 25 starts), fresh off a season in Texas that saw him collect a World Series championship. Jordan Montgomery (Grade 11 C+23 HR+24, 32 starts) also pitched for Texas last year before landing in Arizona as a free agent this offseason. The top 5 starters cover 127 starts with strength from both the left side and the right side.

The last 35 starts are taken by Diamondbacks lefthander Tommy Henry (Grade 9, 16 starts) and Cincinnati



Rodriguez: Challenges



# gotham city BATMEN

fireballer Hunter Greene (Grade 8 C-22 HR-15, 22 starts). Not a pitch below Grade 8, and all 162 starts covered by 7 pitchers. They are missing the Grade 16 terminator at the top of the rotation, but these guys will get it done.

**BULLPEN.** On those nights when the starters need some assistance, there's a mob of competent arms. Ryan Helsley (Grade 20\* C-35 HR+54, 37 IP) and Tyler Holton (Grade 18\* C+31 HR+15, 85 IP) share the closing duties. Holton is a rarity with his 85 innings, and it comes with excellent peripherals. There are 122 innings of Grade 18\* and better.



Helsley: Again, and with help

The setup crew has David Bednar (Grade 16\* C+23 HR+46, 67 IP), Mark Leiter (Grade 14\* C-14 HR+21, 64 IP), Clay Holmes (Grade 14\* HR+53, 63 IP) and lefthander Sam Moll (Grade 14\* HR+53, 62 IP). There are 194 inninnings with outstanding HR ratings.

There are more strong grades with lesser peripherals. Jordan Weems (Grade 15\* C-26 HR-16, 55 IP) and Kenyan Middleton (Grade 15\* C-34 HR-15, 51 IP) help in the middle innings, as does Yonny Chirinos (Grade 14\* C+14 HR-21, 41 IP). The Batmen boast a robust 463 innings of Grade 14 and above.

There are long men and mops as well – nothing has been overlooked this year. Brennan Bernardino (Grade 11\* HR+33, 1 start, 51 IP), Carl Edwards (Grade 10\* C-33 HR+54, 32 IP) and Yunior Marte (Grade 4\* C-16, 39 IP) will pitch in low-leverage situations when Anton is just looking to get through the game. This staff is stacked.

**Offense: 9.0**  
**They are deep.**

There is one card that jumps out of the deck when you look at the Gotham City offense. Luis Arraez (3 0s, 13 hits, 1 walk, 5 7s, 3 31s), who has led major league baseball in hitting for two years in a row, has a spectacular card. He doesn't walk

much, but most of his hits won't be stolen, and he's the best hit and run man in TBL. (Having three 31s on a card is almost unheard of these days.) Arraez bats second every day.

Leadoff duties are shared between Tommy Pham (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, 34 SSN for 25 attempts) and Mark Canha (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, 35 SSN for 12 attempts). Both are very fast and they allow Arraez to leverage his 31s and avoid racking up double plays. (He has 3 24s.)

The power in the middle of the lineup comes from the #9 pick in the 2024 TBL draft, SNT Josh Jung (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+8, R-4) and outfielder Anthony Santander (1-5-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks). Mike Ford (1-1-6, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, 10 13s) will make an impact on those occasions when his bat hits the ball. Jake Fraley (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, 31 SSN for 26 attempts, L-12) is a nice power/speed combination who will grab a seat against lefties.

The lower part of the order has some pop. Carlos Santana (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks) is the everyday first baseman and lead guitarist. Dan Vogelbach (1-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-15) will get on base and hit for power against righties. Willy Adames (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, 149 games) is the regular shortstop. Keibert Ruiz (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 136 games) is a terrific young catcher who bats eighth most days. Against lefties, Luke Maile (1-0-6, 8 hits, 3 walks + 42, 74 games) gets the starts.

Outside of Arraez, there are no show-stopper cards in this lineup, but they are deep – there are first column 1s almost everywhere in the order. This is a dangerous offense.

**Defense: 5.5**  
**Mostly good news.**



Arraez: Jumps out

There's certainly nothing wrong with the infield defense. Luis Arraez (2B9) and Willy Adames (SS9) are as good as they come in the middle of the infield. Josh Jung (3B5) is sublime at third base. Carlos Santana (1B5) is the regular,



Adames, Santana, Jung: Nothing wrong

first baseman. Keibert Ruiz (C8, Th-4) and Luke Maile (C8, Th+0) are the catchers. Ruiz does not throw well, but that is the only chink in the armor here.

If they can stay healthy, Gotham City will be the team to beat in the Mays for several years.

The outfield is down a couple of notches from that lofty standard. Tommy Pham (OF2, 32 arm) and Jake Fraley (OF2, 31 arm) are average. Anthony Santander (OF2, 30 arm) is also out there waiting for at bats. There is one plus defender in the outfield – Cristian Pache (OF3, 36 arm). Mercifully, Giancarlo Stanton (OF1 33 arm) does not grace the field in any of the lineups.

This is one of the best defensive teams we have seen in a while. Arraez' 2B9 is a difference maker.

**Bench: 3.0**

**Will pose challenges.**

There are three serious lefty shifts on the bench – Gio Urshela (2 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+7, 62 games), Giancarlo Stanton (1-1-6, 7 hits, 3 walks, L+9), and Cristian Pache (4 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks, L+7, 17 speed).

These are not great cards, but against Grade 8 pitchers and below, these guys will pose serious challenges.

**1st** This will not be close. Anton Greenwald has constructed a solid, beautifully balanced team that is quite young, especially the infield (other than Santana, of course: he's the senior citizen of the team.) Expect future drafts to focus on young pitching, which will keep the club in contention.

Ages of players on the Gotham City roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 38: Santana
- 36: Pham
- 35: Canha
- 34: Eovaldi, Stanton
- 33: M. Leiter, Maile, Wacha
- 32: Bernardino, Edwards, Ford, Moll, Urshela, Vogelbach
- 31: Holmes, Montgomery, E. Rodriguez, Weems
- 30: Chirinos, Middleton
- 29: Bednar, Dalbec, Fraley, Helsley, Y. Marte, Santander
- 28: Adames, Holton
- 27: Arraez
- 26: E. Cabrera, Henry, Jung, Triolo
- 25: Pache, K. Ruiz
- 24: H. Greene

**TQ:30.5**



**gotham city BATMEN**

# 2023 maracaibo RUMRUNNERS in review



*It did all work out.*

by Walter Hunt

## 2023 in Review

**Final Record: 108-54 (1st, Mays)**

**2023 TBL Champions**

In Paul Montague's excellent retrospective article earlier in this book, he refers to an adrenaline rush when you win the championship. Can confirm: when Maracaibo won the World Series down in Phoenix this year against a very capable Kansas team, it was a great feeling. That's especially true because while the 2023 team was in hand, the 2024 team was in reach and the draft was one day away.

Pre-season predictions had Maracaibo in the mix but it wasn't the out-and-out favorite. We fought through Whitman and Midwest to get there, and to walk away with the championship was, as Craig Musselman said a few years ago, quite a ride.

### What went right?

On offense, the Rumrunners were solid and surprisingly effective. Starling Marte (.293-22-90) was the best regular, and Eloy Jimenez (.302-17-55 in half a season) was very capable. A lot of the team hit in the .240-.260 range (.261 overall, tied for second in TBL), though the team only hit 153 homers; there were more than a half dozen interchangeable parts (Cabrera, Arroyo, Carpenter, Rengifo, Trejo, Moore, Haggerty, Iglesias) who were constantly being shuttled in and out of the lineup based on the situation.

But Maracaibo won on pitching. Sandy Alcantara (23-5, 2.12, 16 CG, 9 shutouts) was stellar, and Dylan Cease (22-5, 1.80, 12 CG, 7 shutouts, 99 BB, 249 K in 220.3 IP) was nearly as good. Jose Quintana (17-7, 3.47, 151 K in 184.3 IP) and Martin Perez (16-14, 4.09, 180 K in 213.7 IP) were good as

well. Alexis Diaz struck out 71 in 50 innings and recorded 23 saves, while Yency Almonte (3-0, 14 saves, 0.63 in 28.7 IP) was superb in limited use. The team had a 2.91 ERA, 40 CG, and 26 shutouts, all first in TBL. The 108-54 record was well earned; they outscored opponents 757-467.

### What went wrong?

To complain about the team's performance would be petty. Salvador Perez (.242-15-63) and Brandon Marsh (.226-12-44, 12 steals) had down years; Marte's 22

homers led the team; they only walked 341 times. Basically the offense gave the team 4-5 runs a game, and it was up to the pitching staff to win with it. It wasn't the Dodgers of the mid-60s, but it gave that feeling, with Alcantara and Cease taking the roles of Koufax and Drysdale. There were some – many – tense moments. But it did all work out.



Alcantara: Stellar

### 3 Things

1. *Getting used to average pitching.* Alcantara pitched in 2023, but is lost for 2024; Cease is extremely mortal. The new rotation won't record 40 shutouts - it might not even record 4.

2. *A whole new middle infield.* The Orlandos – Hudson and Cabrera – are out of sight now. Bryson Stott is now at second and rookie Ezequiel Tovar at shortstop. Hopefully those positions won't be a concern for some time to come.

3. *Getting ready for the next cycle.* It's time for some new blood. Stott and Tovar are a big part of the rebuild, and Bailey will be at least the part-time catcher next year. Hopefully some of this year's pitching staff will be useful in future. Contention will look different by the time we get back there, and it may take a few years.

# maracaibo RUMRUNNERS



Walter Hunt (38th year); Hall of Famer

*It will take some real work to make a serious winner.*

Last year, our intrepid team of analysts nailed it on Maracaibo. *This will not be easy, but Maracaibo is very dangerous this year.* The Rumrunners paired an excellent starting rotation, a savage bullpen lineup, and some opportunistic offense to win Walter Hunt's third TBL crown. They survived playoff series against both Whitman and Midwest on their way to a five-game smothering of a game Kansas team.

Mr. Hunt was forced to sell some of his ludicrously large board game collection in order to make room for his 2024 TBL Championship trophy. When he turned his eyes towards the future, he decided to retrench. The Hunt magic may somehow get them in range of a playoff spot, but the usual trappings of a division title winner are not here. And Gotham City is taking no prisoners this year.

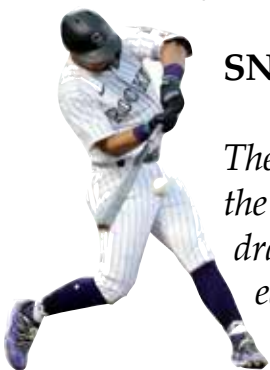
**Pitching: 6.0**  
**A change.**

ROTATION. There is a change at the top of the Maracaibo rotation. Michael King (Grade 14 C+15

**Turnover Rate: 39%**

**Arrived:** Andrew Abbott, Patrick Bailey, Austin Gomber, Luis Guillorme, Travis Jankowski, Luis Medina, Andruw Monasterio, Josh Palacios, Ryan Pressly, Clarke Schmidt, Lenyn Sosa, Bryson Stott, Ezequiel Tovar, Andrew Vasquez

**Departed:** Christian Arroyo, Oswaldo Cabrera, Diego Castillo, Chase De Jong, Jose Iglesias, Isiah Kiner-Falefa, Dinelson Lamet, Brett Martin, Martin Perez, Jose Quintana, Raimel Tapia, Alan Trejo, Jose Trevino, Nelson Velazquez.



**SNT: Ezequiel Tovar.**

*The Colorado shortstop slid all the way to 22 in last year's TBL draft, where Walter was delighted to grab him.*



Cease, Alcantara: Not the same

HR+24, 9 starts), who escaped the phone booth in New York for the wide open spaces of San Diego late last season, has the highest grade on the staff. Fans should enjoy it while it lasts – he has 9 starts and an 18 fatigue number. Matthew Manning (Grade 13 C+21, 15 starts) has a nice grade for the second straight year, and is limited to four months of starts. Together, these two hombres have 29 starts of grades that steal 8s.

Behind them is Andrew Abbott (Grade 11 C-22, 21 starts), Walter's second round draft pick in the 2024 draft. Sandy Alcantara (Grade 9 HR+23, 28 starts) and the very talented Dylan Cease (Grade 8 C-23 HR+23, 33 starts) are here. Cease escaped from the hopeless White Sox and is now pitching in San Diego with fellow Rumrunner Michael King. Better grades are expected from the fireballer going forward.

The top 5 rotation dudes cover 111 starts. The last 51 learning opportunities go to Austin Gomber (Grade 3 C+16 HR-23, 27 starts), German Marquez



**Half Moon.** The 2024 draft was a huge help, but this team is still treading water. They could not solve all the problems in a single year, so they could go either way afterward. It's hard to tell.



# maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

(Grade 7 C+42 HR-32, 17 starts) and Luis Medina (Grade 7 C-36 HR+14, 17 starts, 65 IP). Two of these guys are suffering from pitching in Colorado. The lower grade starters are on quick hooks, so the damage will be limited.

This is not competitive with Gotham City, but it's not awful either. Maracaibo will have an opportunity to compete most days.

**BULLPEN.** This year's closer is the same as last year's - Alexis Diaz (Grade 17\* C-53 HR+42, 67 IP). The giant homer number is a Hunt trademark.

Ron Marinaccio (Grade 15\* C-61, 47 IP) and Michael King (Grade 14\* C+15 HR+24, 49 IP) are the setup men. These are good pitchers. The close and late situations will be handled well. The control numbers are a little concerning. If management gets sick of rolling 35s and 12s, they can hand the ball to Ryan Pressly (12\* C+24, 65 IP). Pressley was plucked from the Riverwoolf food pantry in the offseason. The high-leverage crew has 228 innings.



Diaz: Trademark

There is another 243 innings of guys who steal hits. Austin Cox (Grade 11\* C-42 HR+42, 36 IP) was used, abused, and tossed aside in April. Andrew Vasquez (Grade 11\* C-25 HR+33, 48 IP) at least still has a job. Seranthony Ambioris Dominguez (Grade 10\* C-23, 50 IP), who has to pay

his bills with extra wide checks, will help in the middle innings. Yancy Almonte (Grade 9\* C-33, 48 IP) and Tanner Banks (Grade 8\*, C+25 HR-16, 61 IP) round things out.

It's functional, but not scary like last year. It will be very interesting to see how Mr. Hunt squeezes value out of this group.

## Offense:

7.5

### This may be interesting.

When your team has Tim Raines as your Run Manufacturing Coach, you know you're not blowing teams out with your muscular batsmen. There is some speed here and a little power, but getting back to the 750 run plateau they achieved last year is not happening – Maracaibo just doesn't have the cards. The question is – can they score enough to get them into the wild card conversation?

Against righthanders, the best hitter on the team is Brandon Marsh (4 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks, R+1), who bats fifth in the lineup. Marsh is the only regular with 4 walks and 14 on-base numbers. The cleanup hitter is veteran Salvador Perez (1-0-0, 10 hits, 1 walk + 42, 140 games). The third place hitter is DH Eloy Jimenez (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks).

Walter got a shiny new middle infield in the 2024 draft. The new 2B is Bryson Stott (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 35 SSN for 34 attempts), who leads off this year. The new shortstop is Ezequiel Tovar (4 0s, 10 hits, 1 walk, 27 SSN for 16 attempts) who bats sixth in the righthanded lineups. Tovar is so young he has to ask for a hall pass from his history teacher to go play the games. Both guys run and play defense. Tovar has the four power numbers. Expectations are very high for these two excellent young players.



Perez: Cleanup



Stott: Leadoff

The everyday third baseman is Luis Rengifo (1-4-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, 128 games). He bats second in most lineups so his 2 31s will get a workout. Josh Palacios (1-4-5, 9 hits, 2 walks) adds some power from the bottom of the lineup. Dominic Smith (0-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, 153 games) is the first baseman. "Frenetic Fred" (Travis) Jankowski (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, 2 11s, 35 SSN for 20 attempts, 102 games) bats ninth – your classic second leadoff man.



Against lefty starters, Orlando Arcia (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+10), Andruw Monasterio (0-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, R-4, L+4, 92 games) and longtime Maracaibo speed merchant Starling Marte (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks + 42, 33 SSN for 28 attempts) get opportunities to play.

The lineup has its strengths, and Mr. Hunt always overperforms his cards. This will be interesting.

**Defense: 5.0**  
**Not giving away extra at-bats.**

Maracaibo is always one of TBL's best defensive teams. This year, they have strength at shortstop in Ezequiel Tovar (SS9), second base in Bryson Stott (2B8) and catcher in Salvador Perez (C9, Th-3). Orlando Arcia (SS8) plays against lefthanded starters on the boards. Patrick Bailey (C8, Th+2) is the backup catcher – his throwing arm may be useful late in games.

The corner infielders are solid - Dominic Smith (1B4) plays first and Luis Rengifo (3B4, SS8, OF2 with a 32 arm) plays third. Rengifo is a terrific super-utility player that Walter will move around as needed. In the outfield, Brandon Marsh (OF3, 31 arm) and Travis Jankowski (OF3, 31 arm) are regulars who cover plenty of ground out there. Josh Palacios (OF2, 33 arm) is the only everyday outfielder who is not Fielding 1. Starling Marte (OF3, 34 arm) is around for late defense.

The Rumrunners are not giving away any extra at bats here.

**Bench: 2.5**  
**Not much going on.**

The best players are in the lineup. Dylan Moore (1-0-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks + 42, R-6, L+2) has some power, and Sam Haggerty (2 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, 35 SSN for 11 attempts, 91 ABs) runs some and could be used as a pinch hitter in situations. But there's not much going on here. Matt Carpenter (3 0s, 6 hits, 6 walks), who had a world-ending card last year, is annoying against very wild pitchers, but irrelevant otherwise.



They'll nose out Rye for second place but they'll need an invitation to visit Gotham City's



neighborhood.

Can they get to 85 to 88 wins and take a run at the wild card? Never underestimate Mr. Hunt's ability to squeeze blood out of a stone, but it will take some real work to make a serious winner out of this club.

**maracaibo RUMRUNNERS**

Ages of players on the Maracaibo roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 38: M. Carpenter
- 36: J. Kelly
- 35: S. Marte, Pressly
- 34: S. Perez
- 33: Jankowski
- 32: Banks
- 31: D. Moore
- 30: Almonte, Gomber, Haggerty, Vasquez
- 29: O. Arcia, Dominguez, Guillorme, King, Marinaccio, Marquez, D. Smith
- 28: Alcantara, Cease, J. Palacios, Schmidt
- 27: A. Diaz, E. Jimenez, Monasterio, Rengifo
- 26: Manning, Marsh, Stott
- 25: Abbott, Bailey, Medina
- 24: L. Sosa
- 22: Tovar

**TQ: 21.0**



# 2023 rye HERONS in review



*There's always hope.*

by Craig Musselman

## 2023 in Review Final Record: 81-81 (2nd, Mays)

*A Decent Year in 2023*

The Rye Herons were not projected to be playoff contenders in 2023 but they played a little above their heads, finished 81-81, and had fun doing so. They lost out on the playoffs to Strong City by one game at the end, but that was not a great disappointment. The Herons scored 651 runs but gave up 702, which typically would have yielded a losing record. The team's .500 finish was unexpected and a pleasant surprise.

### What went right?

Joe Musgrove had a solid year anchoring the pitching staff. He was 19-6 with a 2.92 ERA and was top 10 in the International Conference in virtually every starting pitching performance metric. Braxton Garrett had a decent rookie season. The bullpen crew, with modest grades, had a surprisingly good year, with five pitchers having ERAs less than 3. That likely kept Rye in a lot of games that they otherwise might have lost.

On the offensive side, Ty France led Rye with a .305 batting average, .360 OBP. The team's fielding wasn't half bad, as only seven TBL teams had fewer errors.

### What went wrong?

For a team that overachieved, what went wrong was pretty much fully expected. Other than Musgrove and Garrett, the starting pitching staff was terrible. Jameson Taillon, in a down year, lost 17 games and led the International Conference in home runs allowed.

The team had very limited power. Its 141 home runs ranked second lowest in TBL. Not many sluggers here. The offense provided by outfielders was dreadful. Several near full time OF/2Bs were below the Mendoza line.

### 3 Things

1. *From Almost No Outfielders to a Plethora of Outfielders.* Going into 2024, the Herons had only one usable outfielder. As was the plan, the 2024 draft provided outfielders galore, both young and old. Prospect Evan Carter, Esteury Ruiz

and older reliable hitters Masataka Yoshida and Mike Tauchman provided a full complement for 2024 and some hope for the future.

2. *Flying Off the Cliff.* Rye has been known fly off the cliff. The team's feeble braintrust just refuses to trade off declining veterans to go into a deep rebuild. So, the team has been flying around at the lower level for a number of years now, enjoying its

mediocrity. As old veteran stalwarts continue to decline with age, it now appears that off in the distance, there may be another cliff that descends to yet a deeper level? Maybe this management style doesn't work? We shall see.

3. *There's Always Hope.* The Herons again are not built to contend in 2024. C.J. Abrams is on an absolute tear in MLB through the early season, appearing to have both power and speed. With Abrams and Ruiz the team has blazing speed. If the pitching staff can hold on for another year to allow bringing in a drafted bullpen, 2025 could be somewhat on the better side of mediocre. Time will tell.



Musgrove: Once again

# rye HERONS

Craig Musselman (20th year)

*Better days are ahead.*



This year, Craig Musselman completes 2 decades of competition with our happy brotherhood. It is remarkable that his long and successful association with TBL makes him sixteenth on the seniority list in a 24-team league. In 2010, Craig built an absolute road grader, won 105 games and crushed the entire league in the post-season, winning the TBL title while losing only 1 playoff game. They have won 6 division titles. The last four years have seen them alternate with Maracaibo for the Mantle, with Rye winning in the even numbered years (2020 and 2022).

Craig is a buy and hold owner, like Walter Hunt and Rich Meyer. His last really bad season was 2017, when Rye completed a long rebuild and won only 58 games. Since then, the Herons have been competitive, and even won 100 games as recently as 2019.

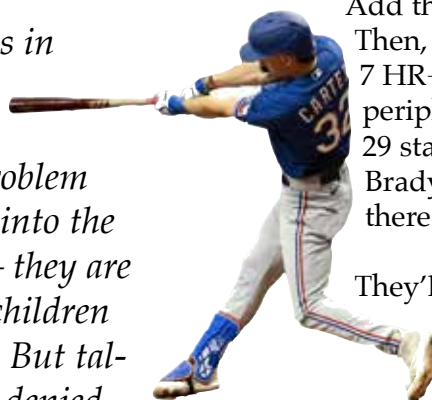
This year, the TQs have Rye looking up at a stacked Gotham City team, but there are a lot of exciting young players in the envelope.

**Pitching: 5.5**  
**Lacks a certain something.**

ROTATION. The Rye starting rotation is not embarrassing, but they lack a certain *something*. The

**SNT: Evan Carter**

*This guy's birthday was in 2002 – he's one of the youngest players in the majors. His only problem is going to be breaking into the Texas Rangers lineup – they are loaded and have other children vying for playing time. But talent like this will not be denied.*



**Turnover Rate: 33%**

**Arrived:** Matthew Batten, Jhony Brito, Evan Carter, Dylan Covey, Chris Devenski, David Fry, Kevin Kelly, Cade Marlowe, Ronny Mauricio, Esteury Ruiz, Raimel Tapia, Mike Tauchman, Masataka Yoshida.

**Departed:** Jaime Barria, Phil Bickford, Rodolfo Castro, Jake Cave, Ryan Feltner, David Fletcher, Eric Haase, Tony Kemp, Zach Pop, Hyun-Jin Ryu, Bubba Thompson, Trayce Thompson

highest grade in the rotation belongs to JT Chargois (Grade 13 C-24 HR+34, 5 starts). He makes a start in May (against Cayman) and 4 starts in November.



Musgrove: Solid

Once the rush from those high-grade afternoons wears off, the work begins. Joe Musgrove (Grade 11 C+32 HR+22, 17 starts) and the surprising Kutter Crawford (Grade 11 C+21, 23 starts) will be solid. Chris Sale (Grade 10 C+21, 20 starts) somehow stayed whole for four months before the inevitable injuries occurred. Braxton Garrett (Grade 9 C+35 HR+12, 30 starts) had a nice year for Miami and appears to have some talent.

Add that up and you have 85 competitive starts. Then, the beatings begin. Adrian Houser (Grade 7 HR+16 C+16, 21 starts) at least has positive peripherals. Jameson Taillon (Grade 7 C+23 HR-21, 29 starts) will pitch when the wind is blowing out. Brady Singer (Grade 3 C+16 HR+14, 29 starts) is there to take whatever the fates dish out.

They'll show up for all 162, but this is a rotation hoping for better grades in a year. They will not keep up with Gotham City with this rotation.



# RYE HERONS

**BULLPEN.** The closer is Jhony Brito (Grade 22\* C+14 HR-15, 37 IP), who will be excellent for the short time he's out there. He's short of innings, and that turns out to be a theme with this bullpen.

The setup men are Alex Lange (Grade 16\* C-62 HR+26, 66 IP) and Yerry De Los Santos (Grade 15\* C-24 HR+51, 24 IP). JT Chargois (Grade 13 C-24 HR+34) has 38 bullpen innings in addition to his starts. There are 165 innings of guys who steal 8s.

Behind that group are four good middlemen led by Kevin Kelly (Grade 12\* C+32 HR+54, 67 IP). Trevor Stephan (Grade 10\* C+31, 69 IP) and Connor Brogdon (Grade 10\* C-26 HR-16, 28 IP) will try to hold onto leads in the middle innings. Carlos Estevez (Grade 9\* C-21 HR+21, 62 IP) adds some depth here as well. Then there's Dylan Covey (Grade 7\* HR+16) who contributes 43 innings of mop up work.

Add it up and you have 434 innings to rescue the ordinary starting staff. This is a little light. The starters will probably have to be stretched to make this work.

**Offense: 8.0**

**The lineup is not deep.**

There is one card on the team with 11 hits: Masataka Yoshida (4 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks, 35 SSN who had a nice year with the Red Sox, finishing sixth for AL Rookie of the Year.

Catcher JT Realmuto (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, 29 SSN for 21 attempts) and third baseman Alex Bregman (1-4-6, 9 hits, 5 walks, R+1) are the team's stars. They bat in the middle of most lineups. The remarkable Realmuto continues to be a running threat despite being a catcher playing his age 33 season.

Mike Tauchman (3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, 34 SSN for 8 attempts, 108 games) is the



Realmuto: Star

leadoff man against righthanders. Matthew Batten (0-6, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+9, 43 games) is the first guy up against lefties.

The lineup is not deep. The everyday first baseman Ty France (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks + 2 42s) is the #5 hitter against righthanders. He's followed by Whit Merrifield (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 28 SSN for 36 attempts) and Raimel Tapia (2 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks, R+2, 64 games).

The last two guys in the lineup are burners. CJ Abrams (1-4-6, 9 hits, 2 walks + 42, 35 SSN for 51 attempts, R+2, L-11), who is going to be a superstar if he makes consistent contact, and the throwback outfielder Esteury Ruiz (3 0s, 9 hits, 1 walk+42, E32 for 80 attempts. L+2). You can thank the MLB rules committee for bringing back the stolen base specialist.



Abrams: Burner

They'll be ok, but this team is waiting to see what the kids turn into. This will take a year or two.

**Defense: 5.5**  
**Can catch the ball.**

They have an SS9 - Paul DeJong (SS9) starts against lefties but will be on the bench most nights in favor of CJ Abrams (SS8). Whit Merrifield (2B8) is the everyday second baseman and he'll look good out there. Alex Bregman (3B5) is an All Star at third. JT Realmuto (C8, Th+0) is excellent behind the plate. Ty France (1B4) is a good first baseman. This is a fine infield.

One amusing note is that they have five outfielders with identical fielding ratings - Masataka Yoshida, Mike Tauchman, Esteury Ruiz, Jake Meyers and Cade Marlowe (all OF2, 30 arm). Austin Slater (OF3 31 arm) starts in some lineups, and is available as a defensive replacement if needed.

**Bench:  
Interesting.**

**3.0**

Rye’s bench is more interesting than their starting lineup. They have one of the best hitting toys in TBL – 22 year old Evan Carter (1-1-4-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks, R+7, 62 ABs). Carter is a terrific prospect who will be here for years.

Cade Marlowe (1-3-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, 34 games) also has a decent card with cool power numbers. Edward Olivares (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 107 games) is a very useful power source off the bench. Ronny Mauricio (0-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, R+5, 102 ABs) has a big righty shift which may prove useful in spots. Paul DeJong (SS9, 112 games) will have plenty of chances to play as a defensive sub late in close games.

This is a pretty nice tool box – one of the better benches in TBL.



Merrifield: Looks good out there



**rye HERONS**

**Ages of players on the Rye roster, as of 07/01/2024:**

- 37: J. Abreu
- 35: Merrifield, Sale
- 33: Chargois, Devenski, Realmuto, Tauchman
- 32: Covey, Taillon
- 31: Estevez, Houser, Musgrove, Slater
- 30: Bregman, DeJong, R. Tapia, Yoshida
- 29: Batten, Brogdon, T. France, Lange
- 28: Crawford, D. Fry, Meyers, Olivares, Stephan
- 27: Marlowe, Singer
- 26: Brito, De Los Santos, B. Garrett, K. Kelly
- 25: E. Ruiz
- 23: Abrams, Mauricio
- 21: Carter

**3rd** The distance between this team and Maracaibo is negligible. Both teams will be choking on Gotham City’s dust.

It’s unlikely that either team will contend for a wild card in the rugged International Conference – the Clemente will probably send 3 teams to the playoffs this year. With Abrams and Carter added to the roster, better days are ahead for the Herons.

**Waxing Crescent.** Even more than last year, this is a transitional team that has a brighter future than before. They’ll take some lumps this year, but there’s a nice younger core to build around.



**TQ: 20.5**



# 2023 new westminster WHISKEYJACKS in review



by Jim Jeatt

*Some hard decisions had to be made.*

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 43-119 (4th, Mays)

A 43 win struggle for the Whiskey Boys was rewarded with the first overall pick in the 2024 draft. It was the worst win total since 38 wins in 2006. The team even underperformed as they had 46 Projected Wins. Injuries and suspensions limited, John Means, Fernando Tatis, Oneil Cruz, and Jazz Chisholm, which contributed to the team underperformance.

### What went right?

*[Management left this section blank, but we noted a very competent performance by Kyle Bradish (8 wins, 3 CG, ERA under 4.00. – Ed.)]*



Bradish: Very competent

### What went wrong?

Underwhelming performances from Moncada (.192 average, .288 SLG) over 100 games. Jonathan Schoop performed poorly (.165/.195/.231 for 121 games.) The offense leaders were not impressive: McCormack 19 HR, 48 RBI. Tatis .262, O'Neil .314 OBP and .443 slugging percentage.

Five starting pitchers went 24-77. Luis H. Garcia struggled at 4-21 with a 5.19 ERA along with 36 HR in 159 IP, while Brubaker was 2-15 with a 4.96 ERA in 161 IP. The relievers saved 20 games. Spread over 6 men, Acevedo had the most at 8.

### 3 Things

1. *Many, not one.* The Whiskeyjacks management looked at the roster and realized that a single pick at the top of a deep draft was not going to help turn things around. Pitching has been a

draft focus recently and to solve the offensive problems quantity have been taken as opposed to quality. The offense has struggled with OBP and selecting players to help in this area has been hit and miss.

Some hard decisions had to be made. The first overall pick was turned into four picks. The net haul turned into 3 first round picks in 2025 plus Brett Rooker. Management gave up Chisholm for three players (Baez, Pinto and Jose E.

Hernandez). Other emerging pieces were dealt Cooper, O'Hearn, Payamps and Milner for picks. In the end 15 selections were made in the 2024 draft and all those players found a place on the roster. The 2025 draft now has 13 New West picks.

2. *Build the core.* The development of a core group continues at a slow pace as Tatis returns for a decent but below standard 141 games, O'Neil Cruz has just 9 games and is uncarded, Means has just 4 starts, and Luis H Garcia has 6 starts. Bradish and Kirby look to have taken a step forward, while Siri, Bohm and Rooker look to be developing. This is still far short of the number of players required to make a contending team.

3. *Losing over 100 games is just not acceptable.* So that leaves the club with the uncomfortable position of drifting into the mushy middle. The hope is that the core can get better and include more players. This will require an improved drafting and scouting record. The four picks in the first round of the 2025 draft may go a long way on the road to recovery.

# new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

Jim Jeatt (20th year)

*That's a nice foundation.*



Jim Jeatt enters his twentieth TBL season with a growing collection of high-octane young talent. Here's some names: Colton Cowser, Zach Neto, O'Neill Cruz, Fernando Tatis, George Kirby, Bryce Miller. That's a nice foundation on which Mr. Jeatt can build a scary club.

They are not there yet, though. Last year, this club won 43 games and lost star shortstop Oneil Cruz for the entire season in April to a fractured ankle. That ice bath got them the #1 pick in the 2024 draft, which Jim traded to Midwest for a basket of goodies that included Brent Rooker and two 2025 #1 draft picks. This team needs some luck – they keep running into major injuries (we're looking at you, Kyle Bradish). Once the winds of fate swing back in their direction, this team should make rapid progress.

It's not too soon for a New West resurgence. They have not won a division title since 2010.

**Pitching: 7.0**  
**Summer zucchinis.**

ROTATION. Two Whiskeyjack starters pitchers have Grades above 13. One is John Means (Grade 20, C+34 HR-25). The other is the aforementioned Kyle Bradish (Grade 14 C+22 HR+26, 30 starts).

Bradish is back pitching for the Orioles after an early season UCL sprain. This guy is a real ace when healthy.



Kirby: Control

There are two other starters that will be top-tier performers for a long time. George Kirby (Grade 10 C+52, 31 starts) has the kind of control you almost never see in a starting pitcher in these modern times. Bryce Miller (Grade 8 C+33, 25 starts) is a future ace for the Seattle Mariners, who seem to grow aces in their bullpen like summer zucchinis.

Then come the useful 30 year olds. Domingo German (Grade 12 HR-25, 19 starts) suffered a shoulder impingement at the beginning of 2024 spring training, but should be back pitching with the Yankees by Memorial Day. Colin Rea (Grade 10 C+14 HR-24, 22 starts) will also be helpful here, as will Luis H. Garcia (Grade 10 HR+21, 6 starts).

**Turnover Rate: 44%**

**Arrived:** Javier Baez, Alec Burleson, Colton Cowser, Jose E. Hernandez, Tommy Kahnle, Ray Kerr, Andrew Knizner, Alec Marsh, Bryce Miller, Zach Neto, Rene Pinto, Colin Rea, Brent Rooker, Chris Stratton, Drew Verhagen, Ken Waldichuk.

**Departed:** Domingo Acevedo, J.T. Brubaker, Jazz Chisholm, Garrett Cooper, Jarlin Garcia, Tyler Heineman, Jose Herrera, Odubel Herrera, Lucas Luetge, Hoby Milner, Ryan O'Hearn, Joel Payamps, Jackson Stephens, Hunter Strickland, Zach Thompson, Taylor Trammell.

**SNT: Zach Neto.**

*Neto should turn out to be star in time. He is a plus defender – smooth footwork, accurate throwing arm.*





Add in 3 starts of Austin Pruitt (Grade 12 C+26, HR+21) and you've got 140 very nice starts. This is a better rotation than either Maracaibo or Rye, and it is going to get better.



Tatis: More is expected

circles, was rather disappointing last year. He hit .257 with a .322 on base percentage last year – pedestrian numbers for a guy who oozes talent. Jim will play the card all year, of course, and the power/speed combination is a beautiful thing, but more is expected out of this guy as he enters his age 25 season.

Ken Waldichuk (Grade 6 C-35 HR-15, 22 starts) take the rest of the starts. He's the only starter in New West that does not steal hits.

**BULLPEN.** Here's where the wheels come off. The closers for New West are Tommy Kahnle (Grade 19\* C-42, 41 IP) and Drew VerHagen (Grade 12\* C-14 HR-12, 61 IP). Kahnle makes sense – he's got the highest grade in the bullpen. VerHagen? Hey – that's what the instructions say, so that's what we report.

The setup men are Jordan Hicks (Grade 13\* C-35 HR+42, 66 IP), Chris Stratton (Grade 11\* C+14 HR+23, 83 IP) and Austin Pruitt (Grade 12\* C+26, HR+21, 3 starts, 38 IP). In the first two groups, there are 289 innings.

There are four guys who will be called when one of the starters has a rough day. Jose Hernandez (Grade 8\* HR-21, 51 IP), Ray Kerr (Grade 9\* C+16, HR-24, 27 IP), Alec Marsh (Grade 12\* C-42, HR-26, 39 IP) and Eli Morgan (Grade 7\*, 67 IP) will pitch to preserve the good relievers for more competitive games.

**Offense: 6.5**  
**There isn't enough.**

Let's start with a little sacrilege. Fernando Tatis (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 33 SBA), who is worshipped as a God in fantasy

Tatis has two nice cards to help him in the middle of lineups. Brent Rooker (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks + 42) was acquired as part of the Midwest deal. Chas McCormick (1-5-5, 10 hits, 3 walks + 42, 29 SSN for 25 attempts, L+6, R-5) bats first against lefties and third against righties. Alec Bohm (1-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, R-4, L+5) is the everyday DH. He also has wacky shifts but he's in the lineup every day and a nice source of power. Andrew Vaughn (1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks + 42, 152 games) plays first every day. Yoan Moncada (1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks) is the everyday third baseman and also has three loud power numbers.



Bohm: Power

The middle infielders are not heavy offensive contributors. Zach Neto (1-6-6, 8 hits, 2 walks+ 2 42s) is an exciting young shortstop who is working on his hitting tool at this point in his career. The second baseman is Nicky Lopez (2 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, 93 games) with ummm... help from Edmundo Sosa (1-4-6, 9 hits, 1 walk+42, 104 games). Behind the plate, Christian Vasquez (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L+5) and Andrew Knizner (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, 70 games) shared the work – neither is an offensive threat.

There's some power here, and Tatis and McCormack can run some. The problem is the overabundance of 12 on base number cards and lack of a real basher in the middle of the lineup. We're all waiting for Tatis to wake up.



**Defense:**  
**Good defensively.**

**4.5**

The middle of the defense is very solid with Nicky Lopez (2B8, SS9, 3B4, 1B3, OF1, 32 arm) at second and Zach Neto (SS8) and Javier Baez (SS9) at shortstop. Edmundo Sosa (3B4, SS9) is also available late in the game. Sosa is the starter against lefthanders.

The catchers are Christian Vasquez (C8, Th+2) and Rene Pinto (C8, Th-2). Both are good mechanically. Vasquez can help limit the running game. Andrew Knizner (C8, Th-3) – not so much. The instructions call for Vasquez to replace him when it is close and late. At the infield corners, Andrew Vaughn (1B4) and Yoan Moncada (3B4) will make the basic plays.

In the outfield, Chas McCormick (OF3, 31 arm) is outstanding, and Fernando Tatis (OF2, 36 arm) has an excellent arm. Brent Rooker (OF1, 33 arm) is not a great defender – bad enough that both he and Bohm are listed as DHs in the instructions. But Rooker has a defensive caddy in young Colton Cowser (OF2, 31 arm). The instructions call for Cowser to replace Rooker in the late innings of any game where New West is ahead.

This is a very good defensive team. They give away a little to Maracaibo and Gotham City, but defense will not be an issue for New West this year.

**Bench:**  
**A few resources.**

**2.0**

The bench has a few resources on it. Jose Siri (1-1-5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks, 31 SSN for 15 attempts) can hit for power and run. He's also an outstanding defensive player (OF3, 32 arm). Javier Baez (0-6, 8 hits, 2 walks, 35 SSN for 12 attempts) is used as an emergency defensive replacement all over the infield.

There's no big hitting toy, and the lefty shifts are often in the lineup, so there's no a lot to reach for in a pressure situation. Nothing special going on here.



**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?



Ages of players on the New Westminster roster, as of 07/01/2024:

34: Kahnle, Pruitt, Rea  
33: Stratton, Vazquez, VerHagen  
32: Schoop  
31: Baez, Freeland, German, Means  
29: Kerr, Knizner, N. Lopez, McCormick, Moncada, Rooker  
28: Morgan, Siri, E. Sosa  
27: Bohm, Bradish, L.H. Garcia, J. Hicks, Pinto  
26: J. Hernandez, Kirby, Marsh, Vaughn, Waldichuk  
25: Burleson, Br. Miller, Tatis  
24: Cowser  
23: Neto



There's no distance between the three teams vying for second place in the Mays – The TQs have them 1 point apart.

A September trade could matter. But the likelihood of any of these teams making the playoffs is slim. All three teams are pointing to the future.

**TQ: 20.0**



**new westminster WHISKEYJACKS**

# Someone Wins

In a year with no dominant clubs, we're faced with the difficult task of picking a winner. In the Ruth Division, we're pretty clear who can't win, but picking who will is a challenge worthy of the Hudson 8-Ball.

The team that we think has the best chance in the Ruth is the **Hoboken Zephyrs**. *Steve Powell* has a difficult task ahead of him again – but he also still has Aaron Judge. There's enough lineup to contend and enough pitching to keep them in the game, but there may be a need to make a move to get far into the post season.



New logo, much the same team. There are some new, exciting names, but there are things that are missing that should keep the **Knoxville Blue Thunder** from quite catching Hoboken. In particular, there are poor pitchers filling the bottom of the rotation and the bullpen. Still, they should make it an interesting race all summer.



*Joe Auletta* has gotten us accustomed to the idea that the **Brobdington Barbarians** arrive in two distinct versions: the one where they win the entire New Mexico-style

Welcome back to contention for Pat Martin, but the question – as with Hoboken – is: can they go all the way, or even part of the way?



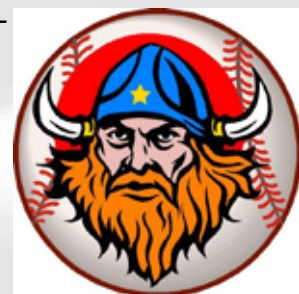
## 2023 Ruth Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Midwest*	112	50	.691	—
Hobokent†	99	63	.611	13
Knoxville	62	100	.383	50
Brobdington	52	110	.321	60

\* Lost to Maracaibo in the Conference Championship.

† Lost to Strong City in the Wild Card.

enchilada as they did in 2022, or dropping all the way to the bottom as they did in 2023. The Prince of Darkness is a master of holding back until all is ready, but it's very hard to do so when there's top tier talent on the roster (but not enough of it). Having Acuna, Soto, Machado and the rest, and grabbing some top shelf talent in the draft, means they're not terrible – but they're not good enough. Can they manage instead to be good enough to mix it up in the 2024 post-season? Well, maybe. There's enough in next year's draft for them to build up, but the **Annual** bets they won't.



*Darrell Skogen* expected that when he pushed in all the chips to try and win in 2023, that he'd win – but one team got in the way and stopped them in the conference championship. Now, in order to add Royce Lewis to the **Midwest Mongrels**, the team has dropped down near

the bottom of TBL and certainly at the bottom of the Ruth. We're not sure who wins here, but we're reasonably certain who won't.

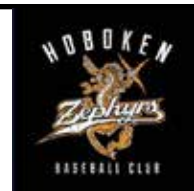
A photograph of a baseball player in a white pinstriped uniform swinging a bat. The player is wearing a black helmet and has the number 99 on his back. The background shows a blurred crowd of spectators in a stadium.

# Ruth Division

- |                |      |
|----------------|------|
| 1. Hoboken     | 25.0 |
| 2. Knoxville   | 24.0 |
| 3. Brobdingnag | 22.5 |
| 4. Midwest     | 15.5 |

Aaron Judge,  
Hoboken

# 2023 hoboken ZEPHYRS in review



*Can they win the scrum?*

by Steve Powell

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 99-63 (2nd, Ruth)

Sizeable improvements in offense and pitching drove the win total up 26 from 2022. Overall team offense was mostly responsible for this with a batting line of .268, .339, .459 and nearly 900 runs scored.

#### What went right?

The offense was just fine. Led by all-world Aaron Judge (.352/.463/.805, 79 homers, 216 hits, 145 RBIs and a mind boggling 179 runs) the Zephyrs scored almost 100 runs more than any other TBL team. Josh Bell had a big season, hitting over .300 with 99 RBI out of the #5 or #6 hole, and Frankie Lindor rebounded from 2 very underwhelming seasons with a solid .278, 29 HR, 112 runs scored and 103 RBI.



Bell: Big season

The big three in the rotation — Rodon, Bieber, and Stripling — went a combined 40-16 to disguise some shortfalls in other parts of the staff and give Hoboken a dead-average team ERA of 3.89. This combination won 99 games and made the playoffs.

#### What went wrong?

The lineup was very top-heavy. While the top five spots in the lineup were hitting 174 homers and driving in 456 runs, the other twelve batters who saw action hit only 70 homers and drove in 304 runs. When the big hitters sat or had off days, runs were few and far between.

Other than Lindor, no one played infield defense. Rookie Thairo Estrada committed 20 errors, while

the 3-headed 3rd baseman (Donovan Solano, Mike Brosseau, and David Villar) totaled 36, and DH carrying a first-baseman's mitt Josh Bell added to the fray with 15. Those gloves were bound to give any pitching staff agida.

Their 99 wins were not enough to take the Ruth Division title from Midwest, and when Hoboken faced a Strong City team in the Wild Card round the dice cooled, ending the Zephyrs season earlier than had been hoped.

#### 3 Things

1. *Can they win the scrum?* In 2023 the Ruth had two very good teams and two very bad ones. All of them will regress to the mean in 2024. Hoboken returns the very good core of Judge, Lindor, Bell, and Naylor. They will not be as good as they were in 2023, but they will go into this season as the division favorites. Off to a quick start, can they keep it up?
2. *Can they win entire IC?* The league is regressing to the mean this year. While some They have a reasonable playoff rotation and a killer top end of the bullpen, both things that play well in the post season.
3. *Can they make one big trade in September?* There's a need for better defense, and they could take a big step forward adding a number one at the head of the playoff rotation. Can they find the kind of high grade, older or injured starter to rent for a handful of starts in the post season?

# hoboken ZEPHYRS

Steve Powell (35th year)

*It's like we tried to use the Hudson 8-Ball and could only find the Dollar General version.*



We are running out of superlatives for Aaron Judge. Not since the days of Barry Bonds have we seen such eye-popping numbers: .352-79-145 – 79. I mean, really. 79 homers. The team hit 244 home runs, and one player hit a third of them. As long as he's on the roster, the Hoboken offense is something to be reckoned with. It's not that there aren't other hitters in the lineup: there certainly are; but permit us to gush a bit.

Now that we've gotten that out of the way, what do things look like for Hoboken this coming year? Truly, it looks pretty solid. The team is a little older, there are only 16 position players on the roster and 20 pitchers to cover all the usage, but this is still a team to be reckoned with. We think that, despite a few bumps along the way, this is the team that should win the

**Turnover Rate: 33%**

**Arrived:** Brian W. Anderson, Cody Bradford, Christian Encarnacion-Strand, Luis Frias, Bryan Hoeing, Luis Matos, Sammy Peralta, Carlos E. Perez, Spencer Steer, Julio Teheran, Hayden Wesneski, Brandon Williamson.

**Departed:** Victor Arano, Chris Archer, Mike Brosseau, Luis F. Gonzalez, Nick Maton, Wil Myers, Tomas Nido, Jake Odorizzi, Andre Pallante, Jose Suarez, Mason Thompson, David Villar.



**SNT: Spencer Steer.**

*A nice combination of power and speed adds to the Hoboken lineup. He's likely to settle in at third base here, where he will provide good value.*

Ruth Division pennant this year. The offense and the pitching are both enough to get them to the playoffs. The team won 99 games last year (and got bounced in the Wild Card round: we thought they would go further); in a year with more parity, they should be as capable as any to get to the final series.

**Pitching: 7.5**  
**Adequate, but could use some help.**

The Hoboken pitching staff is adequate, but has some serious strengths, including a dynamic one-two punch at the top of the bullpen. Their objective is to keep the team in the game so that the offense can carry it to victory.

**ROTATION.** The top starter was selected in the draft two years ago: Bailey Ober (Grade 12 C+32 HR-15). Along with Seth Lugo (Grade 10 C+24) and Kenta Maeda (Grade 10 C+22 HR-16), there are 72 very capable starts.

The next tier includes former ace Shane Bieber (Grade 9 C+23 HR+16) and two new draftees: journeyman Julio Teheran (Grade 8 C+35 HR-25) and rookie lefty Brandon Williamson (Grade 9 HR-14). That's 55 more starts, leaving the remaining ones in the hands of Cody



Devin Williams, Evan Phillips: One, Two



# hoboken ZEPHYRS

Bradford (Grade 6 C+32 HR-26), Ross Stripling (Grade 5 C+36 HR-35), and Hayden Wesneski (Grade 5 HR-35). These guys will need some help when they take the mound. Dr. Steve has adopted a caddy system to help them out.

**BULLPEN.** This is where the extensive pitching staff has a real upside. Despite his wildness, there aren't too many pitchers better than Devin Williams (Grade 29\* C-44 HR+34); he has help from the excellent Evan Phillips (Grade 20\* C+34 HR+21). They have 120 innings between them.

The next step down is a bit of a leap. Wesneski returns as a Grade 14\* for 40 innings, but Dauri Moreta (Grade 15\* C-22 HR+35) is a more reliable alternative. The middlemen are an even bigger step down: Drew Smith (Grade 11\* C-45 HR+14), Trevor Richards (Grade 10\* C-26 HR-22), and short innings Sammy Peralta (Grade 11\* C-51 HR+25) and Luis Frias (Grade 10\* C-51 HR+26) provide 180 total innings to help rescue the middle starters. Kyle Nelson (Grade 8\* C+26 HR-33), Bryan Hoeing (Grade 7\* C+13 HR-23), and a couple of Grade 5\*s pitch early or carry the ball for the lesser starters.

If there is any area that would help keep the team in contention, it might be a September trade for a solid middle reliever to set up the big guys at the end.

**Offense: 11.0**  
**It's pretty solid.**

Any discussion of the offense has to start with Judge (1-1-0-0-0: an extra 1 is just about present in the second column; 9 hits, 6 walks, 9 13s). He's set to be the Hoboken leadoff hitter. He is flanked by two pretty solid cards: Josh Naylor (11 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0, 30 SSN) and William



Contreras, Naylor: Flanks

Contreras (10 hits, 4 walks, 4 0s, L+10 R-8). Francisco Lindor (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-0-0-0, 34 SSN for 35 SBA) is also a solid addition.

Hoboken helped itself in the draft with two young players: SNT Spencer Steer, who has power and speed (9 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-6-6, 32 SSN, L+3 R-3) and Christian "made APBA change type size" Encarnacion-Strand (10 hits, 2 walks+42, 1-5-5, 31 SSN). Steer is a full time player; Encarnacion-Strand has only 63 games. Josh Bell, who will get time at first, is only adequate (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-5-6, L+4 R-3).

The other regulars are adequate. Luis Matos (9 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, L+7 R-6) and Kerry Carpenter (10 hits, 2 walks+42, 1-5-6, L-9) will get reps in the outfield; Thairo Estrada (10 hits, 1 walk+42, 3 0s, 30 SSN for 30 SBA) and Donovan Solano (10 hits, 3 walks+42, 3 0s) will play in the infield.

This is a good lineup, with both power and speed, and a surprising number of 42s. Still, there is a limited amount of OBP; they will be a little bit streaky.

**Defense: 4.0**  
**Some good gloves.**

In the field, Judge leads the way again, with an OF3 (36 arm); they're also strong up the middle – Lindor is an SS9, Estrada a 2B8, Contreras a C8 (with a Th-2). Backup catcher Carlos Perez is only a C7, but has a superior arm (Th+4). Bo Naylor's 1B4 (and Solano's 1B4) are a plus. The

third basemen are a problem; Solano and Steer are both 3B3s, though Brian Anderson is a 3B4.



Lindor: Something

The rest of the outfield after Judge a collection of OF2s with uniform arms of 30. Overall, the defense will catch the ball, which is something.

**Bench:**  
**A few options.**

**2.5**

In addition to the platoon choices at first, third and the outfield, there are a few extra players (but only a few, as there are so many pitchers on the roster). Carlos Perez (8 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-6, L+3 R-6, C7 Th+4) is a useful defensive catcher who hits better than usual. Jo Adell, once the youngest player in TBL, may get a few at-bats in November (8 hits, 2 walks, 1-4-5-5, 26 SSN). Oscar Gonzalez (8 hits, 4-5) is here to drive the team bus.

Ages of players on the Hoboken roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 36: Maeda, Solano
- 34: Lugo, Stripling
- 33: C. Perez, Teheran
- 32: Judge
- 31: B. Anderson, J. Bell, Richards, Rodon
- 30: Bummer, Lindor, Dr. Smith
- 29: Bieber, J. King, Phillips, D. Williams
- 28: Estrada, Moreta, Ober
- 27: Hoeing, Nelson
- 26: Bradford, K. Carpenter, Contreras, Frias, O. Gonzalez, J. Naylor, S. Peralta, Steer, Wesneski, Williamson
- 25: Adell
- 24: Encarnacion-Strand
- 22: L. Matos



**Third Quarter.** The Zephyrs added some talent in the draft, but they are beginning to get old overall. Obviously their lineup is still quite dangerous, but there may need to be some adjustments going forward.



**hoboken ZEPHYRS**

**1st**

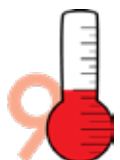
We think they're good enough to win the Ruth pennant. How far they go past that depends on the dice – but even more, whether Dr. Steve is willing to make moves to help the pitching staff, particularly the middle and setup part of the bullpen.

This is a fraught issue, of course. In the last six years, the team has won 98, 80, 85, 89, 73 and 99 games; they've gone out in the semifinal round twice and the wild card round once. They had the big power team, the big pitching team, and some other clubs that should have been more competitive than they have been. It's like we tried to use the Hudson 8-Ball and could only find the Dollar General version, which always said "Reply Hazy, Try Again." It's probably more exasperating for management, which drafts well, trades well and manages well, and has had to watch teams like Brobdingnag and Midwest go past up and down on the escalator. They really could do with a deep run into the playoffs before this crew gets too old – but can they get it done?



Encarnacion-Strand: Small type

**TQ: 25.0**



# 2023 Knoxville BLUE THUNDER in review



*They should not be scared of any Ruth opponent.*

by Joe Auletta

## 2023 in Review Final Record: 62-100 (3rd, Ruth)

We at the *Annual* are once again caught short by a team we thought would be better. This might be a function of the kinder, gentler publication of recent years, or some sort of blind optimism about teams' ability to overperform. Or, it might be that we didn't take into account just how good Midwest and Hoboken would be, giving Knoxville a disadvantage in the many head-to-head games within the Ruth. Whatever the reason, they dropped 100 games and here we are.

### What went right?

With a 100 loss season, the short answer is "not much". But there were still some bright spot performances. Seby Zavala had an .823 OBP in limited (216 PA) appearances, and Matt Chapman was a cornerstone with 152 games, 83 runs, and 85 RBI.

Triston McKenzie pitched like a front of the rotation starter with a 3.02 ERA over 200 innings, and a winning 12-10 record on a team that gave him very little run support.

### What went wrong?

Start with another limited season for the player who has as much talent as anyone, just not as much availability—Byron Buxton struggled through half an injury plagued season and hit .195. Exactly the same as "the next big bat", they acquired even more injured Alex Kirilloff. With luck, both should rebound for 2024.

Without those two being healthy, the Blue Thunder had a major power shortage, hitting just 141 homers (only New West had fewer). That will certainly lose you a few games.

Maybe the new logo will be the charm. We'll see.

### 3 Things

1. *How quickly will the 2024 draft class become major contributors?* No one expects rookies to lead a 100 loss team to 100 wins in one season, but can the quartet of starters (Rodriguez, Ragans, Allen, and Bradley) along with catcher Gabriel Moreno show that they will anchor the battery for years to come?
2. *Can depth overcome the increasing plague of injuries baseball wide?* Add the quartet mentioned above to hold-overs McKenzie, Pivetta, and Gibson and that should be enough to give Knoxville quality rotations for a number of years. IF they can keep them healthy.
3. *Can they get off to a quick start and develop team chemistry and momentum?* They should not be scared of any Ruth opponent, and they started the 2024 season playing .500 ball and in the mix for a playoff spot. Can they keep it up?



McKenzie: Front



# knoxville BLUE THUNDER



Pat Martin (37th year)

*We assume there is a plan (or, as Mr. Montague calls it, a Plan).*

Over the past few years, Knoxville's roster has been something of a revolving door. Gerrit Cole was here; now he's gone. Tarik Skubal, same thing. Nick Pivetta, Eddie Rosario, Miguel Sano, Eduardo Escobar, Manuel Margot, Ryan Pressly, Andrew Kittredge . . . this is not a question of bounce, or unbuild or rebuild: at least from the outside, it just looks like churn. It's been a long time (2015) since the 105-win season and the Williams pennant, and even longer since the World Series against Brobdingnag (2008). Despite an influx of new talent, the last few years have produced little success.

Where does this all lead? Mr. Martin has been at this for quite some time. We assume that there is a plan (or, as Mr. Montague calls it, a *Plan*) and a goal (or, as we call it, a goal). The talent level is again something we like to see; there's a bit missing in next year's draft, but if some of the young guys come through, they might be quite solid by this time next year.

Or, you know, there'll be more churn.

## Turnover Rate: 44%

**Arrived:** Logan Allen, Tristan Beck, Taj Bradley, Garrett Cooper, Danny Coulombe, Colin Holderman, Max Kepler, Ryan McKenna, Julian Merryweather, Shelby Miller, Jovani Moran, Gabriel Moreno, Elvis Peguero, Cole Ragans, Grayson Rodriguez, Chase Silseth, Justin Topa, Ramon Urias.

**Departed:** Jorge Alcala, Shawn Armstrong, Madison Bumgarner, Gilberto Celestino, Austin Davis, Erick Fedde, Mitch Garver, Cesar Hernandez, Andrew Kittredge, Joel Kuhnel, Manuel Margot, Trevor May, David Phelps, Aaron Sanchez, Kyle Stowers, Ryan Tepera, Caleb Thielbar, Seby Zavala.



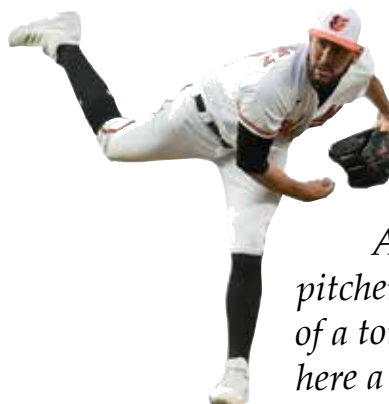
**Half Moon.** More talent has been put on the roster, and the addition of fine young players such as Ragans, Rodriguez, Moreno and others makes us think that the future is bright.

We feel as if we have said this before, but we might be right this time.

**Pitching: 8.0**  
**Half a rotation, deep bullpen.**

The pitching staff has changed quite a bit in the last few years, but it has gotten younger. This year's draft brought four new young starters and a small group of somewhat older relievers. Overall, the staff has been vastly improved.

**ROTATION.** The two best grades among the starters belong to newcomers: lefty Cole Ragans (Grade 15 C-26 HR+34) and righty Chase Silseth (Grade 14 C-44 HR-21). They have 20 starts between them. The other two new arrivals, lefty Logan Allen (Grade 9 C-14) and SNT righty Grayson Rodriguez (Grade 8) provide 47 more starts, and two-way pitcher Nick Pivetta (Grade 9 HR-16) That provides roughly half of those



**SNT:**  
**Grayson Rodriguez.**

*A poised and capable pitcher, he is a future ace, part of a total staff rebuild. He'll be here a while.*



# KNOXVILLE BLUE THUNDER

needed for the season. Last year's young ace, Triston McKenzie, has four starts as a wild Grade 10 as well.

Unfortunately, there are 70 more trips to the hill to be filled. These will be filled by Taj Bradley (Grade 6 HR-32), veteran Kyle Gibson (Grade 6 C+21 HR+14) and Patrick Corbin (Grade 4 C+15 HR-23). Knoxville instructions expect starters to pitch to fatigue; that may mean that these lesser starters will be giving up buckets of runs before they exit. This is not an awful starting staff, but it's not quite the caliber of a playoff team.



Pivetta: Both ways

**BULLPEN.** An indication of Mr. Martin's intention to "go for it" was the acquisition of Shelby Miller, who returned to the majors with a fine season (Grade 28\* C-32 HR+33, 42 innings). His setup crew is solid: Pivetta is a Grade 19\* reliever, while Julian Merryweather (Grade 14\* C-45 HR+16), Justin Topa (Grade 13\* C+32 HR+42), Elvis Peguero (Grade 13\*

C-24 HR+36) and lefty Danny Coulombe (Grade 13\* C+25 HR+33). These five have 300 innings among them, and if used aggressively, can really keep Knoxville in the game.

The club has five additional relievers that can be used. Bryan Shaw (Grade 11\* C-14 HR+36), Tristan Beck (Grade 9\* C+21 HR+14), Colin Holderman (Grade 9\* HR+35) throw from the right side, and Andrew Chafin (Grade 10\* C-53 HR+16) and Jovani Moran (Grade 9\* C-62 HR+36). There are more than 270 relief innings among this crew.

The key to the pitching staff's success will be use of the deep bullpen. We'll see if that happens.

## Offense:

9.0

### Will be streaky.

There is some power in the lineup. The best overall cards belong to Ozzie Albies (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, 35 SSN, L+8 R-4 but SA-0 on the computer) and, for about two thirds of the season, Nolan Jones (10 hits, 4 walks, 1-0-0-0, 32 SSN). When facing lefties, Harrison Bader will get playing time (9 hits, 2 walks, 33 SSN for 23 SBA, and a nifty L+13 R-7 platoon shift).

At first base, there's a potential platoon of Garrett Cooper (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-5-6, L+7 R-4) and Alex Kiriloff (10 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-6-6, L-18 R+2). Matt Chapman holds down third base (9 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0-0, 26 SSN). Shortstop isn't bad either – Geraldo Perdomo plays every day (9 hits, 4 walks+22, 3 Os, L-8 but, again, SA-0 on the PC).

Connor Joe can play first base as well, but is assigned to the outfield, where he has some power and on-base (8 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-0-0-0); Max Kepler also has some power (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0). The everyday DH has good power as well: Jorge Polanco (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-0-0-0, 34 SSN). Behind the plate, rookie Gabriel Moreno is quite capable (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 3 Os, 29 SSN, L+6 R-4), as is his backup Ryan Jeffers (9 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-5-6).



Polanco: Good power

There is no card with 11 hits, but there are a lot of fourth power numbers, which suggests that the offense will be streaky, sometimes scoring bunches of runs and other times having little success. It's going to depend on the dice.

## Defense:

5.0

### Very good.

There are some top gloves on the field for Knoxville. Albies (2B9) and Chapman (3B5)



Chapman, Albies: Top gloves, again

are tops at their position, as is rookie Gabriel Moreno (C8 Th+6) and the new shortstops Perdomo and Nick Allen (SS9). Jones (36 arm), Bader (35 arm), and Kepler (34 arm) are all OF3s, while Joe is an OF2 (32 arm). All of the first basemen, including Joe, are 1B3s.

This is a very good defense, and should keep innings from being extended too much.

**Bench: 2.0**  
**No big help here.**

Knoxville instructions say that the best nine are generally on the field. That's fairly accurate. The extra players on the roster don't do much that the starters don't already do; Nick Allen is another SS9 but can't hit (8 hits, 2 walks, 2 0s, 32 SSN); Ramon Urias is excellent on defense (3B5 2B8 1B3) but is only average (9 hits, 3 0s).

Byron Buxton continues to have intriguing, but elusive, skills (7 hits, 4 walks, 35 SSN, 1-0-0-0). Ryan McKenna (9 hits, 3 0s, 35 SSN) and Christian Bethancourt (9 hits, 1-6-6) are here to fill out the roster.

**2nd** The TQs say it's close, but we don't really think so. This team is partway to contention, but it has downsides as well as upsides. The *Annual* thinks that 90 wins is possible, 85 is more likely, and if they can stop churning they can be a good young team in a year.



Moreno: Top glove, just arrived

Ages of players on the Knoxville roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 36: Gibson, Shaw
- 34: Chafin, Corbin, Coulombe
- 33: G. Cooper, S. Miller, Topa
- 32: Bethancourt, Merryweather
- 31: M. Chapman, Joe, Kepler, Pivetta
- 30: Bader, Buxton, Polanco, Urias
- 28: Beck, Holderman
- 27: Albies, Jeffers, McKenna, Moran, Peguero
- 26: N. Jones, Kiriloff, McKenzie, Ragans
- 25: L. Allen, N. Allen
- 24: Moreno, G. Perdomo, G. Rodriguez, Silseth
- 23: Bradley

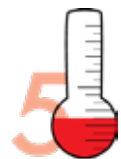


**KNOXVILLE BLUE THUNDER**



New year, new logo

**TQ: 24.0**



# 2023 brobdingnag BARBARIANS in review



*The Barbarians added a box car full of youngsters.*

by Joe Auletta

## 2023 in Review Final Record: 52-110 (4th, Ruth)

The biggest things that went right didn't happen on the field in 2023, at least not with hits, runs, and errors. First, Vlad's prognostication of what teams would do well and which would do poorly beat the odds, as all four teams where Brob owned their first round pick finished in the top half of the draft. Second, and even more important, the 2024 draft turned out to be loaded with talent.

### What went right?

On the field the good was good, not great. And there wasn't enough of those guys. Manny Machado (.282/.353/.507, 84 RBIs) was solid, but Soto (.248/.384/.461, 98 runs) and Acuna (limited to 119 games and a .788 OPS) underperformed the names on the back of the uniforms. Brandon Woodruff pitched well (2.88 ERA) but lack of run support resulted in only a 10-10 W/L mark.

### What went wrong?

With a full dozen batters who hit under .240 there were just too many days where runs were too hard to come by. The team batting average, HRs, runs scored, and steals were all bottom five.

The pitching outdid the hitting, ending up in the bottom two in ERA, walks, and unearned runs. It was a (mostly) team effort.

### 3 Things

1. *Were the scouts right?* The Barbarians added a box car full of youngsters — eight of them under 25 and all expected to be valuable parts of the next Barbarian contending roster. If they got it more right than wrong the rebuild should be short. If not, the front office may be looking for new jobs soon.



Machado: Solid

2. *Can they compete in a Ruth devoid of any super teams?* It's unlikely current value was a goal in the offseason, but Miller and Woo should be a significant improvement to a rotation that looked very bad on the first of March. It isn't a World Series staff — and the relief staff leaves much to be desired — but an average staff with an average offence could be enough to contend in the division.

3. *Can the rotation stay healthy?* Strasburg is young enough he should still be starting, but he retired. Buehler is out for the season. Woodruff is a third of a season and out for 2025. Miller, Bubic, and Woo are on the injured list before the season is two weeks old. The names sound good — the availability leaves a lot to be desired.

*[It could happen. As Joe, and others, have observed about 2024: there are no super teams in TBL overall, not just the Ruth. We're as unsure about our own predictions as we have ever been — there are teams that claim to be rebuilding who will be on the field in the post season. — Ed.]*

# brobdingnag BARBARIANS



Joe Auletta (36th year; Hall of Famer)

*One thing is certain: there's always a juggernaut coming.*

It is always a pleasure to sit with Joe Auletta when discussing the draft. As he is in New Mexico and most of us are on the East Coast, the face to face conversations usually happen at the winter meetings. By the time they take place, of course, the Prince of Darkness has already been evaluating the upcoming event for months, longer than nearly anyone in the league.

Every year he offers Giuseppe's Tip Sheet, so we all know what we are supposed to choose (and when): this is a careful analysis, but also (of course) a magnificent piece of spin. He knows what he wants, and when he wants it, and often gets it. (But not always.) And this year, in part because Royce Lewis, a Twin, went naturally to Midwest, Brobdingnag got to add Elly de la Cruz, Francisco Alvarez, Bobby Miller, Jordan Walker and Bryan Woo. Quite the haul – and there's another draft ahead in which they will have the chance to do it again.

No analysis of Brobdingnag is ever free of context. They must always include, like some physics problem, the velocity and direction of the team: whether they're building up or building down, and whether the next juggernaut is one, two or three years away. One thing is certain: there's always a juggernaut coming. It's not here yet, but it'll likely be here in 2025 or 2026. Count on it.

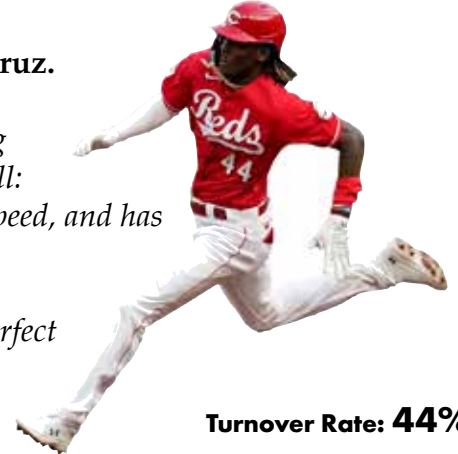


**Waxing Crescent.** Any team with Acuna, Soto, De La Cruz, Walker, and the rest is clearly on the rise, regardless of what they put on the field. They're probably no better than .500 for the year, but anyone would love to have this roster.

## SNT: Elly de la Cruz.

*The dynamic young infielder can do it all: he has power and speed, and has a decent glove.*

*In short, he's the perfect young Barbarian.*



**Turnover Rate: 44%**

**Arrived:** Francisco Alvarez, Kris Bubic, Oswaldo Cabrera, Elly De La Cruz, Ben Joyce, Peter Lambert, Korey Lee, Miles Mikolas, Bobby Miller, Gregory Santos, Nolan Schanuel, Tyler Soderstrom, Ryne Stanek, Gleyber Torres, Jordan Walker, Bryan Woo.

**Departed:** Diego A. Castillo, Ernie Clement, Franchy Cordero, Ezequiel Duran, Elieser Hernandez, Daniel Lynch, Steven Matz, Adam Oller, Luis Patino, Jace Peterson, Tyler Rogers, Patrick Sandoval, Justus Sheffield, Stephen Strasburg, Myles Straw,

## Pitching: 6.0 Not absent, but not enough.

In the years when the Barbarians are not contenders, there is a tendency to build the pitching staff down to the minimum. This has not happened this year; there are actually some arms, both in the rotation and in the bullpen. They will get some outs. There is pitching, but there simply is not enough.

**ROTATION.** Tyler Glasnow is the #1; he's pretty good (Grade 13 HR+16, 21 starts.) His sidekicks are two talented rookies: Bobby Miller (Grade 11 C+23 HR+23) and Bryan Woo (Grade 11 HR-13).



Glasnow: The #1



# brodingnag BARBARIANS

They add 40 starts to the total. Peter Lambert (Grade 9 HR-31) and Ranger Suarez (Grade 8 HR+23) add another 33, so 60% of the season is covered. The rest will belong to innings eaters Jack Flaherty (Grade 5) and Miles Mikolas (Grade 4; who, if the Barbarians made it to the playoffs, could actually make three starts.)

This is far from the worst rotation in TBL, though it's not a championship-caliber staff.

**BULLPEN.** Due to limited usage, Brandon Woodruff (Grade 20 C+24) has been put to work as the closer. He has some help: Craig Kimbrel (Grade 17\* C-23), Jhoan Duran (Grade 16\* HR+23) and Hunter Harvey (Grade 15\* C+32), all righthanded, are good choices for late in games where they lead. They have about 260 innings between them.



Woodruff: Closer, for now

The lower tier isn't terrible either. Ryne Stanek (Grade 12\* C-21 HR-15, 51 innings) is the best of them, but there are also Jakob Junis (Grade 8\* C+26), Gregory Santos (Grade 8\* C+26 HR+54) and Giovanni Gallegos (Grade 8\* C+31 HR-31). The trio has 207 innings. There is, overall, plenty of usage and flexibility, which is a little unusual for a Brodingnag team that intends to be a year or two away from being, well, a *Brodingnag Team*.

**Offense: 11.0**  
**Some outstanding cards.**

Cards that have 12 hits are exciting; cards with 4 or more power numbers are exciting. Cards of players that can run – yeah, exciting. Guys that can field their position are a nice bonus.

When all these things are there – oh my. Ronald Acuna (12 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-4-6, 32 SSN for an eye-popping 87 SBA) may be the best card in the set. He can field – see below. He's the centerpiece of a dangerous lineup. The other half of the price a few years ago for Mike Trout – Juan Soto – is pretty good too (9 hits, 6 walks, 1-0-0-0, L-6, 27 SSN).

The primary catcher, rookie Francisco Alvarez (8 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-1-6) will hit some homers; so will Manny Machado (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-5-5, L+4). Wilmer Flores (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0-0) is a nice addition to the lineup, as is leadoff man Gleyber Torres (10 hits, 4 walks, 1-5-6, 27 SSN, L+3 R-2).

For the remaining positions, the Barbarians roll out top rookie Elly de la Cruz (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-3-6, 31 SSN for 43 SBA, L-12 R+3); youngster Luis V. Garcia (10 hits, 2 walks, 27 SSN); even younger Jordan Walker (1-4-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, 25 SSN), and part-timer Luis Campusano (12 hits, 1-5-6, L+10 R-6). Oswaldo Cabrera (8 hits, 3 walks, 2 0s), though, will create outs.

This is not a perfect lineup, but it is a very potent, very Barbarian one – power, a remarkable amount of speed, and more than ever, youth. In counterpoint to a built contender like River-woolf or a “one more time” team like Whitman, these guys are largely here to stay, to be supplemented by all of the stuff coming next year.

**Defense: 4.0**  
**Some good, some less good.**



Acuna: Oh my

Brodingnag has three Fielding One players: Acuna (OF3, 33 arm); Machado (3B5); and Torres (2B8). Omar Narvaez is a C8, but Alvarez is only a C7; both have inferior arms. At shortstop, De



Machado: One of the Fielding Ones

La Cruz is an SS8, but Garcia (playing out of position) is an SS7; Flores is a 1B3; Soto is an OF2 (31 arm); and Walker is an OF1 (31 arm). Oswaldo Cabrera (OF2, 30 arm, with ratings for all of the infield positions) can help on defense.

Overall, the defense has some that is good, and some that is less than good. But we like the names, as does Mr. Auletta.

**Bench:** **1.5**  
**Not as such.**

As with any non-contending Barbarian team, there's hardly any bench to work with. The DH/SS position allows some flexibility in the starting lineup, but the departure of Myles Straw in the waiver draft means that only Cabrera can help with Walker's glove.

There are three other catchers on the roster, none of whom contribute at all: Korey Lee, Tyler Soderstrom (well, he's a Th+2), and Joey Bart; they're lottery tickets. Nolan Schanuel (9 hits, 5 walks+42, 2 0s) might provide the occasional pinch hit, and then there's the wild, 21 plate appearance card of Abraham Toro (12 hits, 3 walks+52, 1-1); he's pictured below, probably his only chance to ever be depicted in the *Annual*.



Toro: Only chance

**3rd**

But not so far from second place that it's not possible. Indeed, in this year of parity, the good offense and modest pitching might be enough to give the Brobdingnag club a short playoff run.

This was never going to be a contender, but unusually it was never possible for it to be a bottom dweller either. Any roster with the three good starters, with the four good relievers, with Acuna and Soto and De La Cruz and and and, is bound to win some games over the course of 162 games. The draft next year doesn't have any very high picks, but there are a lot of them. 2025 or 2026 will be the jubilee.



**brobdingnag BARBARIANS**

Ages of players on the Brobdingnag roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 37: Mikolas
- 36: Kimbrel
- 32: Flores, Gallegos, Narvaez, Stanek
- 31: Junis, Machado, Woodruff
- 30: Glasnow
- 29: Harvey
- 28: Flaherty, R. Suarez
- 27: Bart, P. Lambert, Toro, Torres
- 26: Acuna, J. Duran
- 25: O. Cabrera, Campusano, K. Lee, B. Miller, J. Soto
- 24: L. V. Garcia, G. Santos, Woo
- 23: Joyce
- 22: F. Alvarez, E. De La Cruz, Schanuel, Soderstrom, J. Walker

**TQ: 18.5**



# 2023 midwest MONGRELS in review



*The plan changed.*

by Darrell Skogen

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 112-50 (1st, Ruth)

Last year the Dawgs took a chance, made a big trade that mortgaged their future, and cashed in all their chips in search of a TBL championship. Except for some bad dice in the conference finals, the plan almost worked. The drafting of Julio Rodriguez and addition of Justin Verlander and Kyle Schwarber helped the Dawgs win 112 games. The season ended with a 4-2 series loss to Maracaibo, the eventual league champion, proving that the idea was not far-fetched at all. The fans in Midwest and GM V-Mart and his players were well satisfied with the season.

Blood Sweat and Tears reminds us that “what goes up, must come down.” And boy, are the Dawgs down this season. The weak draft residue after last winter’s trades, combined with the injuries that riddled this year’s pitching staff made it impossible to follow through with a hoped for second year that would ease the draft capital shortage. It was time to clean house and work toward the future after a great run of years. We were hoping for a 70 win season in 2024, but it looks like that is unlikely now. Time to reload in another two year plan. Unfortunately, it could be three years since there was so little draft in 2024 and will likely again be so little in 2025.

### What went right?

112 wins, the best record in the league. The Dawgs showed that they can indeed play offense. Rookie Julio Rodriguez slashed .295/.329/.533, with 32 doubles, 29 homeruns, and 20 stolen bases. Schwarber, popularly called “Schwabasy” by the 14 season ticketholders, hit .220 with 46 bombs and 114 RBI. Eduardo Escobar chipped in 27 more big flies with 67 RBI. The team cranked out 200 homers and scored just short of 800 runs. Still, the Dawgs are a pitching first team, and it was great all season. Verlander led the staff at 24-3, 2.13. Tony Gonsolin

ended 19-3, 2.02, and Shane McClanahan added a 14-9, 3.29 line. Garrett Whitlock went 10-2 as a part time starter and reliever. Closer Edwin Diaz had 49 saves and 1.02 ERA in 63 innings. The rest of the pen was equally strong: Enyel de los Santos (1.91), Cionel Perez (1.20), Brooks Raley (1.83), AJ Puk (2.47), Sam Hentges (2.15), and David Price (3.37) over a combined 280 innings.

### What went wrong?

Bad dice against Maracaibo. Everything else was the best Midwest has done since joining the TBL universe.

### 3 Things

1. *The trading and drafting worked.* J-Rod provides a spark plug for the offense for years to come. Schwabsy will hit .200, but those 40-50 homerun seasons are consistent. Verlander was awesome, but he was traded away to work toward getting the number one overall pick in the 2024 draft to get a third offensive weapon.

2. *Royce Lewis.* The Dawg management is certain that Mr. Lewis is a stud for the ages. The question is whether he will be healthy or if he will instead follow the Eric Davis-Byron Buxton mold and be the “always injured Royce Lewis.” We shall see.

3. *Pitcha, pitcha, pitcha?* We don’t have *any* this year. It’s going to be a very long season as the Mongrels throw Humpty Dumpty after Humpty Dumpty out there this season and perhaps again in 2025. It would have been easier to take if the 2023 championship had developed, but as Mick Jagger sings, “You can’t always get what you want.” We’ll settle for the 112 win season and hope to build back before the Guru finds the infirmities of old age make him step away from TBL play. Incentive for the old man to stay alive to set into motion another run of strong seasons!

*[Here’s hoping. – Ed.]*



Rodriguez: Slashing rookie



# midwest MONGRELS



Darrell Skogen (22nd year)

*There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch.*

For the fourteen season ticket holders up in Maple Grove, you'd hope that their seats come with lap belts and handholds. Four years of moderate success from 2018 to 2021 was followed by a 44-118 season in which they finished an astonishing 74 games out of first place, and last year's 112-50 campaign, the best record in TBL. The Guru, by word and by deed, made it clear that all the chips had been pushed to the middle to get the Mongrels to the World Series. As he notes in his Year in Review, it all went right until the dice went wrong.

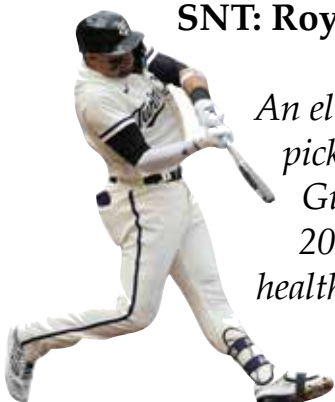
As Robert Heinlein observed in acronym, TANSTAAFL: *There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch*. After the big trade – two #1s, two #2s – to get Royce Lewis, and a few other moves to bring in other players, there were holes everywhere

**Turnover Rate: 39%**

**Arrived:** Jaime Barria, Ty Blach, Shintaro Fujinami, Yasmani Grandal, Trent Grisham, Royce Lewis, Michael Massey, Casey Mize, Kyle Muller, Luis Patino, Nate Pearson, Casey Schmitt, Connor Seabold, Michael A. Taylor.

**Departed:** Hanser Alberto, Jorge Alfaro, Cody Bellinger, Nelson R. Cruz, Tyler Duffey, Josh Harrison, Eric Hosmer, Dustin May, Adrian Morejon, Rougned Odor, David Price, Pavin Smith, Terrin Vavra, Justin Verlander.

## SNT: Royce Lewis.



*An elite hitter, he was the first pick overall – for which the Guru paid highly – in a rich 2024 draft. If he can stay healthy, he will absolutely rake.*

and no way to fix them all. Accordingly . . . hold on to your handholds, boys, and tighten those lap belts. Here we go again.

## Pitching: Over the cliff.

**3.5**

There are an awful lot of pitchers on the roster, who mostly do not help at all. Mr. Skogen is traditionally fond of pitching, so this year will be painful in the extreme. There is about a third of a season of decent starts, and a group of relievers who would be a helpful set of middle and long men for most teams; they'll have to work pretty hard, especially for the two-thirds of the season when the good starters aren't on the mound. It's going to be a long year in Minnesota.



McClanahan: Best there is

ROTATION. The best there is, once again, is hard-throwing lefty Shane McClanahan (Grade 13 C-12, 21 starts). The rest of the capable starters – roughly one full season's worth – consists of Javier Assad (Grade 13 C-14 HR+15, 10 starts) and Tony Gonsolin (Grade 10 C-14 HR-23, 20 starts). Their appearances are sprinkled through the first five months, and then they're done (Assad moves to the bullpen).

Ahem. Well. The rest of the rotation, 111 more starts, are split among five pitchers: 80-year-old Rich Hill (Grade 4 HR-22), Garrett Whitlock (Grade 3 C+36 HR-23), and three Grade 1s: Joan Adon, Zach Davies, and Kyle Muller.



It's possible that Jaime Barria's 6 starts as a 7 may come into play later in the season. It goes without saying that the starters are largely on their own. They are all expected to go five innings unless pounded out (which should happen frequently, especially the Grade 1s).

**BULLPEN.** Last year's Midwest pen was strong and deep, and the veteran manager knew how to use it. This year's is, well, a considerable step down. The top end grades belong to lefty Brooks Raley (Grade 15\* C-21 HR+35) and righty Enyel de los Santos (Grade 14\* C-15 HR+41). They have about 120 innings, which is not enough, but is at least something. There are also 56 innings of Javier Assad as a 14\*.



Raley, De Los Santos: Something

Support comes from a quartet of middlemen. Nate Pearson (Grade 10\* HR-16) is the only righty, along with Grade 9\* lefties Cionel Perez (C-24 HR+53), A. J. Puk (C+34 HR-22) and Sam Hentges (HR+52). That's just over 200 innings of Grade C\* goodness. Luis Patino has 22 additional wild innings.

It means that there will be a lot of work for Shintaro Fujinami (Grade 4\* C-52 HR+22), Jaime Barria (Grade 2\* C+21 HR-41), and Ty Blach and Connor Seabold, both Grade 1\*s, who may wind up pitching quite a bit.

The Midwest pitching staff has gone over the cliff.

**Offense:  
A few good cards.**

**5.0**

The lineup has a few good cards in it, and also has some regular players who do one or more things well (and other things not so well).

The first and best overall card belongs to Julio Rodriguez (10 hits, 1-0-0-0, 30 SSN for 47 SBA). No sophomore slump for him. He plays every day, as does Kyle Schwarber, the master of the three outcomes (7 hits, 6 walks, 9 13s, 1-1-0-0).



Schwarber: Three outcomes

The middle infield is manned by Michael Massey (9 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0, 29 SSN) and J. P. Crawford (9 hits, 5 walks, 1-6-6). At first Joey Meneses (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s) is perfectly adequate; Eduardo Escobar (9 hits, 2 walks, 2 0s, L+6 R-5) will play at the hot corner, but a third of the year will belong to rookie phenom Royce Lewis (11 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-0-0, 33 SSN). Midwest expects more cards like that, with more usage, for years to come.

The rest of the outfield is spread among Cedric Mullins (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-4-6, 33 SSN), Trent Grisham (7 hits, 5 walks, 3 0s, L+5 R-3, 32 SSN), and Michael Taylor (8 hits, 2 walks, 1-1-0-0, 35 SSN). Mullins is clearly a world apart from the two bearded ladies. Behind the plate, Elias Diaz (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, L-9) and Yasmani Grandal (9 hits, 3 walks, 2 0s) offer some high-quality outs.

The offense will have some good innings and some bad innings, but they likely generate somewhere close to 600 runs for the year, down more than 150 from last year. Expect them to be fun to play, but to get outscored.



**New Moon.** They have bounced nearly to the bottom, and will be there for at least this year and possibly the next (as the 2025 draft only begins with a #3.)

**Defense: 5.0**  
**Team strength.**

This, at least, is a team strength. Both catchers are C8s; Diaz has a Th+1, Grandal a Th-2. The infield corners are average; Escobar and Lewis are 3B4s, and Meneses is a 1B3. The middle infield is superb: Michael Massey is a 2B9, and J.P. Crawford is an SS9, so both can pick it.

The outfield is filled with OF3s: Rodriguez (33 arm), Mullins (33 arm), Taylor (34 arm) and Grisham (30 arm). There's even an OF3 with a 37 arm (Victor Robles) for late-inning defense. Fortunately, Schwarber, an OF1, does not need to keep his glove oiled.

**Bench: 2.0**  
**Some choices.**

The bench is thin, partially because there have to be so many pitchers on the roster. The best of what's there, in addition to the extra catcher and extra outfielder, is Victor Robles (10 hits, 3 walks+42, 2 0s, L+5 R-4 34 SSN), who would get more playing time if he had more games. The other players are just . . . there: Casey Schmitt (SS8 2B7 3B3, 8 hits, 2 walks+42, 3 0s) is the backup infielder; Trevor Larnach (7 hits, 5 walks, 1-4-5, L-11 R+1) is an extra outfielder. That's about it.

**4th** The other three teams in the Ruth are likely to be competitive, to one extent or another. Midwest is not. There will be days where they



Crawford: Picks it



**midwest MONGRELS**

Ages of players on the Midwest roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 44: R. Hill
- 36: Raley
- 35: Escobar, Grandal
- 33: Blach, El. Diaz, M. Taylor
- 32: Meneses
- 31: Davies, Schwarber
- 30: Fujinami, Gonsolin
- 29: J. P. Crawford, Mullins, Puk
- 28: E. De Los Santos, Cl. Perez, Seabold, Whitlock
- 27: Barria, Grisham, Hentges, Larnach, McClanahan, Pearson, V. Robles
- 26: Assad, Massey, Muller
- 25: Adon, R. Lewis, Schmitt
- 24: Patino
- 23: J. Rodriguez

will score runs, though not in vast excess; the good pitchers may have their moments. Early results already reported are probably worse than they will turn out over the season, but they will definitely be among the bottom dwellers this year.

**TQ: 15.5**



---

# 2023 TBL world series



## Maracaibo vs. Kansas

by Walter Hunt

---

2023 featured a great final series between Maracaibo, whose last visit to the Classic had resulted in a four-game sweep by the Northboro Phoenix, and the Kansas Koyotes, making their first visit ever to the finals.

Maracaibo won 108 in the regular season after deciding to “go for it” again; they had to get past two other excellent teams – first Whitman, and then Midwest – to have the chance to defend the International Conference. Kansas only won 92, but won a tight series against Grand Cayman and then defeated Columbus in five games, giving them some momentum heading into the World Series.

### Game 1 at Maracaibo Javier vs. Alcantara



Alcantara

Things got off to a hot start in Game 1, as Kansas jumped out to a 2-0 lead after a two-run homer by Garcia in the first; but the Rumrunner offense woke up in the bottom of the inning, as Salvador Perez and Raimel Tapia both hit two-run bombs off Cristian Javier. In the third inning another home run by Matt Carpenter gave Maracaibo a 5-3 lead they would not relinquish. Sandy Alcantara, who was lights out during the regular season, settled down and gave up no more runs, and Ron Marinaccio and Alexis Diaz closed out the victory.

**Maracaibo 5, Kansas 3**

**W: Alcantara      L: Javier      S: A. Diaz**

### Game 2 at Maracaibo Scherzer vs. Cease

Pitching was once again the featured skill as the teams faced off in Game 2. Dylan Cease, who won 21 games with a below-2 ERA in the regular season, was matched with long-time ace Max Scherzer (11-4, 2.74). The two men put on an impressive pitching duel. Travis Taylor hit a homer in the second inning; the Rumrunners scored a run on three singles in the bottom of the frame, and took the lead in the third with another solo shot by Carpenter.



Cease

That was all of the scoring. Scherzer pitched into the eighth inning, Cease into the seventh; Maracaibo had three chances to score an insurance run but could not convert, and Kansas didn't get a hit after the fifth inning.

**Maracaibo 2, Kansas 1**

**W: Cease      L: Scherzer      S: A. Diaz**

### Game 3 at Kansas M. Perez vs. Kopech

With Maracaibo leading two games to none, the series shifted to Kansas. Maracaibo scored a run in the third, and then took a definitive lead in the sixth when Michael Kopech became fatigued. Yimi Garcia came out of the bullpen, and Salvador Perez launched a three-run homer to put Maracaibo ahead 4-0.



Perez

In the bottom of the inning, Francisco Mejia drove in Kike Hernandez to put Kansas on the

---

---

board, and Serathony Dominguez surrendered a two-run homer to Chris Taylor to make the game 4-3. In the ninth, though, Erik Swanson was wild, walking two and hitting a batter, leading to two additional runs. It was more than enough for Alexis Diaz to close out the Kansas club again and put Maracaibo up 3-0.

### Maracaibo 6, Kansas 3

W: M. Perez    L: Kopech    S: A. Diaz

#### Game 4 at Kansas Quintana vs. Severino

Facing elimination, Kansas needed to get a good pitching performance, and also to get their offense running. Maracaibo pitching had been dominant, but it was very mortal from the first inning on. Jose Quintana surrendered back-to-back doubles and a two-run homer to Brandon Drury, putting Kansas up 3-0; George Springer added a solo shot to lead off the second, and after a one-out single, Maracaibo went to the bullpen.



Severino

The relievers pitched very well, but Luis Severino was superb; he gave up hits in the second, third, fifth and ninth innings, but no Rumrunner crossed the plate. His complete-game shutout renewed the hopes of Kansas fans for a comeback in the Series.

### Kansas 4, Maracaibo 0

W: Severino    L: Quintana

#### Game 5 at Kansas Alcantara vs. Javier

It would have taken quite a game to trump the performance by Severino in Game 4. Maracaibo, as it happened, was ready to provide it.



Alcantara

Sandy Alcantara, who had stifled the Kansas offense in Game 1, returned to the mound, and kept the Koyotes from scoring. Cristian Javier was almost as effective: he

gave up only two hits before the seventh, but Salvador Perez hit a solo homer in the seventh to give Maracaibo a slim 1-0 lead.

Alcantara had given Kansas several opportunities to score, but entered the ninth inning still pitching a shutout. With one out, he surrendered a double to George Springer, who moved to third on a Brandon Drury ground ball against reliever Yency Almonte. Kansas management reached to the bench for the big pinch-hitting card, D. L. Hall; in what surely might have been criticized as a poor tactical move, the Rumrunners elected to intentionally walk Hall, putting the winning run at first along with the tying run at third. Kansas then responded by sending up Jose Segura to pinch-hit for Yan Gomes. With the outcome of Game 5, possibly the turning point of the Series, on the line, Segura tapped a grounder to short, and Isiah Kiner-Falefa tossed it to Dylan Moore to secure the 1-0 victory: an exciting end.

### Maracaibo 1, Kansas 0

W: Alcantara    L: Javier    S: Almonte

*The World Series was played face-to-face at our hotel in Arizona during TBL's Spring Training / Draft weekend in March, 2024. It was a great pleasure to have a chance to roll dice with Bill Schwartz, an old hand at APBA who plays the board game (as he's noted, "APBA as God intended it" – I'm inclined to agree.)*

*The tough luck pitcher for Kansas was Cristian Javier, who lost two games, 1 and 5, in complete games in which he walked no one and struck out 31! His offense simply didn't give him much support.*

*While a Maracaibo-Kansas rematch is probably not in the cards for a few years – both teams have some work to do before they're ready for a championship run – but this was a great series to play, win or lose. Congratulations to Bill and the Koyotes for making it exciting.*

**Series MVP: Sandy Alcantara (2-0, 15 IP, 18 K)**

# Like Aaron Island, But Smaller

Years ago, the *Annual* featured a cover story entitled *Who Will Be Voted Off Aaron Island?* It was an attempted homage to the *Survivor* television series; the Aaron Division had four powerful teams, and by the mathematics present – then and now – only three could possibly make it to the postseason. This year’s Aaron Division race is kind of like that: any of the four teams can make it to the play-offs, just not all of them. But this isn’t four juggernauts, it’s written far smaller. It’ll still be an exciting race, but don’t expect 100 wins from any of them.

Let’s start with the *Calusa Indians*. Gordon Rodell is the only guy to put a cartoon in his Year in Review. It’s been a rollercoaster for the last few years down in Florida, but we’re putting our money on the Calusa boys to win by a small margin.



We’re by no means sure about that; *Mark Freedman’s Melrose Avengers* have Ohtani, they have Betts, and they have some key players to share the clubhouse with them. They could go quite deep with what they have.



## 2023 Aaron Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Kansas*	92	70	.568	—
Vegas†	90	72	.556	2
Melrose	81	81	.500	11
Calusa	72	90	.444	20

\* Lost to Maracaibo in the World Series.  
† Lost to Columbus in the Wild Card.

The *Kansas Koyotes* got very close last year, and this year’s team has most of the same players. *Bill Schwartz* has a home-grown team as we noted last year, and those guys are a little older. Still, there are some real strengths. Is it enough to get to the playoffs again? Aaron Island is pretty competitive.



The *Vegas Gamblers* enter their second season with *Young Skogen* at the helm. Rob got them to 72 wins last year, and are the most likely to be voted off the island; but he – and his team – make us think of Melrose in its rebuilding phases. Getting top notch talent in its prime is a worthy goal, and if everything falls right, Contender City is around the next bend.



- 
- A photograph of Freddie Freeman, a professional baseball player, in a batting stance. He is wearing a white Los Angeles Dodgers uniform with blue accents and a blue batting helmet. He is holding a black bat and looking towards the pitcher. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators in a stadium.
1. Calusa 25.0
  2. Melrose 24.0
  3. Kansas 23.5
  4. Vegas 19.5

Freddie Freeman,  
Calusa

# Aaron Division

# 2023 calusa INDIANS in review



Nana nana boo boo on you.

by Gordon Rodell

## 2023 in Review

Final Record: 72-90 (4th, Aaron)



There is no crying in TBL! As poster child for the Calusa Nation, LeRoy epitomizes the frustration of all Indian fans.

### What went right?

Ha! Ha! This is a joke, right? What could possibly go right when you finish last. All right, all right. I will try to find something. OK, Cal Quantrill won 13 games.

The Indians led the league in defense only committing 56 errors. There you go, that's as positive as it gets.

Uncle Albert was having a great season, before he was traded during the in-season trading period. At that time, he was slashing .371 / .418 / .725. Not bad.

### What went wrong?

The 2023 *Annual* designated the Indians as a "half-moon borderline contender", but predicted entropy in the team's future. Well the season was more like Bad Moon Rising and the 'entropy' arrived sooner than expected. There was no gradual decline into disorder, but more like a

full blown cascade into darkness. Sooo you guys were *wrong* on both predictions. So nana nana boo boo on you! I could go into all of the individual failures, but why?

Suffice it to say it was all bad. Yeah I know, I had to look up entropy myself. Thanks guys.

### 3 Things

1. Computers can be WRONG!! Obviously no one read last year's *Annual*. The computer replay predicted that the Indians should have won between 77 and 94 games. If not winning the Aaron, they should at least capture a possible wildcard. *Wrong, Wrong, Wrong!* Does this mean mankind, whose very existence is predicated on the accuracy of computers, is at risk? Could be.



Quantrill: Won 13.

2. *Scary Guys!* Giuseppi designated the Indians as the best offense in TBL. They have the highest percentage of 'scary guys'. As Nancy Sinatra sang "OK Boots, Start Walkin' ". Calusa fans can sing "OK Scary Guys Start Hittin'" or "Pound Them Into Submission". Either one works.

3. 2024? *Dee-Fense, Dee-Fense!!* Just because strong defense didn't win in 2023, doesn't mean it won't win in 2024. We're going to keep pounding that square peg into that round hole until it Fits! Dadgummit! That's a Southern euphemism. We can use big words too.



# calusa INDIANS



Gordon Rodell (10th year)

*The difference between a championship and an also-ran year may hinge on the dice and the bullpen. Both are notoriously unpredictable.*

Mr. Rodell hasn't lost 100 games since his rookie campaign, when he took over the franchise. He's twice won well over 100 games and has been near .500 overall. Yet his teams are often overlooked, maybe because Calusa plays in the always-competitive Aaron Division ... or possibly because they haven't won a playoff series since 2016. Perhaps this year, the Indians can break the spell or curse or whatever's holding them back.

The league's cognoscenti argue that teams should build the offense first and then the pitching staff. Successful teams in the past have both followed this unwritten rule and flouted it, but few teams have taken it to such an extreme as the 2024 Indians. They enter the season with a subpar rotation, but a beefed-up lineup. As a result, the difference between a championship and an also-ran year may hinge on the dice and the bullpen. Both are notoriously unpredictable.

## **Pitching: 4.5** **The Eloi and the Morlocks.**

This staff reflects the Eloi and the Morlocks in H.G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine*. A robust bullpen, aka the Morlocks, support the effete starting rotation, aka the Eloi. The bullpen will

### **SNT: Xander Bogaerts.**

*He's a proven bat, and he also provides solid middle-infield defense.*

*Mr. Rodell went all in to pick him up.*



be used early and often in nearly every one of the Indians' 162 games, sometimes thanklessly. Don't be surprised if Calusa's entire starting staff don't earn more than 30 wins.

Of course, the Morlocks — er, the bullpen — will come to the rescue time and time again to keep the team in the game and maybe earn the wins the rotation couldn't. It's a deep pen with mostly positive peripherals, and they have more than 550 innings before you even get to the innocuous long relievers. That's a lot, but it still only provides just over 3.3 innings per game. Mr. Rodell will have to maximize the Morlocks to account for the Eloi, without running out of relief innings by September.

**ROTATION.** Remember "Spahn and Sain and pray for rain?" The Indians have two full-time starters who can steal hits all by themselves: ace Zach Eflin (Grade 11 C+44) and Taijuan Walker (Grade 10 C-22). Add in one start for opener Joe Mantipty (Grade 8 C+32 HR+21), and that gets the team to 63 starts. That's it for the good news. For the other 99 games of the season, Calusa will be sending out arms they hope can make it to the fourth or fifth inning.

### **Turnover Rate: 39%**

**Arrived:** Scott Alexander, Osvaldo Bido, Dairon Blanco, Xander Bogaerts, Adam Duvall, Lucas Erceg, Victor Gonzalez, Isiah Kiner-Falefa, D.J. Lemahieu, Tim Locastro, Mickey Moniak, Luis L. Ortiz, Endy Rodriguez, Josh Winder.

**Departed:** Adam Cimber, Matt Duffy, Trent Grisham, Garrett Hampson, Cooper Hummel, James McCann, Danny Mendick, Chris Paddack, Joely Rodriguez, Noah Syndergaard, Rowdy Tellez, Keegan Thompson, Joey Wendle.



**calusa INDIANS**

It's as if the team suited up its Minions. Tylor Megill (Grade 6 C-26) and rookie Luis Ortiz (Grade 6 C-46) will do the best they can for 38 starts. Then it gets uglier.

David Peterson (Grade 5 C-26) is the only LHP in the rotation for 21 starts, although opener Scott Alexander (Grade 4 C+41 HR +51) adds five more. Cal Quantrill (Grade 4 HR+22) and rookie Osvaldo Bido (Grade 3 HR+35) soak up the remaining starts. Getting to the fourth inning may require luck.

**BULLPEN.** If there is a novelist writing this scenario, the bullpen assures us that it's not a tragedy. A pair of wild closers share the job: Peter Fairbanks (Grade 21\* C-34 HR+36) and Jose LeClerc (Grade 18\* C-41 HR+26). They have just over 100 innings. Set-up help come from LeClerc, when not closing, and Camilo Doval (Grade 14\* HR+46). While these are good grades, the top of the pen is still thin.

The rest of the deep pen protects the bad starters, and Mr. Rodell has adopted a caddy system for the weaker part of the rotation. RHP Jason Foley (Grade 11\* C+34 HR+54) and LHPs Victor Gonzalez (Grade 11\* C+21 HR+41) and Brent Suter (Grade 11\* HR+46) keep the ball in the park. Kyle Finnegan (Grade 10\*), Lucas Erceg (Grade 9\* C-62 HR+61), LHP Joe Mantiplay, Josh Winder (Grade 8\* C-22 HR+31), and LHP Scott Alexander are usually better than the starters. They'll all get lots of work.

**Offense: 12.0**  
**Can score runs against anyone.**

After the ping-pong description of the pitching staff, it's nice to know that there's something you can rely on: the bats. This is a formidable



Freeman, Robert, Duvall: 5 power numbers

offense, the best in the division. There's plenty of power and some excellent speed. This team has eight players with at least four power numbers (three with five!) and two players with 11 hits. This team can score runs against anyone.

It all starts with perennial stud Freddie Freeman (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 3 walks+42, 35 SSN for 24 SB attempts). Then there are four players with outstanding power: Luis Robert (1-1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, L+3 R-2, 32 SSN for 24 attempts), Marcell Ozuna (1-1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks), Adam Duvall (1-1-4-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-3), and Jake Burger (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks+42). Of these, only Duvall is game-limited.

The table-setters also have power as well as speed. T.J. Friedl (1-3-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, L+6 R-3, 31 SSN for 33 attempts), Marcus Semien (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks, 32 SSN for 17 attempts, 162 games), and SNT Xander Bogaerts (1-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, 35 SSN for 21 attempts) find ways not only to get on base, but also into scoring position. They spell trouble for opposing teams.

That leaves the lone weakness of the lineup. Martin Maldonado (1-0-0, 7 hits, 3 walks+22, L+8 R-4) and Austin Barnes (2 0s, 7 hits, 3 walks+22, L-13 R+3) at least form a workable platoon. Despite this one weakness, this monster offense can help carry the subpar starting rotation.

**Defense: 5.5**  
**Outstanding.**

On paper, this is an outstanding defensive alignment. Bogaerts (SS9), Semien (2B9), and Freeman (1B5) anchor the infield, while Burger

(3B4) is just average. The outfield features three OF3s, and Duvall's arm (35) is noteworthy. Behind the plate, Maldonado (C9, with a -2 arm) and Barnes (C8 with a -4 arm) show why they deserve to be in the lineup. There are no weaknesses here.

**Bench:**  
**Potentially deep.**

**3.0**

The team has another seven hitters potentially on the bench. Rookie Mickey Moniak (1-5-6-6, 11 hits, a walk, but 11 13s, L-12 for half a season) would start on other teams. Dairon Blanco (4 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, 32 SSN for 29 attempts) has several uses. Isiah Kiner-Falefa (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 19 attempts) can do a number of things, including pitch. Veteran D.J. LeMahieu (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 3 31s) is kind of wasted here. Vaughn Grissom (4-6, 10 hits, a walk+42, L-4 R+2) can pinch-hit some. Tim Locastro (1-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks+3 42s+22, L-6 R+4) is an interesting toy, while Endy Rodriguez (6-0, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-12 R+3) is just waiting for his chance. It's potentially a deep bench, but what if some of these guys were starters?

**1st**

The Aaron Division is slated to be another tough race, but the *Annual's* metrics put Calusa a touch above both Melrose and Kansas. This year's Indians will

be an interesting and even fun team to play. Of course, it's always fun when you're scoring runs.

The trick — and the challenge — will be to keep the other team from gaining an insurmountable lead. Mr. Rodell has his work cut out for him.



Here every year



**calusa INDIANS**

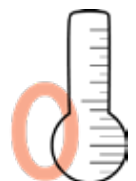


**Third Quarter.** Going for Bogaerts left the pitching staff somewhat out in the cold. The bones of the lineup are mostly not that young anymore; this might be the last hurrah for this version of the team.

Ages of players on the Calusa roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 37: Maldonado
- 35: Duvall, LeMahieu
- 34: S. Alexander, A. Barnes, F. Freeman, Suter
- 33: Mantiply, Ozuna, Semien
- 32: Finnegan
- 31: Blanco, Bogaerts, Locastro, Montas, T. Walker
- 30: Eflin, Fairbanks, Leclerc
- 29: Erceg, Kiner-Falefa, Quantrill
- 28: Bido, Burger, Foley, Friedl, V. Gonzalez, Megill, D. Peterson
- 27: Winder
- 26: Doval, Moniak, Robert
- 25: L.L. Ortiz
- 24: En. Rodriguez
- 23: Grissom

**TQ: 25.5**



# 2023 melrose AVENGERS in review



About what you expect from an 81-81 team.

by Mark Freedman

## 2023 in Review

**Final Record: 81-81 (3rd, Aaron)**

*It was the best of times,  
it was the worst of times*

The Avengers performed better than expected finishing with an 81-81 record. Road, and especially the computer, was not as kind as home field but that was to be expected when options were limited by usage and a mediocre bullpen.

### What went right?

Mookie Betts (41 HR, 114 R, 111 RBI) and Shohei Ohtani (36 HR, 103 R, 100 RBI) led the way. Ohtani also reached 20 wins (21-4, 2.02 ERA) for the first time. Kyle Wright was also excellent (18-8, 2.37 ERA).



Betts: Led the way

Otherwise most performances were average; the team scored 692 runs and gave up 700. Average: that's about what you would expect from an 81-81 team.

### What went wrong?

This year was about re-tooling, changing things up and hopefully creating a better team. Unfortunately, that did not happen. The real-life players, and with it all hope, broke down. At one point 21 of the 36 players were on the IL, 15 on the 60 day DL, all at the same time. Only three players didn't hit the DL during the MLB season. When the draft was over, we jettisoned 19 players, 12 of them XCs or uncarded.

It's also worth nothing that "retooling" meant giving up some games as lost from the beginning. The bottom part of the rotation – Hutchison, Rogers, Wood and Espino – started 76 games and went 16-45, with ERAs ranging from 5.38 to 7.19.

### 3 Things

1. *Revamping continues.* Thanks to trades there was a lot of roster turn in an attempt to get the wheels back on the bus. Two first and three second round picks brought a lot of new talent onto the roster.

2. *Pitching.* We picked up a lot of starters in the hope that four or five would be serviceable in 2025. With Ohtani and Oviedo out next year as pitchers we needed the arms. The bullpen got an overhaul as well, somewhat in a hope of not being a doormat this year but also with an eye toward next year. Pitching has always been the weakest part and we're hoping to improve on that.

3. *The offense continues to rebuild.* Ohtani and Betts still anchor the center of the lineup and there is hope that youngsters Benson, Morel, O'Hoppe, Chisholm and Pasquantino will stay healthy and exhibit growth. Maybe we'll get a surprise or two out of veterans such as Correa, Conforto or Happ to extend the lineup. At least we feel things are trending in the right direction.

# melrose AVENGERS



Mark Freedman (31st year)

*This team may just overperform as well.*

In our *Annual* research, we discovered a clue to Mr. Freedman's successes — and failures — as a team-builder and manager. Going back to 2004, when he took over this franchise, the Avengers tend to win and win big whenever the team hit more than 200 home runs. While there are several years when the team hit that landmark and still lost, usually due to atrocious pitching, it's a measure of his team's success.

Even if that's true, this year's team has a decent chance to hit 200+ HRs. While most every TBL team has solid power, this lineup is littered with it. It may be worth watching the Avengers' cumulative HR totals to discover if this is to be a winning season or an also-ran. After reaching 81 wins last season, better than the *Annual* forecasted, this year's team may just overperform our prediction again.

## Turnover Rate: **56%**

**Arrived:** Will Benson, Tanner Bibee, Jazz Chisholm, Corey Julks, Sean Manaea, Steven Matz, Billy McKinney, Trevor Megill, Rafael Montero, Logan O'hoppe, Daniel Palencia, Nick Ramirez, Johan Rojas, Cristopher Sanchez, Lucas Sims, Rowdy Tellez, Louie Varland, Jacob Webb, Austin Wynns, Kirby Yates.

**Departed:** Matt Barnes, Curt Casali, Taylor Clarke, Josh Donaldson, Paolo Espino, Garrett Hill, Drew Hutchison, Jimmy Lambert, Aaron Loup, Andres Machado, J.d. Martinez, Wade Miley, Rafael Ortega, Wily Peralta, Manuel Pina, Anthony Rendon, Josh Staumont, Luis Torrens, Matt Vierling, Kyle Wright.

## Pitching: **7.0** Solid, if not entirely dominant.

There will be days when the Avengers are very tough to beat, based solely on their pitching. The team has a remarkable ace and solid rotation support, even if it drops down way too far. The

peripherals are mostly good, although the rotation does have a few scary HR ratings. Still, the goal for Mr. Freedman is to make the playoffs. Once there, the dominant top end of the rotation can shine.

The bullpen is strong at the top and deep, with lots of innings available. This group makes up for the lower end of the rotation, so those starters don't have to pitch that long in any game. The pen is headed by two closer-grade relievers, and three top-tier pitchers to hold leads and nail down wins. Again, the peripherals are mostly positive, so the good relievers will be in

the game when it matters. Overall, this is a solid if not entirely dominant pitching staff, signaling a return to competition.



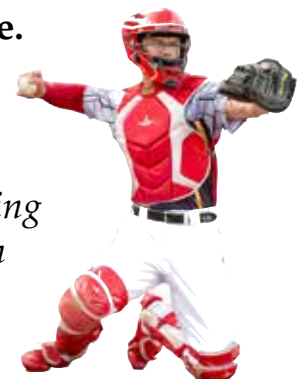
Ohtani: On the mound

## ROTATION.

What a season ace Shohei Ohtani (Grade 18 C-31) has to look forward to, starting with 23 starts of this. (Of course, he gets to bat too.) He's followed on the hill by SNT Tanner Bibee (Grade 13 HR+25). That's 48 awfully good starts that many TBL

## SNT: Logan O'Hoppe.

*Tanner Bibee could go here as well, but there's something quite appealing about a catcher who can hit.*



teams simply can't match. They're followed by lefty Cristopher Sanchez (Grade 11 C+41 HR-21), Johan Oviedo (Grade 10 C-32 HR+23), and lefty Steven Matz (Grade 8 HR+22) for 67 more starts.

The rest of the rotation is made up of spot starters, swingmen, and openers. Lefty Trevor Rogers (Grade 10 HR+21) has the best grade, but only four starts. Rookie Louie Varland (Grade 8 C+24 HR-42) needs to be kept on a short leash. Lefties Sean Manaea (Grade 7) and Alex Wood (Grade 3 C-23 HR+26) start 34 times, while openers Steven Okert (Grade 11 C-23), a lefty, and Trevor Megill (Grade 9 HR+43), a righty, make a couple starts each. For those scoring at home, there are 75 LH starts. Is that a weakness? Maybe not with such a deep bullpen.

**BULLPEN.** Playoff-bound teams have deep bullpens, and this one is up to the challenge. The closer is Lucas Sims (Grade 21\* C-62 HR+32), and he's set up by Kirby Yates (Grade 20\* C-62) and lefty Tanner Scott (Grade 17\* HR+51). That's about 200 big-time, if very wild innings. Middle innings are left to Jacob Webb (Grade 15\* C-44), Wood (Grade 13\* C-23 HR+26), Daniel Palencia (Grade 12\* C-44 HR+22), Manaea (Grade 11\*), and Okert for 260 more innings.

The early guys are quite capable of protecting the bottom of the rotation. They include Nick Ramirez (Grade 10\* C+31 HR+55), and Megill, as well as some innings from Matz and Varland. Waiver wire pickup Rafael Montero (Grade 5\* C-23) adds innocuous bulk innings, if needed. While this year's pen lacks good control, the grades strengthen the staff, and the HR peripherals ten to keep balls in the park.



Ohtani: At the plate

**Offense: 10.0**  
**Lots of speed as well as power.**

This team belongs to Shohei Ohtani (1-1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 5 walks+22, L-8 R+2, 30 SSN for 26 SB attempts); he leads both the pitching staff and the lineup, batting third all year. Here's a factoid: Ohtani could never pitch and bat in the same game, and he'd only have to miss four other games. But we're sure he'll play as much as possible.



Betts: Sublime

But Ohtani's not alone. He'll make room for the sublime Mookie Betts (1-1-6-6, 11 hits, 4 walks, L+3 R-3, 32 SSN for 17 attempts), Christopher Morel (1-1-4-6, 9 hits, 3 walks), and rookie Logan O'Hoppe (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L+6 R-3). How about that? This team is so good, Mookie doesn't even get first mention. Wow.

While Ian Happ (1-6-6, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-6, 32 SSN for 17 attempts) is set to lead off every day, that honor could also go to Will Benson (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks, L-20 R+2, 33 SSN for 22 attempts) vs. RHPs and rookie Johan Rojas (4-5-6, 11 hits, a walk+42, L+1 R-3, 35 SSN for 15 attempts) vs. LHPs. Additional power comes from Vinnie Pasquantino (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-3), Jazz Chisholm Jr. (1-5-5, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-12 R+2, SSN 34 for 25 attempts), Carlos Correa (1-6-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, but 5 24s), and Rowdy Tellez (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-7).

The last two spots in the lineup fall to Reese McGuire (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, R-3) and Corey Julks (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-3, 32 SSN for 18 attempts).



**Half Moon.** As per Melrose tradition, there are some quite outstanding cards and names on the roster, with skilled management that is fearless in pursuit of success. There's sure going to be a pennant race in the Aaron this

There's obviously lots of speed, as well as power, on this team. Still, Mr. Freedman has his work cut for him to put all the pieces together to create a big season.

**Defense: 4.0**  
**Strong up the middle.**

The Avengers are strong up the middle: Happ (OF3), Correa (SS9), Betts (2B8 and OF3), and McGuire (C8, but with a Th-2). Rojas is another OF3, but Benson, Chisholm, and Julks are all OF2s. Tellez (1B4) handles the cold corner well, but Pasquantino (1B3) is only average when he plays. O'Hoppe (C7, with a Th-4) won't stop anyone's running game. That leaves Morel (3B3, among other mediocre defensive ratings) as the only weakness, but there's help on the bench.

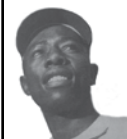
**Bench: 3.0**  
**Some depth.**

Austin Wynns' best skill is on the field (C7, Th+4). Jonathan India (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L-5, 34 SSN for 16 attempts) and Michael Conforto (1-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L-9) could start on other teams. Nick Senzel (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+12 R-10 is useful, and Santiago Espinal (3 Os, 9 hits, 3 walks+22) is the defensive third baseman (3B4). And Billy McKinney (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks) is waiting to be traded. This team has some depth.

**2nd** While the *Annual's* metrics suggest that this team is a step behind Calusa, anything can happen, which is why we play the games.

Ages of players on the Melrose roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 37: Yates
- 34: N. Ramirez
- 33: Matz, Montero, A. Wood, Wynns
- 32: Manaea, Okert
- 31: Betts, Conforto
- 30: Megill, Sims, J. Webb
- 29: Correa, Espinal, Happ, McGuire, McKinney, Ohtani, Scott, Senzel, Tellez
- 28: Julks
- 27: India, C. Sanchez
- 26: Benson, Chisholm, Oviedo, Pasquantino, Tr. Rogers, Varland
- 25: Bibee, Morel
- 24: O'Hoppe, Palencia
- 23: J. Rojas



**melrose AVENGERS**

Kansas, which is a half-step behind the Avengers, should be in the race too. The Avengers have a powerful offense that helps its pitching staff. They have an experienced manager who knows how to make the pieces contribute to the whole. Melrose may not win 100+ games in 2024, they're poised for the playoffs.



Poised

**TQ: 24.0**



# 2023 kansas KOYOTES in review



*What went right? Better said, what didn't?*

by Bill Schwartz

## 2023 in Review Final Record: 92-70 (1st, Aaron)

Last year's *Annual* predicted "they'll win the Aaron, and might even go further". Much to the delight of Koyote fans, that prediction came true in spades when Kansas, after finding themselves 9 games out of first at the end of May, completed a season-long climb to take the division lead entering November and hold on in the end by two games over the hard-charging Las Vegas Gamblers.

### What went right?

Better said, what didn't? Needing one win in that final series vs. Vegas on the road, a ninth inning rally for the ages in game 2 turned a 1-0 deficit into a 2-1 win, ensuring the Koyotes of their first Aaron crown under current management. Appropriately, it was long-time ace Max Scherzer who started the game. After prevailing over Vegas, it was a 4-1 series win over Columbus. Then, looking dead in the water, facing an 0-3 hole vs. Grand Cayman, the Koyotes rallied for four straight wins to move on to the World Series vs. Maracaibo. Unfortunately, look for the results of that series under "What went wrong."

This was a pitcher-dominated team, led by the Big 3 of Grade 19 Cristian Javier (15-6, 2.37; Grade 15 Scherzer (11-4, 2.74); and Grade 12 Sonny Gray (11-6, 2.38). A lock-down bullpen featured no less than five relievers with ERAs under 2.01 – Grade 19 Matt Moore (1.40), Grade 16 Rafael Montero (1.51), Grade 18 Zach Jackson (1.57), Grade 14 Brad Hand (1.88) and Grade 18 Erik Swanson (2.01).

The offense, though overall mediocre, did have its moments, led by Adolis Garcia's 31 HR and

24 SB. Seth Brown also pounded out 31 HR and Brandon Drury chipped in with 29 HR and 93 RBI. September trade acquisition, Jeff McNeil, despite modest overall stats, played a big role in the last two months with several key hits down the stretch and in the playoffs.

### What went wrong?

When one gets to the World Series not a lot goes wrong. However "what if's" abounded in that Series, as three of the losses were by scores of 5-3, 2-1, and 1-0.

### 3 Things

1. *Decent starters.* The Koyotes will have a staff that features no starter below Grade 9, headed by Kodai Senga's Grade 16 and always dependable Max Scherzer and Sonny Gray. The hope again is that the decent starters will mask some of the deficiencies in the bullpen.

2. *Draft results.* When Kodai Senga's 29 starts of Grade 16 dropped to #18 in the first round, he seemed to

be a no-brainer. Brock Stewart's Grade 24 (but only 28 RIP) filled the bill in the third. Jason Heyward's 124 games of 1-0-0-0, OF-3, 33 arm was a fit; 80 bulk innings of Grade 11 Michael Tonkin was a find. The Koyotes are left with a possible contender in the fairly weak 2024 Aaron Division. The rotation and defense should allow Kansas to be in a lot of games. Can a fairly mediocre pen hold late leads?

3. *Scherzer watch.* Max Scherzer's march up the TBL career leaderboards to a potential Hall of Fame induction continued. Although his consecutive string of years of 200+ K's was broken at 10, his consecutive years of double digit wins continues at 10. And he currently sits at #4 alltime in Ks with 3,506, #12 in ShO with 39, and #20 in W. with 188.



Javier: One of Big Three



# kansas KOYOTES



Bill Schwartz (17th year)

*The morning after sees a Kansas club caught neatly in transition.*

Applause, if you please, for Walter Hunt and Rich Meyer, who do our snap analysis after each TBL draft. Last year, they picked Maracaibo and Kansas as the top two teams in the league before the season started. A year later, those two teams played in the 2024 TBL World Series. This was Mr. Schwartz' first appearance in a TBL World Series. He got there with a 92-win team that snuck in on the strength of their pitching. Despite the 4-1 series loss, Kansas had a memorable year.

The morning after sees a Kansas club caught neatly in transition. Bill's instructions talk about a .500 club going into this season, but he clearly drafted like a club that still holds hopes for another playoff run. They are in a scrum with Melrose and Calusa for the Aaron.

**Pitching: 7.5**  
**Strong rotation; careful use of bullpen.**

ROTATION. The ace of the staff is 31 year old Kodai Senga (Grade 16 C-36 HR+22, 29 starts). Bill may talk down the club's chances this year in his instructions – a .500 year is realistically what may be expected (optimistically) – but that's not what he was thinking on draft day. Senga was taken with Bryce Miller and Carl Ragans still on the board.

Behind Senga are the outstanding Sonny Gray (Grade 13 C+15 HR+46, 32 starts), Max Scherzer (Grade 12 C+15 HR-25, 27 starts) and the underrated Aaron Civale (Grade 11 C+22 HR+23, 23 starts). That's 111 very good

**Turnover Rate: 19%**

**Arrived:** Miguel Amaya, J. J. Bleday, Jason Heyward, Jesse Scholtens, Kodai Senga, Brock Stewart, Michael Tonkin.

**Departed:** Michael Chavis, Rafael Montero, Reyes Moronta, Darren O'Day, Anibal Sanchez, Miguel Sanchez, Brian Serven.

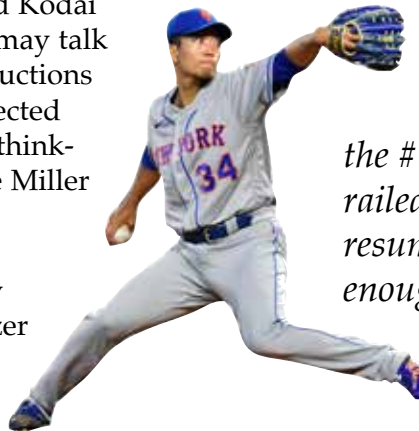


Scherzer, Gray: Right behind

starts. And there's more. Cristian Javier (Grade 10 C-14 HR-14, 31 starts) does not have the peripherals of the top 4, but he's a good pitcher in a great situation in Houston. Michael Kopech (Grade 9 C-62 HR-32, 27 starts) will scare the living daylights out of everyone, including his own manager. These two cover all the remaining starts but 3, which go to Luis Severino (Grade 1, 2 starts) and Drew Smyly (Grade 16, 1 start).

**SNT: Kodai Senga.**

*No adjustment period required; he steps in as the #1. An early injury derailed his 2024, but he should resume beguiling hitters soon enough to make a difference for the Koyotes for years to come.*



**Third Quarter.** They're a year older, but have put a team together that should still contend. In a year without a true juggernaut, they have a chance to get back to the big series. Better watch out.



# kansas KOYOTES

This is one of the best starting rotations in TBL.

**BULLPEN.** The killer closer is Brock Stewart (Grade 24\* C+13 HR+51, 28 IP). He is scheduled to be up all year, but he'll have to be used very carefully. There are two setup men who may be pressed into closer duty when Stewy is unavailable: Drew Smyly (Grade 16\* C-14 HR-22, 28 IP) and Erik Swanson (Grade 15\*, 67 IP). Adding in Matt Moore (Grade 14\* C+26, 53 IP) and Zach Jackson (Grade 13\* C-53 HR+44, 18 IP), you have 194 innings of relievers that steal 8s without help. This is going to have to be treated as a scarce resource – this is short of where they need to be to compete for the division.

There is a good set of bridge relievers to get from the weaker starters to the high-grade guys. Michael Tonkin (Grade 11\* C+21 HR-21, 80 IP) and Jose Cuas (Grade 11\* C-46 HR+15, 65 IP) have 145 innings between them. Jesse Scholtens (Grade 9\* C+13 HR-16, 31 IP) and the talented Yimi Garcia (Grade 8\* C+33 HR+14, 66 IP) add another 97 innings. Altogether, Kansas has 436 innings of bullpen specialists who steal hits. That's adequate but not overwhelming.

Kansas has the benefit of durable starters who can be stretched. But this bullpen will have to be very carefully managed to keep Kansas in the pennant race.

**Offense: 8.0**  
**Power in spots, speed in spots.**

When Kansas won the National Conference Championship last year, they scored only 666 runs, good for fifteenth in TBL. That issue did not improve this year, despite the selection of Jason Heyward (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks)



Heyward: For now

in the 2024 draft. Heyward will be 35 in August, so there's no looking to the future here. He pairs with Adolis Garcia (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 4 walks, 34 SSN for 10

attempts) to form the core of the Kansas lineup. The leadoff hitter is the multi-talented George Springer (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, 3 24s, 31 SSN for 25 attempts). Kike Hernandez (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, 3 24s) bats second, probably to avoid hitting those double play numbers by hitting and running. Bill's instructions specifically call this out. Jeff McNeil (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, 35 SSN for 10 attempts), who has a far better card than Hernandez, will probably end up playing second most of the time.

At first, Brandon Drury (1-5-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks) will provide some power, and occasionally sit in favor of McNeil. Third Base belongs to Michael Moustakas (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-8) and Chris Taylor (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, 32 SSN for 19 attempts, 117 games).



Drury: Some power

The catchers are veteran Yan Gomes (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+ 42, 116 games) with help from Francisco Mejia (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, L-7 R+1, 50 games). Jeremy Pena (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks) plays shortstop every day. Seth Brown (1-5-6, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-11) and Tyrone Taylor (1-5-6-6, 9 hits, 1 walk, 35 SSN for 9 attempts) share the designated hitter duties.

There's power in spots, and speed in other spots. There's no monster hitting card here, however. This group may struggle against the best pitching.

**Defense: 5.5**  
**Secret weapon.**

The secret weapon with this Kansas team is their defense. The regulars at key positions are excellent glove men, and this will greatly help the good pitching staff.

It starts in the middle of the infield where Jeremy Pena (SS9), Jeff McNeil (2B8), and Kike Hernandez (2B8, SS8, OF3, 32 arm) will vacuum up balls all season. Yan Gomes



Pena: Excellent

(C8, Th+2) is the regular catcher. Michael Moustakas (3B4) is very capable at third base. His stand-in against lefties is Chris Taylor (OF2, 34 arm, 2B7, 3B3), who is less capable. At first, Brendon Drury (2B7, 1B3) is there for his bat.



Gomes: Capable

The outfield is loaded with talent. Adolis Garcia (OF3, 34 arm), George Springer (OF3, 34 arm) and Jason Heyward (OF3, 33 arm) will catch everything that flies out there.

**Bench:** **2,5**  
**Not a deep team, but some help.**

Where the defense will push this team forward, the bench will hold them back. Kansas is not a deep team. Outside of the platoon players like Chris Taylor and Tyrone Taylor, Kansas has a set of non-entities like J.J. Bleday (1-0-0, 7 hits, 5 walks, L-10, 82 games) and Miguel Amaya (1-6, 7 hits, 3 walks + 2 42s, 53 games) – hardly the hitting toys or defensive heroes that they’ll need to squeeze out games in a hot pennant race.

Jean Segura (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks, 3 24s, 3B4) is around to help at third as a defensive sub. Just don’t let him hit.

The Koyotes give away a little ground here to Calusa and Melrose.

**3rd**

There are 1.5 points separating the top 3 teams in this division. A few rolls of the dice, or a clever trade in September will make the difference.

Ages of players on the Kansas roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 39: Scherzer
- 36: Gomes
- 35: M. Moore, Moustakas, Smyly
- 34: S. Gray, Hand, Hayward, Segura, Springer, Tonkin
- 33: Y. Garcia, Shreve, C. Taylor
- 32: K. Hernandez, McNeil, B. Stewart
- 31: S. Brown, Drury, A. Garcia, Senga
- 30: Cuas, Scholtens, Severino, Swanson, T. Taylor
- 29: Civale, Z. Jackson, Walsh
- 28: Hall, Kopech, Mejia
- 27: Javier
- 26: Bleday, Pena
- 25: Amaya



**KANSAS KOYOTES**

Kansas has all of their 2025 draft picks still in hand. How bad do they want this?

**TQ: 23.5**



# 2022 vegas GAMBLERS in review



*This could take a while.*

by Rob Skogen

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 90-72 (2nd, Aaron)

The Big Trade paid dividends in Vegas last year. The Gamblers exceeded expectations by winning 90 games and sneaking their way into the playoffs in their inaugural season under new management. They took a good Columbus squad to the brink in the Wild Card series but failed to advance.

### What went right?

Pete Alonso powered the team's offense, clubbing 37 home runs and driving in 108. Trea Turner was a highly effective table setter, collecting 198 hits (68 XBH) and scoring 105 runs. The speed game was present as well, with three guys stealing 20+ bags (Jon Berti 28, Kyle Tucker 25, and Turner 21).

Newly minted ace Corbin Burnes led the team's pitching rotation with 19 wins, 275 strikeouts, and a 2.97 ERA over 242 IP, while veteran Cole Irvin surprised everyone with 18 wins of his own to earn team MVP honors (3.57 ERA, 194 IP, 156K).

The bullpen stepped up to secure an additional 25 wins to help overcome a trio of innocuous starters on the staff. Scott Barlow led the relief corps with a dominant 1.49 ERA and 33 saves in 72 IP.

### What went wrong?

In the end, however, the pitching staff was just not good enough to cover for an offense that went ice cold come postseason (.192/.254/.299). Irvin's standout regular season performance didn't follow and he lost both of the games he started. An overused Barlow finally ran out of gas when the team needed him the most and he was tagged with a knockout loss in a decisive Game 7.

A couple of late season trades to bring much needed reinforcements to the pitching staff for the stretch run worked well but may prove to be a little more costly than it was worth, considering a first round pick and a rookie outfielder with first round value were sacrificed to make it

happen. That said, the team did acquire a frontline starter they coveted in Tarik Skubal to pair with Burnes for the long haul.

### 3 Things

1. *Time to roll up the sleeves.* While we fumbled our way through our first TBL season and found success, we aren't fooling ourselves that it can be sustained with the lack of depth on the roster. There's no question we have some serious work ahead of us. We have demonstrated we are not afraid to be active on the trade front when needed and we are happy with the potential of our first full off-season crop of young players. We expect to lose more games than we win this time around but hope to be back in the mix sooner than later.



Irvin: Surprise

2. *Pitching first.* The playoff buzz didn't last long. Alarm bells were ringing in the front office as soon as the offseason came into focus and that grabbed our undivided attention. Despite an excellent 1-2 punch, the rotation was in shambles and we needed to find 100+ starts somewhere, somehow. We added bulk starters Graham Ashcraft, Patrick Sandoval, and Roansy Contreras to the backend via trade and invested a first round pick in young hurler Brayan Bello to make for an exciting third option behind the guys already in place. Things are much better than we found them, but still not quite where we want them to be.

3. *Hitting will come . . .* Considering Tucker was the crown jewel we brought in to reimagine our club around, we're thrilled to put Alek Thomas beside him the outfield for the foreseeable future. He might not be ready for prime-time just yet, but we have tremendous faith in the youngster. With a speed and defense first approach, we were able to infuse some much-needed youth across the roster. We only ask that our fans be patient with us as we are rolling the dice that the hitting will follow. We hope. This could take a while.

# vegas GAMBLERS



Rob Skogen (2nd year)

*It may be just a matter of time before his team is competitive once again.*

After a run at the playoffs in his rookie TBL campaign, shredding the *Annual's* prediction for the team — thanks to the holdover talent, a remarkable pre-season trade, and a fast start — Mr. Skogen has chosen to purposefully take several steps backward to remake the team in his own image. Will he mimic his uncle, the esteemed elder Mr. Skogen? If so, that means an emphasis on pitching and a predilection for Twins players. We may be seeing that play out.

One thing is for certain: the younger Mr. Skogen has chosen to pit his eye for talent against the league's. He's already proven himself a fearless trader and an astute drafter. Since he's not an APBA novice, it may be just a matter of time before his team is competitive once again. He already has several key pieces of a contender. In the meantime, though, the Gamblers will still have the roll the dice with what they have. And what they have isn't enough.

**Pitching:** **5.0**  
**Somewhat respectable.**

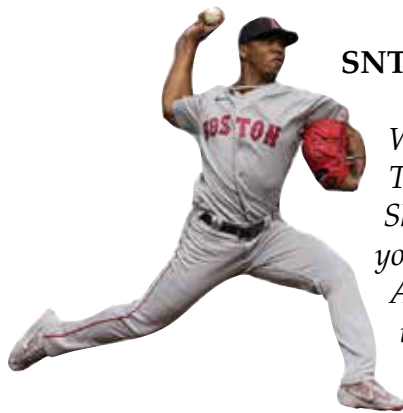
Despite the lack of a closer-grade reliever and better setup grades, there are some real strengths within this pitching staff. Topped by a two-headed ace, the rotation is decent, although



Burnes: First head



Skubal: Second head



**SNT: Brayan Bello.**

*With his very first TBL draft pick, Mr. Skogen selected this young starting pitcher. As he works to remake this team as his own, does this provide any insight?*

**Turnover Rate: 50%**

**Arrived:** Aaron Ashby, Graham Ashcraft, Brett Baty, Brayan Bello, Matt Brash, Willi Castro, Roansy Contreras, Shea Langeliers, Matthew Liberatore, Oswald Peraza, Jojo Romero, Patrick Sandoval, Gabe Speier, Matt Thaiss, Alek Thomas, Michael Togli, Brice Turang, Matt Wallner.

**Departed:** Jon Berti, Humberto Castellanos, Yonathan Daza, Corey Dickerson, Kyle Higashioka, Tim Hill, Chris Martin, Phil Maton, Nick Nelson, Zach Plesac, Colin Poche, Ryan Pressly, Victor Reyes, Adrian Sampson, Antonio Senzatela, Lucas Sims, Jacob Stallings, Ramon Urias.

the team seems to possess a peculiar love of Grade 7 starters with three of them. Still, the Gamblers need to rely on only 21 starts from starters less than those Grade 7s. It could be much worse.



**Waxing Crescent.** The teardown has begun, but there is a core of good young players. They have a healthy 2025 draft, and management with realistic expectations. It may take one or two years, but then — watch out.



# vegas GAMBLERS

The bullpen has about 490 innings before dipping into innocuous ugliness. The grades aren't awful for a rebuilding team, and mostly positive peripherals throughout the staff will help. Even without an actual closer on the roster, this is a better staff than Calusa's by the *Annual's* rating system. That speaks to how competitive this division will be in 2024.

**ROTATION.** The ace is Corbin Burnes (Grade 14 HR+14), one of the returns from the Adley Rutschman trade. He's joined by lefty Tarik Skubal (Grade 15 C+35 HR+43). Together, they start 47 games. Trade acquisition lefty Patrick Sandoval (Grade 9 C-36 HR+33) makes 28 trips to the mound, which totals 75 starts of pitchers who steal hits without help.

The trio of Grade 7s that follow – SNT Brayan Bello (C+21), Graham Ashcraft, and lefty Cole Irvin (C+23) – add 66 more starts, leaving 11 for rookie lefty Matthew Liberatore (Grade 5 HR+33). Innocuous starters fill the rest. The bottom of the rotation will be hit early and often, but the rotation is at least respectable.

**BULLPEN.** There are worse closers than Tim Mayza (Grade 16\* C+26 HR+51). While his grade falls short and he's lefthanded, his peripherals shine. He's set up by righties Justin Lawrence (Grade 12\* C-24 HR+41), Matt Brash (Grade 12\* C-21 HR+51), and lefty JoJo Romero (Grade 12\* C+21 HR+54). They have 236 innings when the game's close.

The middle relievers include Joe Jimenez (Grade 12\* C+25), Albert Abreu (Grade 11\* C-54), lefty Gabe Speier (Grade 11\* C+44), and Scott Barlow (Grade 10\* C-32 HR+43). They add another 238 innings, which may not be enough to protect the lower end of the rotation. TBL has seen much worse bullpens, but this one may be hard-pressed to hold leads.

## Offense: Thins out quickly.

8.0

The best full-time player is Kyle "King Tuck" Tucker (1-4-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks, 33 SSN for 35 SB attempts). The Gamblers have some power to back him up, with rookie Matt Wallner (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+42, L-17 R+3), Pete Alonso (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+42), and Nolan Gorman (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, but 10 13s). When the dice are rolling doubles, these guys will feast on any kind of pitching.



Tucker: Best

The table-setters have some power too, although not as much. Superstar Trea Turner (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L-4, 35 SSN for 30 attempts) does it all except walk a lot. Unfortunately, he leads off nearly every game. He's joined by Taylor Ward (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+6 R-4), who's limited to 97 games. Finally, there's the surprising offensive force of Willi Castro (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L-5, 33 SSN for 38 attempts). That's it for the good news.

The rest of the lineup are either fillers or youngsters looking forward to better years ahead. Obviously, neither group helps much this season. As a result, Nick Pratto (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+42), Alek Thomas (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-12 R+2, 34 SSN for 10 attempts), and rookie Brice Turang (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-6, 33 SSN for 30 attempts) get to play a lot, which isn't a plus.

The catching platoon includes Shea Langeliers (1-4-5, 8 hits, 2 walks+22, L-5) and Carson Kelly (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L+7 R-5). They don't add much to the lineup, but at least they complement one another. This is a lineup that thins out quickly to cards that'll generate many, many outs.

**Defense: 4.0**  
**Mostly average.**

All the defensive highlights are in the outfield, where Tucker and Thomas are both OF3s. Ward (OF2) at least makes all the easy plays. Alonso (1B4) and Turang (2B8), when he plays, are good, but the rest of the infield is mostly average: Turner (SS8), Gorman (3B4, 2B7). Castro (3B3, among other mediocre ratings) is a defensive liability. The catchers are actually decent defensively: Langeliers (C7, with a Th+1) and Kelly (C8, with a Th+3). Given their offensive cards, defense is why they're here.

**Bench: 2.5**  
**A huddle of scrubs, some useful.**

Most of the good regulars play regardless of batting shift, but there is a huddle of scrubs eligible for bench roles. Elehuris Montero (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L-3) can at least hit some and help out at 3B. Gabriel Arias (1-6-0, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-16 R+6) is an SS8 and will tempt Mr. Skogen with his power potential vs. RHPs. Matt Thaiss (1-0, 7 hits, 4 walks+42 L-6) can act as an emergency catcher. But innocuous Brett Baty, waiver wire pickup Oswaldo Peraza, and rookie Michael Toglia are simply waiting for better seasons and shouldn't see more than a token appearance in November.

**4th** While Melrose or Kansas may press Calusa for the division crown, it's unlikely that Vegas will get lucky enough to challenge again for the current season.

Despite a pitching staff that's not really that terrible, the *Annual* predicts that the offense won't be enough to carry the team. The average defense and sub-par bench won't add any wins to the formula.

In the end, the rebuilding Gamblers will pass the days of the 2024 season waiting for better years ahead. And they seem to be in a good position, as long as some of their lottery tickets pay dividends.



**vegas GAMBLERS**

**Ages of players on the Vegas roster, as of 07/01/2024:**

- 32: Mayza
- 31: S. Barlow, T. Turner
- 30: C. Irvin, T. Ward
- 29: Alonso, Burnes, J. Jimenez, C. Kelly, Lawrence, Speier, Thaiss
- 28: A. Abreu, Davidson
- 27: W. Castro, Romero, Sandoval, Skubal, K. Tucker
- 26: Ashcraft, Brash, Langeliers, Wallner
- 25: Bello, Montero, Pratto, Toglia
- 24: Arias, Baty, R. Contreras, Gorman, Liberatore, O. Peraza, Thomas, Turang

**TQ: 19.0**



# Four Possibilities

Last year's pennant race, we said, was a two- or three-team race. It turned out to be a two-team contest, because of ice-cold dice in Hudson. We do not attempt to predict that sort of thing, *especially* for Hudson.

This year, it might well be a *four*-team race. We're picking *Clay Beard's Hudson Generals* to end up on top, but the margin of error may be larger than the TQ difference. All of the teams have talent; we just think that



Hudson has enough to keep ahead of the other three. Once again, it may come down to the dice.

*Vic Vaughn's Columbus Jets* score second-best. They had a great run in 2023, coming one step short of the World Series. This year's team has power, and defense, and some pitching, but have some OBP challenges. Still, they're very good, and should be in the race all summer. The *Annual* thinks so; still, this is the tightest race in TBL, so any number of outcomes are reasonable.



## 2023 Mantle Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Rocky Mountain*	101	61	.623	—
Columbus†	92	70	.568	9
Hudson	63	99	.389	38
Munich	54	108	.333	47

\* Lost to Columbus in the Conference Semifinal.  
 † Lost to Kansas in Conference Final.

The *Rocky Mountain Dragons* are just a step behind Columbus. *Dave Jaskot* won the pennant last year and clearly is going for it again: they have hired *Justin Verlander*, but he's likely renting rather than owning. The Dragons are a fierce opponent, and will stay in the race as long as they play well. We expect that to be all season.

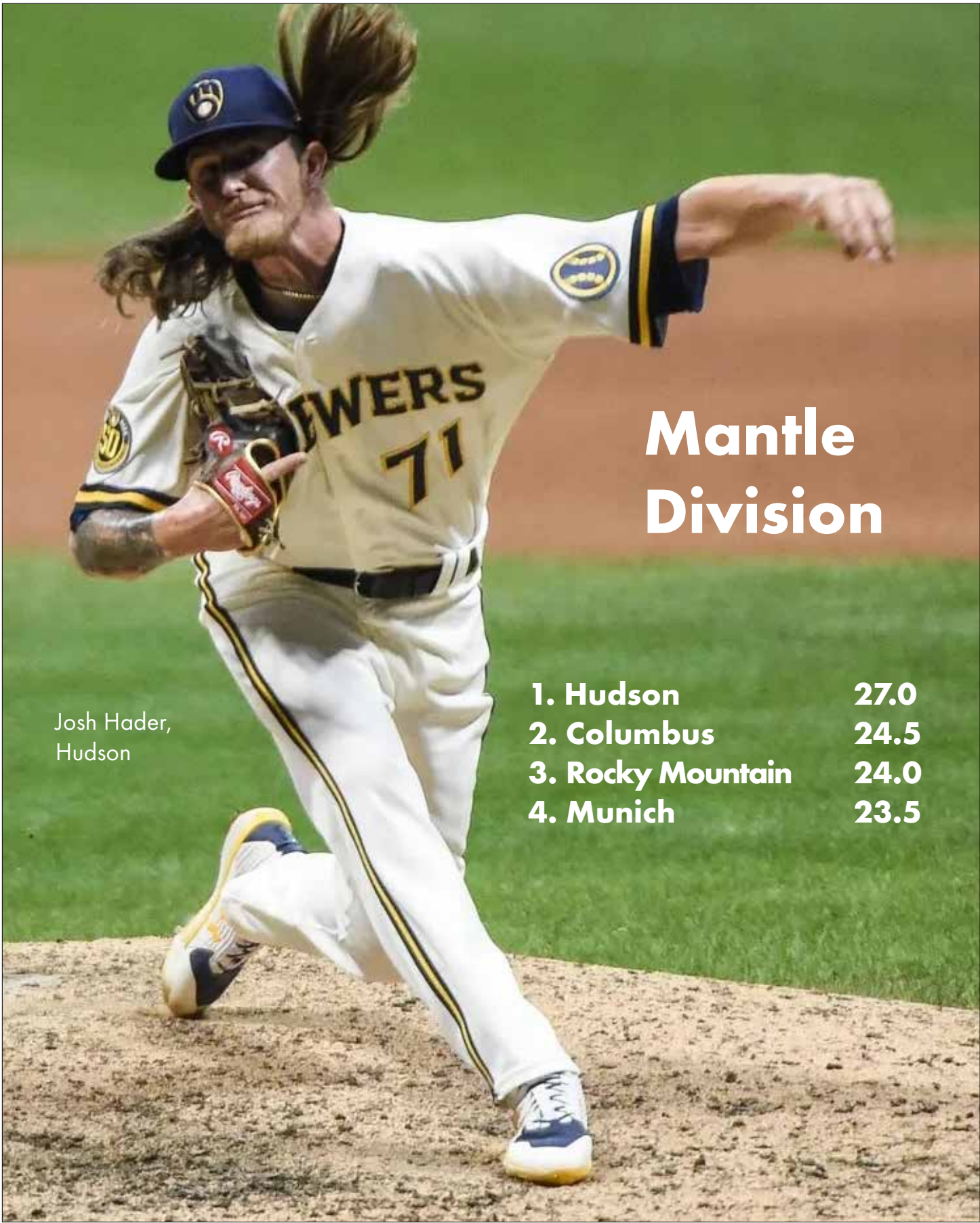


The *Munich Marauders* have accumulated quite a lot of talent, so the long trip through 100-loss land is definitely over. They have a good offense, an average defense, and some – but possibly not quite enough – pitching. Still, they could give a good account of themselves in 2024.



The *Annual* would not even rule out a playoff appearance, or even the Mantle pennant. One thing is for sure: it won't be another 54-108.





Josh Hader,  
Hudson

# Mantle Division

- |                          |             |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| <b>1. Hudson</b>         | <b>27.0</b> |
| <b>2. Columbus</b>       | <b>24.5</b> |
| <b>3. Rocky Mountain</b> | <b>24.0</b> |
| <b>4. Munich</b>         | <b>23.5</b> |

# 2023 hudson GENERALS in review



*The future is bright here.*

by Robert Jordan

## 2023 in Review

**Final Record: 63-99 (3rd, Mantle)**

Clay Beard's Hudson Generals were rebuilding out of necessity last season after having won 201 games in 2021 and 2022. The *Annual* saw this coming – there was much discussion of the team's age, and their complete lack of an impact hitter in the lineup. Taking a step back meant going from 102 wins to 69.

But this is an example of a good team regrouping rather than an old team rebuilding. Hudson returns as the favorite in the Mantle this year. All part of The Plan.

## What went right?

Freddy Peralta went 7-5, 3.02 for Hudson last year. Emerging ace Pablo Lopez went 9-12 with a 4.51 ERA and a 1.21 whip. Closer Nick Sandlin finished with a 1.81 ERA and 26 saves. Setup man Bryan Abreu had 7 wins and a 2.18 ERA all in relief. The pitching was not going to save them last season, but they only gave up 1365 hits in 1461 innings.

Max Muncy did some positive things last year – 18 homers, 52 extra base hits in 475 at bats and 82 walks. He did not have much help, unfortunately.

The beating delivered by Hudson's opponents gave them the #6 pick in the 2024 draft, with which the savvy head General grabbed Tristan Casas. Casas is down with a brutal early-season rib cartilage fracture, but he's got stardom written all over him. He is 24 years old and was one of the best hitters in baseball in the second half of last year.

## What went wrong?

Hudson did not have the cards last year to generate consistent offense. They finished 20<sup>th</sup> in the league in runs scored with an anemic 639 runs. They hit .220 as a team with only 159 home runs - less than one a game. Rookie Riley Greene, Clay Beard's first round draft pick last season, hit .215 with 3 home runs in 119 games. The pitching had a few bright spots, but Tyler Wells was not one of them. He finished 1-12, 5.56.



Muncy: Some things

## 3 Things

- 1. Buy and Hold.** They have some outstanding players here that simply didn't perform last year. Consider Brian Reynolds - as solid a player as you'll find anywhere. He went from leading this team to the World Series in 2023 (.312/.382/.540) to an out machine last year (.205/.300/.321). This bodes well for the next few years – it's easier to own talent than it is to acquire it.
- 2. Age is no longer a factor.** There was a lot of discussion on age on Hudson's roster in the *Annual* last year. They have 8 players on the 2024 roster who are 30 or older. The future is bright here.
- 3. The Bounce, Hudson style.** Mark Freedman won the 1999 TBL title, plunged to a 56 win last place finish in 2000, then came within 1 game of the 2001 TBL title, losing to Gotham City in seven games. We dubbed that "The Bounce". Can Clay pull off his own version? He won 102 then face-planted to 69 wins last year. He has a legitimate shot at the Mantle division title this year. Don't take your eyes off this club – they are always in motion.

# HUDSON GENERALS

Clay Beard (40th year); Hall of Famer

*Mr. Beard may need some luck to bring the crown home.*



Last year, Mr. Beard decided not to tear his team apart after his seven-game World Series loss to Brobdingnag in 2022. They survived a down year, dropping from 102 to 63 wins, but we'll still deem his call a prescient decision. The Generals are back, baby, and we at the *Annual* are picking them to win the Mantle Division.

How did this turnaround happen? It was mostly due to astute picking in the TBL rookie draft, since management only made one trade for a player, acquiring Brandon Nimmo. He used Hudson's spot picking sixth in every round, as well as several targeted trades, to build the current roster.

While the Generals may not win another 102 games or return to the TBL World Series (although we won't entirely rule it out, either: the Magic 8-Ball is notoriously fickle), we can call this a kind of an organic bounce, going from the World Series to the sixth-worst record back to a playoff favorite. Kudos, Mr. Beard, from the staff at the *Annual*.

**Pitching: 13.0**  
**It's impressive.**

This staff is the strongest in the Mantle and one of the best in the league. It starts at the top of a deep rotation and extends to the top end of a dominating bullpen. While there are only two starters with two positive peripheral numbers and only two relievers with the same, the grades reveal few weaknesses. And Mr. Beard, now in his 40th year managing a TBL team, has learned all the tricks for using his pitchers.

The rotation should keep his team in most games, and on those days when the starter falters, the Generals have about 600 innings of relief to chase wins. It's impressive. The reliev-

ers match up well with the starters, too. The top end of the rotation and the bullpen have lots of usage, which means they'll go a long way to help the team effectively dominate the Mantle Division.



Peralta: Again the top starter

ROTATION. It's true that Tyler Wells (Grade 15 HR-35) and Andrew Wantz (Grade 14 HR+22) have higher grades than Freddy Peralta (Grade 13), Peralta is the real ace of the staff. He has 30 starts, compared to Wells' 20 and Wantz's three. Peralta is the likely one to start any playoff series, and that's as it should be.

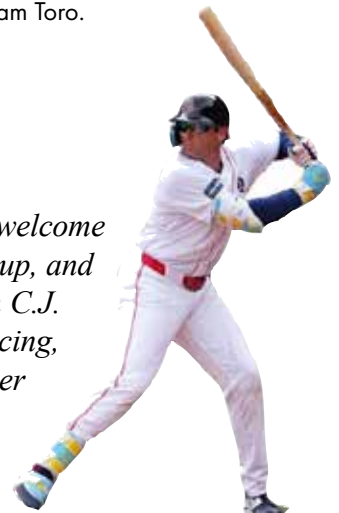
**Turnover Rate: 31%**

**Arrived:** Lawrence Butler, Jose Caballero, Triston Casas, Tom Cosgrove, Tony Kemp, Brandon Nimmo, Reese Olson, Josh Sborz, Josh Smith, Jose Soriano, Miguel Vargas.

**Departed:** Hanser Alberto, Kolby Allard, Sean Doolittle, Freddy Galvis, Victor Gonzalez, Didi Gregorius, Brad Miller, Jose Quintana, Darin Ruf, Abraham Toro.

**SNT: Triston Casas.**

*This 24-year-old provides welcome power to the Generals lineup, and he's 10 years younger than C.J. Cron, the player he's replacing, and may have an even better career.*





These three are ably followed by Kevin Gausman (Grade 12 HR+22), rookie Reese Olson (Grade 12), Pablo Lopez (Grade 11 C+25), and lefty Andrew Heaney (Grade 9 C-21). Besides Wells' scary HR peripheral, the rotation will stifle weaker teams and hold their own against any opponent. Like Columbus, Hudson needs no starts from a pitcher with a Grade less than Heaney's 9. Impressive.

**BULLPEN.** Any bullpen that starts with a three-headed closer is bound to excel. Closer Josh Hader (Grade 26\* C-51 HR+43), Bryan Abreu (Grade 23\* C-34 HR+26), and rookie Tom Cosgrove (Grade 22\* HR+41) contribute about 180 innings, albeit with little control. Still, it's difficult to walk your way to a comeback win.

The next level includes Raisel Iglesias (Grade 12\* C+26), Wantz, Bryan Baker (Grade 15\* C-45 HR+26), Jose Soriano (Grade 14\* C-42 HR+25), and last year's closer Nick Sandlin (Grade 17\* C-22 HR-33). They add 236 innings. The early relievers also have lots of usage. Josh Winckowski (Grade 10\* HR+22), Josh Sborz (Grade 8\*), and lefty Dylan Lee (Grade 8\*) contribute 158 more innings. The bullpen is balanced, deep, and impressive.

**Offense: 7.0**  
**Fewer hits than you want.**

Mr. Beard will have to rely on his impressive pitching staff, due in part to a weaker lineup. Only two significant players have four power numbers: Randall Grichuk (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L+8 R-5) and team leader Bryan Reynolds (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-3, 35 SSN for 13 SB attempts). And Grichuk, with that shift, is a part-time player.



**Third Quarter.** If the offense was better we might rate them a full moon; that said, this is a very solid team, and should perform very well in a tight division.

While it's true that Max Muncy (1-1-0-0, 7 hits, 5 walks+22, L-11 R+3) has four power numbers, he has only three other hits. At least he has lots of usage. Other power comes from SNT Tristan Casas (1-5-5, 9 hits, 5 walks, L-3), Brandon Nimmo (1-4-6, 9 hits, 4 walks+42, L-5), Sean Murphy (1-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks+42, but 4 24s), and even Ha-Seong Kim (1-6-0, 9 hits, 4 walks, L+5 R-4, 31 SSN for 47 attempts).



Muncy: Lots of usage

J.D. Davis (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+22), Jonah Heim (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, L+5 R-3), and C.J. Cron (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, but 5 24s) highlight some of the problems with this offense: it has fewer hits than you want to see in a championship team. While the lineup has pretty good power and a little speed, it's somehow devolved into a team that waits for walks and a three-run homer. This from a manager whose teams have stolen more than 100 bases 13 times.

The rest of the lineup includes Riley Greene (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-5), gracefully aging veteran Andrew McCutchen (3 0s, 8 hits, 6 walks+22, 30 SSN for 14 attempts), rookie Jose Caballero (2 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks+2 42s, L+3 R-5, 34 SSN for 29 attempts), and Jake Cronenworth (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, L-3). That makes just two players with as many as 10 hits. As a side note, the 2023 Generals set a franchise record for the worst team batting average at .220. Mr. Beard is hoping that doesn't set a trend.

**Defense:**  
**Not a weakness.**

**4.0**



Heim: Top notch

The best news comes behind the plate, where both Murphy and Heim are C9s. Heim has a Th+4, while Murphy's is only 0, still not a weakness. Nimmo and Reynolds (with a 34 arm) are both consummate pros (and OF3s) in the outfield.

Kim splits his time at short and second (SS8/2B9). Cronenworth (2B8) plays a solid keystone, and Muncy (3B4) handles the hot corner well. Grichuk and Greene are OF2s, and Caballero (SS8) and the first basemen (1B3s) are all average. Only Davis (3B3) is a liability when he plays.

**Bench:**  
**Some depth.**

**2.5**

In addition to extra usage among starters, a few others add some depth. Tyler Freeman (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L-3) is somewhat useful, since he plays all over the infield and in the OF in a pinch. Miguel Vargas (4 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks+22) can play a half-season, although he may not get the chance. Tucupita Marcano (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22) is an innocuous infielder, and rookie Lawrence Butler is waiting for his chance to come. Waiver wire pickups include youngster Josh Smith (3 0s, 7 hits, 4 walks+42), who plays around the diamond, and veteran Tony Kemp (2 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L+14 R-4, 30 SSN for 19 attempts), who somehow has value.

**1st**

The *Annual* consistently gets Mr. Beard's Hudson Generals wrong when making its predictions.

Maybe it's because we write this book in April and May, when the fields are still freshly green, and few teams have a full month

Ages of players on the Hudson roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 37: McCutchen
- 34: R. Iglesias
- 33: Heaney, Muncy
- 32: Gausman, Grichuk, T. Kemp
- 31: J. Davis, Nimmo
- 30: Cronenworth, Hader, Sborz
- 29: Baker, Heim, D. Lee, S. Murphy, Reynolds, Wells
- 28: Cosgrove, Kim, P. Lopez, F. Peralta, Wantz
- 27: B. Abreu, Caballero, Sandlin
- 26: J. Smith, Winckowski
- 25: T. Freeman, J. Soriano
- 24: Casas, Marcano, Olson, Vargas
- 23: Butler, R. Greene



**HUDSON GENERALS**

of completed results. But this year's version of the Generals has the upper hand in the Mantle Division specifically due to its deep and powerful pitching staff.

The question is whether the team will score enough runs to support the pitching. Columbus and Rocky Mountain will be chasing the Generals all season. Mr. Beard is an active manager, but he may need some luck to bring the crown home this year.



Still fickle, but we live in hope

**TQ: 27.0**



# 2023 columbus JETS in review



*It's hard to find much fault in a team that reached the Conference finals.*

by Vic Vaughn

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 92-70 (2nd, Mantle)

It is fair to say that by reaching the National Conference finals, the 2023 season far exceeded expectations. Coming off a 63-win season in 2002, we expected to be significantly better with a vastly improved pitching staff and possibly contend for the Mantle title. Both Clay's computer pre play and the *Annual* correctly predicted a close division race with Rocky Mountain who pulled away late in the season to take the division crown. The Jets ended the season with 92 wins, securing a wild card playoff spot for the first time in five years. We had a roller coaster playoff run, barely surviving a seven-game series with the Gamblers, somehow sweeping the Dragons to reach the conference finals where our luck finally ran out against Kansas.



Gimenez: MVP

### What went right?

Team MVP Andres Gimenez had himself a heck of a year putting up a .316/.384/.493 slash line leading the team with 185 hits, 22 steals, 289 total bases, and finishing tied for second with 24 home runs. He played stellar defense committing only six errors at second base in 146 games and did his best Ron Hunt impersonation, getting hit by pitches 34 times.

Another key contributor at the plate was Rhys Hoskins, who led the Jets in home runs (32), doubles (38), runs batted in (96) and finished second on the team with 277 total bases.

On the mound, Aaron Nola had a team high 14 wins with a 3.08 ERA and 230 strikeouts in 207 innings. Jeffrey Springs contributed 12 wins with a 3.17 ERA and Merrill Kelly kicked in 11 wins

with a 2.76 ERA. The bullpen was anchored by Jason Adam who converted 38 saves and mid-season acquisition Felix Bautista who posted a 1.06 ERA with the Jets. We had a lot of close games in 2023 with 75 of them being decided by either one or two runs. A strong bullpen helped us win 45 of those games which was key to making the playoffs.

### What went wrong?

It's hard to find much fault in a team that reached the Conference finals. We were hoping that "Shiny New Thing" Spencer Strider and his Grade 16 would be better than 9-8, 3.47, but that's just nitpicking. The offense was pedestrian averaging a little over 4 runs per game. That mediocre offense came back to bite us in the Conference Finals against an excellent Kansas pitching staff in which

we managed just 12 runs in the five-game series with a shutout and two other games where we only plated one run.

### 3 Things

1. *Those darn UCLs.* This is a universal issue, but injuries to Strider, Springs, and Kelly will put us in the same boat as many other TBL teams as we all scramble to find 162 decent starts going forward.

2. *The youth movement continues.* For the first time in a while, our team average age is less than 30. And that's with Joey Votto on the roster!

3. *2024 will be a step back.* With no breakout stars on offense and a pitching staff that regressed some from 2023, there won't be enough to compete with Rocky Mountain and Hudson in the division.

# columbus JETS



Vic Vaughn (18th year)

*In a year without any real monsters — in the league, the conference, or the division — the Jets may just surprise.*

It's safe to say that Mr. Vaughn doesn't trade much. Maybe it's because he likes the guys he has. Maybe it's because he rarely gets an offer he can't refuse. Maybe it's because he doesn't enjoy the back-and-forth of negotiating. Nevertheless, he always seems to end up with a decent team.

Last season was supposed to be the breakout year. The *Annual* picked them to win the Mantle Division. Instead, they finished nine games behind the Rocky Mountain Dragons, although they still made the playoffs. They made it all the way to the Conference Championship Series, beating Vegas and Rocky Mountain, before falling to the Kansas Koyotes in five games. 2023 wasn't exactly a disappointment.

This year, while the Jets are back with a good team, we think the Hudson Generals will edge

## Turnover Rate: **33%**

**Arrived:** Alex Faedo, J.P. France, Jay Jackson, Luke Jackson, Derek Law, Angel Perdomo, Brandon Pfaadt, Luke Raley, Gary Sanchez, D.J. Stewart, Anthony Volpe, Alike Williams.

**Departed:** Elvis Andrus, Tucker Barnhart, Matt Bush, J.P. Feyereisen, Daniel Hudson, Corey Knebel, Sean Manaea, Penn Murfee, Albert Pujols, Harold Ramirez, Trevor Williams, Matt Wisler.

## SNT: Anthony Volpe.

*This rookie shortstop had a solid season, but hit less than expected, so Mr. Vaughn scooped up this youngster to man the position for the next 15 years.*



them out for the division crown. But you never know. This team has a solid pitching staff, abundant power, and excellent defense. In a year without any real monsters — in the league, the conference, or the division — they may just surprise.

## Pitching:

**9.0**

## A team strength.

Last season, the Jets finished with a dynamite 3.32 team ERA (sixth in the league). It was a team strength that catapulted them into the playoffs. This year, Mr. Vaughn has put together another deep pitching staff, with a credible ace and a dominant if wild closer. Most impressively, the team needs no starts — zero, nada, none — under Grade 8, and the team has two closer-grade relievers.

Despite several low-inning relievers filling up the roster, the Jets have more than 535 relief innings, thanks in part to several starters in the pen. They should be more than enough, given the strong rotation. This is an above-average pitching staff, a team strength. It's the second best in the division to Hudson's. Mr. Vaughn will have to lean on them to win games or at least keep them in games they can win. As always, how far they go, in the regular season and possibly into the playoffs, is the question.



**Half Moon.** They went further than we expected in 2023, and while there are some serious concerns in the future, they've gotten younger and have a good talent pool. Next year might be a rebuild, as the Year in Review says — but that's next year.



# columbus JETS

**ROTATION.** The ace this year is Merrill Kelly (Grade 14 C-22), who's solid in a season with few 13+ grades. He delivers 30 high-quality starts. He's joined by Spencer Strider (Grade 12), rookie Alex Faedo (Grade 12 HR-25), and three November starts of lefty Jeffery Springs (Grade 16 HR+34). They add 47 more capable starts.



Kelly: Ace

The rotation continues with a trio of Grade 9 RHPs: Mitch Keller (C+21), Aaron Nola (C+26 HR-21), and rookie J.P. France. They add 87 possible starts, although lefty J.P. Sears (Grade 8 HR-26) makes one double-header

start (thanks to TBL schedule-master Clay Beard). It's a deep rotation with no weak spots.

**BULLPEN.** Last year, Jason Adam recorded 38 of the team's 50 saves. This year, Adam (Grade 17\*)



Bautista: Closer

becomes a set-up guy. The closing duties fall to Felix Bautista (Grade 28\* C-35 HR+35) and sometimes Jay Jackson (Grade 20\* C+24). Both are RHPs and offer 91

shutdown innings. Jackson also joins Adam and Luke Jackson (Grade 15\* HR+26), who add 88 more solid innings, as the set-up crew.

The bullpen's lefties appear in middle relief: Taylor Rogers (Grade 14\* C-31) and Angel Perdomo (Grade 13\*). They have 81 innings combined. That leaves Derek Law (Grade 12\* C-34 HR+22) for 51 innings and erstwhile starter Sears for many, many more. Matt Boyd (Grade 6) and rookie Brandon Pfaadt (Grade 3 C+23 HR-34) are around for moral support, assuming they don't have to take the mound.

**Offense: 8.0**  
**Challenged to get hits.**

The power supply starts with four players with double 1s, although most are limited by games and a lack of other hits. Jorge Soler (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, but 3 24s, L+7 R-4) had a breakout year. Rookie D.J. Stewart (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+42+22, L-10 R+2 for 58 games), Gary Sanchez (1-1-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, L+7 R-5 for 75 games), and Joey Votto (1-1-6, 7 hits, 4 walks+42, L+4 R-3 for 65 games) need to get lucky. When they do, so will the team.

The next group provide more power with four power numbers each. Lourdes Gurriel (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, but 3 24s), rookie Luke Raley (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+2 42s, L-4, 32 SSN for 17 SB attempts), and Jesus Sanchez (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11) are all capable of smacking extra-base hits. More importantly, these three players have lots of usage.

More power comes from superstar Ketel Marte (1-4-5, 10 hits, 4 walks+22, 31 SSN for 10 attempts), LaMonte Wade (1-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks+22, L-4), Eugenio Suarez (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+42), and SNT Anthony Volpe (1-4-6, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, L+6 R-3, 32 SSN for 29 attempts). As exciting as Volpe is this year, he will also generate many outs over the course of the season, especially against RHPs.

Kevin Kiermaier (6-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L-3, 35 SSN for 15 attempts) and Andres

Gimenez (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, 32 SSN for 36 attempts) fill out the lineup. Unfortunately, Nick Fortes (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+42, but 3 24s, L+12 R-6) has to play vs. LHPs. The lineup needs to overcome some significant shifts vs. RHPs, but it does provide power and



Marte: Superstar



speed. So, getting hits will be the challenge this year, especially against good pitching.

**Defense:**

**5.0**

**No real weaknesses.**

The team has no real defensive weaknesses. Volpe (SS9) and Gimenez (2B9), when he plays, are excellent in the middle.



Gimenez: Excellent

Kiermaier (OF3, 37 arm) is peerless in CF, and Gurriel (OF3, 34 arm) is almost as good. Marte (2B8) and Votto (1B4) are solid. The other positions, however, are handled just adequately. The catching tandem are both C7s, although Gary Sanchez has a Th+1. Fortes' is Th-2. Suarez (3B4) and Wade (1B3) are just average, as are Jesus Sanchez, Marte, and Raley (all OF2s). But there are backups to help.

**Bench:**

**2.5**

**Many options.**

Dylan Carlson helps more for his defense (OF3) than his offense (2 0s, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, L+6 R-5), although he does get on base. Jorge Mateo (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks, L+5 R-5, 33 SSN for 37 attempts) adds speed off the bench, if not much offense. He's also a SS9/OF2 with a 33 arm. Zach McKinstry (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+22, 28 SSN for 22 attempts) plays multiple positions. Gimenez and Jesus Sanchez aren't slated to start many games per the emergency instructions, so they're also available. Waiver wire acquisition Alike Williams doesn't help the team this year. His biggest number is the +7 vs. RHPs. Mr. Vaughn will have many options for in-game changes.

**2nd**

By the imperfect metrics the *Annual* uses, the Jets land in second place, a tick above Rocky



Mountain, mostly due to the superior pitching.

But they'll need to hit to win. There are exactly three batters with 10 hits and none with 11. If the team hits many of its homers without runners on base, it could be a long season. If they can put men on base for the power hitters, they may surprise even Hudson. That's why we play the games. To win, Mr. Vaughn will have to juggle the lineup and the pitching.

**columbus JETS**

Ages of players on the Columbus roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 40: Votto
- 36: J. Jackson
- 35: M. Kelly
- 34: Kiermaier
- 33: Boyd, D. Law, Ta. Rogers
- 32: Adam, L. Jackson, Soler, E. Suarez
- 31: A. Nola, G. Sanchez, Springer
- 30: L. Gurriel, K. Marte, A. Perdomo, Stewart, Wade
- 29: Bautista, J.P. France, J. Mateo, McKinstry, L. Raley
- 28: Faedo, Keller, Sears
- 27: Fortes
- 26: J. Sanchez
- 25: Carlson, Gimenez, Pfaadt, Strider, A. Williams

**TQ: 24.5**



# 2023 rocky mountain DRAGONS in review



2023 will be another competitive year.

by Joe Auletta

## 2023 in Review

**Final Record: 101-61 (1st, Mantle)**

## 3 Things

### What went right?

The Dragons had a good offense that was in the top two of the National Conference in batting, homers and runs let the Dragons to the best record in the Conference. It was a deep, balanced offence that had eleven hitters with 9+ homers and 35+ RBIs but no one with 30 HRs or 100 RBIs.

The pitching was also the Conference's best (3.21 ERA, 30 complete games and 18 shutouts) and had four starters stay healthy 29+ starts with a dozen or more wins, led by Julio Urias (19-8, 2.74 ERA) and Zac Gallen (18-7, 1.98).



Gallen: Leader

### What went wrong?

The playoffs. The Dragons ran into the Jets who finished nine games behind them in the regular season but swept them in the Conference semi-finals.

It's hard to consider the season a failure, but clearly Mr. Jaskot hoped to go further after such a fine season.

1. *Is there another gallon in the gas can? Can the rotation repeat the good health and performance they had last season and they seem capable of a repeat. But can they close out the close ones? The bullpen is sound, but it isn't clear they have a true closer to anchor it. Can "the committee" thing work?*

2. *A similar story in the lineup—will a Big-Bat step forward? This is a deep lineup, and a lot of versatile pieces, but will someone step up to drive in the big run when needed. The lineup as a whole should score, but no individual bat is truly scary.*

3. *How big a problem will the platoon shifts against lefties be? There roster as a whole has a serious issue vs. LHPs with no fewer than nine hitters at -5 or worse, and they can't all sit vs southpaws. Can they manufacture enough runs against LHP, and get key hits from the likes of Stephenson, Remillard, and Goodman to get enough wins against them?*

# rocky mountain DRAGONS



Dave Jaskot (13th year)

*Mr. Jaskot will need to solve the puzzle.*

The Dragons won the Mantle Division crown in 2023 by hanging with the pre-season favorite Columbus Jets early in the season. In July, they surged ahead and never looked back. They won 101 games, the most in the National Conference, but ran out of steam in the semifinals to those same Jets. It was a tough end to a fantastic season, but Mr. Jaskot hasn't given up yet. He's put together another decent team in 2024.

The Dragons aren't the dynamo they were last year. There are pieces missing and a somewhat reduced quality of some of the pieces that remain. But the team has some strengths, too. Its offense isn't bad, but it may need to overcome its pitching on some days to stay competitive. This will be a good year for Mr. Jaskot to skillfully employ all the team's assets to steal a few extra wins.

## Turnover Rate: 39%

**Arrived:** Ryan Borucki, Ryan Brasier, Yennier Cano, Ryan Feltner, Robert Garcia, Ian Gibaut, Hunter Goodman, Andy Ibanez, Wade Miley, James Outman, Joel Payamps, Martin Perez, Zach Remillard, Justin Verlander.

**Departed:** Javier Baez, Anthony Bass, Hunter Dozier, Chad Kuhl, Eric Lauer, Collin McHugh, Jose Quijada, Franmil Reyes, Edwin Rios, Devin Smeltzer, Michael A. Taylor, Julio Urias, Jake Woodford, Juan Ypez.

## SNT: Justin Verlander.



*The mercenary of the current age finds a new home and a new chance to get to the post season.*

The offense has a new leader and patched-up lineup that includes several new arrivals along with the holdovers. The pitching staff features some old bulldogs, but the bullpen lacks a closer grade, which may cost the team some wins. In the competitive Mantle Division, they'll need the planets to align to equal last season's record, but the Dragons seem up to the challenge of returning to the playoffs.

**Pitching:  
It's a puzzle.**

**10.0**

The pitching staff has strengths, like the nine starts of a Grade 18 and a presumptive closer with +51 control. But it also has weaknesses, like no closer grade in the bullpen and 38 starts of pitchers with grades under 8. How these balance out will be determined by Mr. Jaskot's managing skill and a little bit of luck. The challenge begins now.

With no real closer, the team will employ a closer-by-committee strategy, making use of the +5 bonus as often as possible. This will only help. The Dragons boast about 505 total relief innings, but given the back end of the rotation, they may need all of them. It will be a puzzle to put the right pieces in the right place at the right time to win as many games as possible.



**Third Quarter.** This is exactly the point in the life cycle when teams trade for Justin Verlander and spend the draft patching together a bullpen. The team is leaning old, and will need to scramble to keep in contention in the future.



# rocky mountain DRAGONS

ROTATION. The good news is that the team needs only seven starters to cover the entire season. The ace is lefty Wade Miley (Grade 14), and he's ably assisted by Nick Martinez (Grade 18 HR+21), although for only nine starts, lefty Framber Valdez (Grade 12 HR+24), SNT Justin Verlander (Grade 12 C+21), and former ace Zac Gallen (Grade 11 C+26 HR+21). Together, they take the mound 124 times.



Gallen: Former ace

Unfortunately that leaves too many learning opportunities for three others: Anthony DeSclafani (Grade 5 C+33), waiver wire acquisition Ryan Feltner (Grade 5 C-62 HR+51), and lefty Martin Perez (Grade 4). These will undoubtedly be bullpen games, but these starters still have to get through three or four innings, per the emergency instructions. The team can overcome these starts, but it'll take aggressive managing.

BULLPEN. The nominal closer is lefty Ryan Borucki (Grade 17\* C+51), but he has only 37 innings, so he'll have to be used judiciously. That leaves rookie Yennier Cano (Grade 15\* C+41 HR+42) and retread Ryan

Brasier (Grade 15\* HR+44). Contributing 132 innings, they'll both pitch in high-pressure situations. How they perform may go a long way to determine the fate of this team.

Steven Wilson (Grade 15\* C-45), Joel Payamps (Grade 15\* C+26), and Perez (Grade 15\*) pitch in middle relief. They add another 157 innings. The rest of the pen includes lefty Robert Garcia (Grade 12\* HR+23), Ian Gibaut (Grade 11\* HR+21), Martinez (Grade 8\* HR+21), and lefty Brock Burke (Grade 6\* C+53 HR-35). With 235 innings between them, they provide an upgrade to the poor starters.

**Offense: 8.0**  
**Often seven deep.**

Josh Lowe (1-5-6-6, 11 hits, 2 walks, L-7, 35 SSN for 35 SBA) had a breakout season, and he's expected to lead the team in many categories. He has some support, starting with lead-off hitter extraordinaire Brendan Donovan (1-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+42,

L-10). Bryan De La Cruz (1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks) and Andy Ibanez (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks) provide some added punch.

Nate Lowe (3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, L-7) regressed from last year's peak, but Isaac Paredes (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+42+22, L-3) stepped up his game. Brandon Belt (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks, but 11 13s, L-10) brings his patience game, while Cal Raleigh (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-6) contributes more power.



J. Lowe: Breakout

Rookie James Outman (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, but 10 13s, L-5, 32 SSN for 19 SBA) may have his moments in the spotlight. Ryan McMahon (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-9 R+2) is diminished from last season, but plays vs. RHPs. Then there's Tyler Stephenson (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L+4 R-3), who forms a short-side platoon with Raleigh, so he has a job, even if unexciting.

That leaves Tommy Edman (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, 33 SSN for 31 SBA), who took a step backward, but remains one of the fastest and best fielding members of the Dragons. Zach Remillard (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L+7 R-5) is here to hit LHPs. The lineups often go seven deep, making the offense a team strength. They have good power and some speed, but they may need the dice to be friendly to score runs in bunches.

**Defense:**  
**No weaknesses.**

6.0

The many highlights start behind the plate. Both catchers are C8s, and Raleigh has a Th+2. Stephenson's isn't bad at Th-0. Edman is a SS9, Nate Lowe is a 1B5, and McMahon is a 3B5. Outman and Josh Lowe are OF3s. Ibanez is solid as a 2B8, but Paredes (2B7) splits time there and across the diamond as an average 3B4. Donovan and De La Cruz are OF2s, so that means there's not a single weakness — and many highlight-reels — on the field for the Dragons.



Raleigh: Highlight

3rd

Just a tick behind Columbus, the Rocky Mountain Dragons are poised to excel or sink to the bottom. They can catch Columbus, although their offense may not be able to duplicate last season's race to the division crown. With Munich is breathing down their neck, the Dragons have to play their cards right (literally) to put together a playoff run. Otherwise, they may end up on the bottom looking up. It's up to Lady Luck and Mr. Jaskot's skill and determination.



rocky mountain DRAGONS

**Bench:**  
**Some good bits and pieces.**

3.0

Besides the extra usage of the regulars, this team has a few bits and pieces to help win games. Unfortunately, there isn't an SS8 on the roster, so if Edman's used up, it gets ugly. Jack Suwinski (1-5-5, 8 hits, 5 walks+22, L-9) may be good enough to start on another team, but is relegated to the bench on this one.

Sam Hilliard (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, but 13 13s, L-6) can PH some. Kris Bryant (1-6, 8 hits, 3 walks+42) is waiting for the magic in his swing to return. Hunter Goodman (2-4-5-6, 8 hits, 2 walks) is simply waiting. Jose Miranda (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks+22) is wondering what the hell happened. He'll take the year off, wishing he'd been injured instead.

Ages of players on the Rocky Mountain roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 41: Verlander
- 37: Miley
- 36: Belt, Brasier
- 34: DeSclafani
- 33: N. Martinez, M. Perez
- 32: Bryant
- 31: Ibanez
- 30: Borucki, Cano, Gibaut, Hilliard, Payamps, Remillard, F. Valdez
- 29: Edman, McMahon, S. Wilson
- 28: Gallen, R. Garcia, N. Lowe
- 27: Burke, B. De La Cruz, Donovan, Feltner, Outman, Raleigh, T. Stephenson
- 26: J. Lowe, J. Miranda
- 25: Paredes, Suwinski
- 24: Goodman

TQ: 24.0



# 2023 munich MARAUDERS in review



*The Plan . . . started to produce results.*

by Paul Montague

## 2023 in Review Final Record: 54-108 (4th, Mantle)

In retrospect marking time could be the theme for the 2023 Marauders. The 2023 draft brought in rookies galore, and they began to show some hints of individual promise coalescing into a team of emerging major leaguers. However, “emerging” is the operative word. They’re not all there yet, and there were still some obvious weak spots needing to be addressed during the 2023-24 off-season. How well the front office did in that endeavor remains to be seen; but we’ll mark time while we see...

### What went right?

The Plan (a nebulous and perhaps mythical document that is rumored to circulate in the Munich front office) started to produce results. The roster – already young – got younger still. The average age of the batters was 27.6 and of the pitchers, 25.8. The presumption is that with youth comes quality – eventually, as the youth gains sufficient experience to convert raw tools into on-field skills.

There were some signs of improvement on the field despite finishing with the third draft position for a second year in a row. The pitching staff improved its collective ERA from 5.07 to 4.67 and 90 fewer runs allowed (779) – still not “good”, but “better”.

Recent draft pick Bobby Witt, Jr. ran away with the team’s Rookie of the Year award by posting top marks in games, at bats, runs, hits, triples, and stolen bases, and finishing second in RBI with 74 and home runs with 23.

The few ‘grizzled veterans’ also showed up, notably perennial team MVP Anthony Rizzo, who set the standard in all three triple-slash categories with .262/.385/.515, while leading in homers (30) and RBI (76). So the youngsters had a good role model.

### What went wrong?

Well, there were over 100 losses – again. That story gets old, and it would have been nice to see an increase in winning percentage. But two things prevented that. First, while the pitching overall was better, there were still pockets of “actually rather worse”, notably the bullpen. Second, the offense actually saw a serious drop in power, from 231 homers to 158, with a corresponding reduction in scoring. As a result, the pitching improvement was effectively negated in the standings.



Rizzo: Grizzled

### 3 Things

1. *Even More Yout’!* After a productive 2023 rookie draft, Munich doubled down in 2024, with three first-round picks and three second-round picks while also using some draft capital to acquire still-young slugger Austin Riley to finally plug the massive black hole at third base that has plagued the team for years.

2. *Even More Speed!* To quote from the 2024 road instructions, “This is now officially a running team, with a total of 329 steal attempts (over 2 per game)”. (This year, the speed should come without a lack of power, as only one batter who will see regular playing time does not have either a first-column “1” or four power numbers – and most have both.)

3. *Even More Anticipation!* In fact, fans should be looking forward to better results overall in 2024 (perhaps maybe possibly please even borderline playoff contention?), and certainly in years to come after this season.

# munich MARAUDERS

Paul Montague (41st year); Hall of Famer

*It'll be a dogfight all season.*



It's difficult to believe, perhaps, but Mr. Montague's Marauders — a team that's been in seven World Series, winning three — has now lost 100+ games for the past three seasons. But there's a method to this painful madness, as the team is accumulating young talent at an alarming rate. When it all comes together, maybe as soon as 2025, this team will be a top contender for more than three consecutive years.

This team currently averages just over 26 years old, and that includes two 34-year-old hold-overs from its last halcyon days. This collection of youth is already starting to show dividends, as the *Annual* does not expect them to lose 100+ games again, despite being in a tough division. In fact, our T.Q. rating predict that Columbus, Rocky Mountain, and Munich will be in a dogfight all season to determine who pushes Hudson for the division crown and who finishes last.

**Pitching:** **8.0**  
**Better with a full-time closer.**

It's a blessing to have lots of talented starting pitchers on a roster. Mr. Montague has so many this year that two are set to pitch exclusively in long relief and one doesn't have to pitch all year. And while you may be hard-pressed to name one starter as the ace, all six who made the rota-



**Half Moon.** They're not quite there yet, but they are really young and still have stuff in the bank for 2025. We rate them slightly behind the other teams in the Mantle, but they could possibly have enough to win it this year.

## SNT: Austin Riley.

*Mr. Montague acquired him during a wild offseason trade-a-thon. He'll anchor third base and the lineup for the next decade.*



**Turnover Rate: 44%**

**Arrived:** Hunter Brown, Isaiah Campbell, Henry Davis, Edouard Julien, Zack Littell, Phil Maton, Parker Meadows, Andrew Nardi, Bo Naylor, Eury Perez, Colin Poche, Austin Riley, Julio Urias, Mark Vientos, Maysyn Winn, Jacob Young.

**Departed:** Matt Brash, Miguel Cabrera, Roansy Contreras, Matt Festa, Yasmani Grandal, Brandon Hughes, Jarred Kelenic, Austin Meadows, Owen Miller, Glenn Otto, Chad Pinder, Michael Rucker, Alek Thomas, Duane Jr. Underwood, Ryan Weathers, Rowan Wick.

tion are promising youngsters. It's a good problem to have.

Like the seasoned TBL manager he is, Mr. Montague has decided to hedge his bets with his bullpen, balancing present competitiveness with future needs. So his one reliever with a closer grade spends part of the year in the minors. This



Gilbert, Webb: The Logans, again



# munich MARAUDERS

strategy allows him the flexibility to make a trade if the team falls out of contention early. Otherwise, the team has a mostly solid pitching staff that should keep the team in many games.

**ROTATION.** First-round pick Eury Perez (Grade 14 HR-21) has the highest grade in the rotation, but he's not the ace, as he has only 19 starts. A trio of capable righthanders follows: Logan Gilbert (Grade 11 C+34), Josiah Gray (Grade 11 C-41), and former ace Logan Webb (Grade 10 C+42 HR+23). They add 95 solid starts. So far, so good.

The good news is that the Marauders need only two more starters to cover the whole season, which means Nick Lodolo (Grade 1 C+31 HR-45) can safely watch from the dugout, out of harm's way. But the two remaining aren't exactly the aces either.

The only LHP in the rotation is Julio Urias (Grade 8 C+33 HR-32). The last starter standing is rookie Hunter Brown (Grade 7). These two may need help early.



Poche: Likely

**BULLPEN.** The likely closer, Colin Poche (Grade 18\* C-21 HR+36), is the pitcher on the AAA train, but he has about 61 innings to contribute.

When he's resting, the closing duties fall to Phil Maton (Grade 15\* HR+25). The setup guys are rookies lefty Andrew Nardi (Grade 15\*) and righty Isaiah Campbell (Grade 15\* C-25 HR+35). With Poche, they have 213 innings, which may be enough, although when Poche is down, late leads are in jeopardy.

The middle relief crew includes lefties Alex Young (Grade 13\* HR-22) and Garrett Crochet (Grade 10\* C-62 HR+36), as well as righty Carlos Hernandez (Grade 8\* C-25). They contribute another 136 problematic innings. Then come the real bulk relievers: starters Kyle Hendriks (Grade 8 C+34 HR+25) and Zack Littell (Grade 7 C+45). With more than 220 innings between them, they'll pitch early and often. That may not always be a good thing. This is a better staff with a full-time closer.

**Offense: 8.5**  
**Should score runs in bunches.**

The offense revolves around five power hitters, all with lots of usage. Youngster Corbin Carroll (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+42, L-7, 35 SSN for 59 SBA) is good at everything. But wait; there's more.: Seiya Suzuki (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 4 walks), SNT Austin Riley (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 3 walks+22), Lane Thomas (1-0-0-0, 10 hits 2 walks+42, L+7 R-5, 31 SSN for 25 attempts), and boy wonder Bobby Witt Jr. (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 30 SSN for 64 SBA) should score runs in bunches.



Carroll: Good at everything

The Marauders have several table-setters, too, and a few of them can also flash some power. Rookie Edouard Julien (1-5-6, 9 hits, 5 walks, L-18) and veteran Lars Nootbaar (1-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks, L-8, 35 SSN for 12 SBA) are excellent examples. Leadoff hitter Nico Hoerner (6-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, 33 SSN for 50 SBA) should approach 100 runs scored.

The rest of the lineup is a grab bag of talent, but they do have some power, if nothing else. Longtime Marauder Anthony Rizzo (1-6, 9 hits, 3 walks+42, L+6 R-3) is still productive. Victor



Caratini (1-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, but 3 24s, L-5) and rookie Bo Naylor (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 5 walks, L-8) split time. Spencer Torkelson (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks) is slowly developing into an offensive force. That leaves Henry Davis (1-6-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+22), who bats ninth against lefties. Davis aside, this is an above-average lineup, with lots of power — five deep! — and several very dangerous base-stealing threats who will get on base. Under the guidance of an experienced game manager like Mr. Montague, this team should pummel lesser pitching, and it can compete with almost anyone.

**Defense: 4.5**  
**Weakness at catcher.**

This team flashes some leather. Carroll and Thomas (with a 33 arm) are both OF3s, and they play all the time. Suzuki and Nootbar (OF2s) roam LF adequately. Riley (3B5), Rizzo (1B5, when he plays), and Hoerner (2B9) solidify a strong infield. Only Witt (SS8) and Torkelson (1B3, when he plays) are at least average. The real weakness is at catcher. Caratini is at least a C8, but with a -4 arm. Naylor (C7 with a Th-2) and Davis (C6 with a Th-4) won't stop anything except fastballs.

Outside of the catchers, there's a lot of usage on this team, good for substitution opportunities. There are also a number of lottery tickets on the bench, a sign of a serious rebuild. Parker Meadows (3 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+22) can pinch-hit and pinch-run. Josh Rojas (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-4, 35 SSN for 12 attempts), Jacob Young (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 35 SSN for 13 attempts), and Emmanuel Rivera (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, but 3 24s) are useful in the right situations. Sam Huff (1-1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, but 11 13s, L+3 R-4) is potentially a fun hitting toy. Mark Vientos has power, and Masyn Winn is a useful SS9. There's a lot of usage here.

Ages of players on the Munich roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 34: Hendricks, Rizzo
- 31: Maton
- 30: Caratini, Poche, J. Rojas, A. Young
- 29: Suzuki
- 28: Littell, E. Rivera, L. Thomas
- 27: L. Gilbert, C. Hernandez, Hoerner, Riley, J. Urias, L. Webb
- 26: Campbell, J. Gray, Huff, Lodolo, Nootbar
- 25: H. Brown, Crochet, Julien, Nardi
- 24: H. Davis, P. Meadows, B. Naylor, Torkelson, Vientos, Witt, J. Young
- 23: Carroll
- 22: Winn
- 21: E. Perez

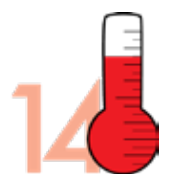


**MUNICH MARAUDERS**

**4th** Yes, the *Annual* is predicting a last-place finish for the 2024 Marauders. But this is a team that could compete, even in this division, with a few tweaks.

The offense is deeper than many teams, and the rotation is solid, with no awful starts. The bullpen is thin when the closer isn't up, but even so, the TQ ratings put Munich a notch behind Rocky Mountain, which is a notch behind Columbus. This three-way race for second place will be one to watch all season long.

**TQ: 23.5**



# Two Up, Two Down

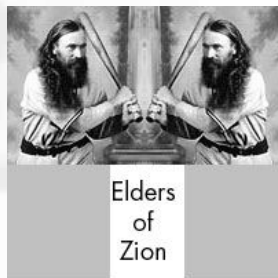
Mark Bloom's *Grand Cayman Havens* had a good year in 2023, but not good enough. Faltering in the post season makes them even more hungry in 2024.



They're very good, and we think they will manage to stay ahead of their nearest rival to win the Williams Division pennant again.

There's only really one rival, as this is going to be a two-team race all year.

It's finally happened: the *Elders of Zion* are back to the level that we expect from a *Rich Meyer* club. They had a good off-season and an excellent draft, and they (as we say here at the *Annual*) can Do Some Things. They will push Grand Cayman all year in all areas, pitching, batting and fielding. As we have noted, this is a place that the Sensei has been before. It's nice to have him back in competition, though it's unclear that his divisional and conference rivals might privately agree.



Elders of Zion

## 2022 Williams Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Grand Cayman*	96	66	.593	—
Northboro	86	76	.531	10
Zion	83	79	.512	13
Warrenton	80	82	.494	16

\* Lost to Kansas in Conference semifinals.

It's a tough time down in *Northboro*. It turns out that the cards on the *Phoenix* are not as good as the names that go with them.

The pitching staff is a bit of a mess, and the lineup is missing some games and at bats (and power and hit numbers, to be fair). There's not much that can be done, so *Robert Jordan* and *Steve Stein* will be hunkering down and suffering this year, in hopes of better times in the future.



Then there are the *Warrenton Giants*. *Jack Chapman* has been replaced with *Ray Murphy*, who has re-entered the fray as a manager. We suspect they'll be back to using the DH, but even with nine hitters instead of eight, they're not going to score a lot of runs and they'll be giving up many, many more. They have lots of draft upcoming, so watch this space.



# Williams Division

1. Grand Cayman	30.5
2. Zion	26.5
2. Northboro	16.0
4. Warrenton	11.0

Matt Olson,  
Grand Cayman

# 2023 grand cayman HAVENS in review



Can they get farther this year?

by Mark Bloom

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 96-66 (1st, Williams)

All the gambits paid off ... until they didn't. The team flourished behind a strong pitching staff, including a dominant relief corps that won 38 games and saved 48 more. Despite a depressed batting average, they managed just enough offense to win 96 games. While the team fell short of 100 wins, they never trailed in the race to the Williams Division crown, its first since 2017. In the end, they made it to Game 7 of the division series.

### What went right?

The pitching staff was the team strength. Alek Manoah set franchise records with a 2.25 ERA and eight shutouts. His 18 wins tied for 7th best. His W-L% tied for 10th all-time. Tyler Anderson finished 10th all-time with a 3.30 ERA. The relief staff compiled a 2.57 ERA. Tyler Kinley surrendered just four hits in his 24 innings, recording 19 saves.

Meanwhile, new acquisition Matt Olson led the team in games, at-bats, doubles (46), homeruns (35), total bases (296), and sadly, strikeouts (167). Yordan Alvarez contributed another outstanding season, with a slash line of .274/.370/.555 and 34 homers, while leading the team in runs (82), RBIs (89), and walks (75).

### What went wrong?

Olson hit only .222, a common team malady. Only three hitters who played even half the season hit over .250. Marcus Stroman gave up 29 homers in 146 innings, pitching to a 5.10 ERA and a 7-11 record. Still, the team finished first

and went up three games to none vs. the Kansas Koyotes in the division series. We were up three games to two, two outs away from advancing before team weaknesses, like David Robertson's -62 control, caught up to them.

### 3 Things

- 1. Going for it all again.* The last time this team had three consecutive winning seasons, that third season culminated in a trip the World Series. With two winning seasons behind them, the third time is the charm. The Havens are the pre-season pick to win the Williams and they will gain a playoff spot. Can they get farther this year?
- 2. Forming a win-now draft strategy.* With few picks in an abundant draft, GM Boomer Wells opted to take players that filled needs instead of players with possibly brighter futures. It's a gamble to win now. On the other hand, he's only traded away a second-round pick in the 2025 draft, so the team has flexibility for later.
- 3. Trusting the core.* Yordan Alvarez and Matt Olson form the core of the batting order. Jarren Duran and Tyler O'Neill may join them. The bullpen is still strong, and this year, the team is going to use a pair of Grade 14\* relievers as cad-dies to overcome the back end of the rotation and win a few more games.



Manoah: Franchise records

# grand cayman HAVENS

Mark Bloom (34th year)

*We shall see what the Dice Gods have to say.*



Mark Bloom is enjoying the glow of his third division title since re-entering TBL in 2004. The question before us is – can the Havens repeat? The Williams division has a long history of ending dynasties before they start. The last time a team won this division two years in a row was 2005-2006, when the Richmond Rebels turned the trick.

This year, the Zion storm has arrived. Richard has been very quietly stockpiling talent over the last few years, and the race between Cayman and Zion looks to be one of the closest in TBL this season. The TQs are tilted towards Grand Cayman. We shall see what the Dice Gods have to say.

## **Pitching: 12.5** **Starters will be helped by the bullpen.**

We start our analysis with the unit that may be the most problematic for Boomer this year. Grand Cayman will use 10 pitchers as starters over the course of the season. At the top of the rotation is Atlanta Braves ace Max Fried (Grade 13 C+25 HR+25, 14 starts). Fried is missing 20 starts and is the only starter in the stack that steals 8s without help.

ROTATION. There are 51 competent starts behind Fried. Marcus Stroman (Grade 11 C-14 HR+36, 25 starts) had his second solid season in a row for the Cubs. Dane Dunning (Grade 10 C+13 HR+15, 26 starts) posts his first respectable grade since Boomer drafted him with a 2021 #2.



Stroman: Second solid season

There are 40 more starts that will test the bullpen a bit. Jake Irvin (Grade 9 C-26 HR-15, 24 starts) and Touki Toussaint (Grade 11 C-62 HR+21, 16 starts) will show up and give it their



**Full Moon.** Here we go again. Grand Cayman didn't get as far in the post season as they'd have liked, and now they're even hungrier. Very little has changed on the roster, though there are some more things. Let's go.

best shot but expectations are moderate here. The Emergencies call for them to be yanked in the 5<sup>th</sup> if anyone reaches base.

The top of this rotation provides 105 decent starts. The last 57 mound events are assigned to openers and starters with sketchy grades. Zack Thompson (Grade 7 HR+15, 9 starts) and Ty Anderson (Grade 6 C-25, 25 starts) take 34 of the 57. Ryan Walker (Grade 11 C-15, 13 starts, 41 IP), John Brebbia (Grade 12 C+13 HR-15, 38 IP, 10 starts) and one start of Brusdar Graterol (Grade 20\* C+35 HR+45) get them the rest of the way to November.

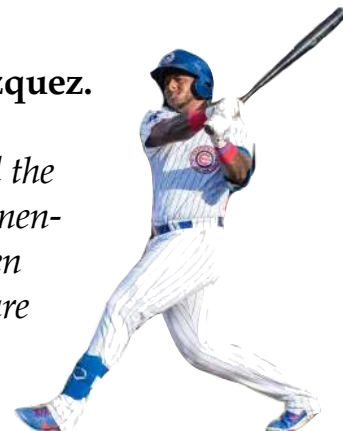
## **Turnover Rate: 22%**

**Arrived:** Nick Anderson, Jake Irvin, Pablo Reyes, Zack Thompson, Touki Toussaint, Nelson Velazquez, Ryan Walker, Taylor Walls.

**Departed:** Michael Brantley, Miguel Castro, Johnny Cueto, Kyle Garlick, P.J. Higgins, Tyler Kinley, Peter Strzelecki, Austin Wynns.

## **SNT: Nelson Velazquez.**

*The card is killer, and the lineup will need augmentation in months when Alvarez and Duran are unavailable.*





# grand cayman HAVENS

This rotation is going to need a lot of help from the bullpen. Fortunately, there is bullpen aplenty.

**BULLPEN.** Brusdar Graterol (Grade 20\* C+35 HR+45, 67 IP) is exactly what you want in a closer when you're trying to win a close division race. Cayman cannot afford to blow any leads late, and Brusdar's excellent grade and Rivera-like peripherals will hang over opponents like the Sword of Damocles.

The bridge to Graterol involves two other closer grades - Wandy Peralta (Grade 18\* C-61, 54 IP) and Kevin Ginkel (Grade 18\* C-12 HR+45, 65 IP). The top 3 bullpen artists have 186 outstanding innings between them. Peralta and fellow lefty Alex Minter (Grade 11\* C+14 HR+24, 65 IP) allow Boomer to work matchups to his advantage.

The middle men are solid as well. Andres Munoz (Grade 14\* C-15 HR+51, 49 IP), Jordan Romano (Grade 14\* HR+22, 59 IP), Nick Anderson (Grade 13\* HR+23 HR+26, 35 IP) and the

underrated David Robertson (Grade 14\* HR+16, 65 IP) have the important job of rescuing the starters and holding the fort until the late crew is ready. There's a lot of them - 208 innings in all. Dane Dunning (9\* C+13 HR+15, 25 IP) and John Brebbia (Grade 12\* C+13 HR-15, 38 IP) will also see action. They will work in long relief. This is an outstanding bullpen from top to bottom. There's a whopping 588 innings and they will earn their pay.



Graterol: What you want

whopping 52 home runs for Atlanta last season, and he will be a shibboleth in the center of the Havens attack in every game this season.

Olson's stamina and good health make him stand out on this team. Cayman has terrific hitters but many of them are missing some games. The poster boy for great partial seasons is the terrifying Jordan Alvarez (1-1-6-6, 10 hits, 5

walks+42, 114 games) - one of the best hitters in baseball when he's healthy. Jarren Duran (5 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks, 16 speed, 35 SSN for 26 SBA, 102 games), who didn't really win a job until June with the Red Sox, will bring power and speed to the lineup for five months. Duran was an eighth round draft pick in 2023.

There is more power. Ke'Bryan Hayes (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks, 124 games) is a terrific young third baseman entering his age 27 season. Danny Jansen (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, 86 games) and Jake Rogers (1-1-6, 8 hits, 3 walks, 107 games) share the catching duties, and will make loud contact on occasion. Brandon Lowe (1-5-5, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-11, 109 games) will make most of the starts at second base, and he hit 21 dingers for Tampa last year.

The bottom third of the order is not as scary. Daulton Varsho (1-4-6, 8 hits, 3 walks, 27 SSN for 23 SBA) is the everyday centerfielder. Robbie Grossman (3 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks, L+9, 115 games) who management tried to trade away for an entire offseason with no takers, has survived to punish lefthanders from the third slot in the lineup.

Rob Refsnyder (2 0s, 8 hits, 5 walks + 42, 3 24s, L+6, 89 games) is also death on lefties. Amed Rosario (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 34 SSN for 17 SBA) is the shortstop.

The top of this lineup, when they are all on the field together, will beat up pitching of all kinds. Boomer has several lefty killers that will make southpaws miserable. Olson will contend for league MVP this



Alvarez: Best when healthy



Olson: All World

**Offense: 10.0**  
**Great when they're all together.**

If you're going to start an APBA offense, start it with All World first baseman Matt Olson (1-1-5-5, 10 hits, 5 walks, R+2, 162 games). Olson hit a

year. This team is better set up for the playoffs, when the missing games won't matter as much.

**Defense: 5.0**  
**Terrific.**

Grand Cayman is a terrific defensive team. Olson (1B5) and Hayes (3B5) are as good as anyone at the infield corners. Brandon Lowe (2B8) and Taylor Walls (2B8) will handle work at the keystone with style. Danny Jansen (C8, Th-3) is fine mechanically, but can't throw. Jake Rogers (C7, Th-2) is there for the power bat.



Hayes: As good as any

In the outfield, Rex Grossman (OF3, 28 arm), Daulton Varsho (OF3, 31 arm), and bench stud Tyler O'Neill (OF3, 30 arm) will catch everything that sails their way. Rob Refsnyder (OF2, 31 arm) and speedster Jarren Duran (OF2, 31 arm) are also solid. Drew Waters (OF2, 31 arm) also sees time as a regular.

The only soft spot is at shortstop, where Rosario (SS8) could use an SS9 to back him up. That may need to be on Boomer's shopping list if he wants to make a deep playoff run.

**Bench: 3.0**  
**Nice part time options.**

There are some very nice part time options on the bench for Cayman – particularly SNT Nelson Velasquez (1-1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks, R+2, 53 games). This guy is more than a hitting toy – he alleviates some of the pain of missing Alvarez and other stars for months during the year. Tyler O'Neill (1-6-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, 17 speed, 72 games) is a good player who will help a lot when he plays. His nice hitting card is also augmented by a very competent glove (OF3).

Super utility guy Pablo Reyes (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, 64 games) is a one-man bench – he plays all the infield positions and even pitches a little.

There are some nice tools here.

**1st**

The TQs have Cayman and Zion 4 points apart, but this feels like a matchup that will be closer. However, Cayman's lineup will maul ordinary pitching, and their bullpen will make leads stand up. Grand Cayman has a chance for a rare repeat in the Williams.

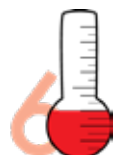


**grand cayman HAVENS**

Ages of players on the Grand Cayman roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 39: Robertson
- 34: N. Anderson, T. Anderson, Brebbia, Grossman
- 33: Refsnyder, Stroman
- 32: W. Peralta
- 31: Romano
- 30: Fried, Ginkel, Minter, Olson, P. Reyes
- 29: Dunning, Jansen, B. Lowe, O'Neill, J. Rogers
- 28: A. Rosario, Toussaint, R. Walker
- 27: Alvarez, J. Duran, Hayes, J. Irvin, L. Urias, Varsho, T. Walls
- 26: Manoah, Z. Thompson
- 25: Graterol, Munoz, N. Velazquez, Waters

**TQ: 30.5**



# 2023 ELDERS of zion in review

*Expect a solid campaign.*

by Richard Meyer



## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 83-79 (3rd, Williams)

Stuck in a tough division, Zion entered 2023 with no illusions of post-season potential. For much of the year, all four ballclubs played above .500 ball, with a late fade by Warrenton sliding the Elders into third place at a respectable 83-79, 3 games above the Giants, three games behind Northboro, and 13 games to the rear of the pacesetting Grand Cayman Havens.

Moving into 2024, Northboro and Warrenton have taken significant steps back. Cayman still looks to be the division favorite, but Elders fans have good reason to expect a solid campaign with more wins to show than last year, and the prize of a wild card berth in reach.

### What went right?

On the mound, Luis Castillo earned only a 11-10 record, but had a 3.12 ERA and also a K per inning. Jon Gray went 12-8 with a 4.16 ERA to lead the staff in wins and win percentage. Mike Mikolas (who could go in either the right or wrong column) ate innings (208) and also went 11-10, but with an inflated 4.75 ERA by allowing 26 HR. Paul Sewald (2.16, 4-4, 31 saves, 71 K in 58 IP) handled the closer's role well, and Scott Effross, Luis Garcia, and John Schreiber all added sub 3-ERAs in relief.

On the offense side, only Corey Seager (26 HR, 83 RBI, .249) hit 20+ HRs, but 9 other Zion hitters reached double figures. Andrew Benintendi hit an even .300 from the leadoff spot vs RH, and was second on the team behind Seager with a modest 55 runs scored. Part-timer rookies Gunnar Henderson and Nate Eaton also hit .300+ in limited action, and ONE of them will be expected to provide much more in years to come. And in an entertaining curiosity, OF Austin Hays recorded 22 HBP (out of an impressive teamwide 73) for the year.

### What went wrong?

Benintendi also led the Elders with 8 steals, as the team totaled only 17 successful steals all year. Seager made 24 errors (out of a team total of 62) at shortstop. Alex Cobb (6-15, 5.53) demonstrated just how bad a Grade 7 RH with good peripherals can fare in TBL. Ironically, the same Cobb, pitching as the number 3 starter for the Merrimac Valley Moles in Strat's MAX league, won 20 games with an ERA around 3.60 with his Strat card. The overall offensive performance of the team – a .250 BA, .315 OBP, and modest .405 slugging percentage – was not sufficient to overcome a middle of the road 3.98 team ERA. As a result, the team had an overall run differential of -5, almost the very definition of how to get to a .500 finish.

### 3 Things

1. *Keeper.* After a stretch of bad first round picks, Gunnar Henderson looks like a keeper. In contrast, previous first rounders Keston Hiura (DFA'ed at year's end) and Akil Baddoo (occupying the #26 spot on the roster about half the time in 2024) have been big time busts. (Unfortunately, this year's #1 pick Matt McLain has started the real world season on the DL with shoulder troubles).

2. *Closer.* With no real closer entering the off-season, Zion traded swing man Mike Lorenzen for a third rounder, and then sent that pick along to NBO for LHP Jose Alvarado. Zion then used a second third round pick to add 24 year old RHP Abner Uribe. They have 70 innings of closer grade.

3. *Power/Defense.* Zion's offensive power profile has improved markedly over 2023, particularly in the infield, where Seager (11666), Henderson, McLain, Zach Gelof, and Jeimer Candelario all have 4 power numbers, along with backup C D'Arnaud, and OF Hays, Blackmon, and Taveras. Up the middle defense has also improved, as Seager earned a 9, and most of the second base platoon are also plus fielders.



Seager: Leader



# ELDERS of zion

Rich Meyer (40th year); Hall of Famer

*Mr. Meyer knows how to do this . . . he's done it before.*



This year's theme for the *Annual* is dynasties – memories thereof, how they are constructed, and which teams are likely to have enduring success based on our current rosters. One of the first teams that leaps to mind when this subject is raised is the Elders of Zion in the 1990s. From 1991 to 2002, Richard Meyer won 5 TBL titles with a team that featured Greg Maddux as the staff leader. That was a different era, when starting pitchers weren't expected to hit 97 on the gun and undergo Tommy John surgery every three years. TBL itself has also changed. In the early 2000s, our league was taken over by the Boom and Bust philosophy, where a championship team would be sold for parts in the offseason trading period in pursuit of top-10 draft picks that would set the foundation for the next championship run.

Rich Meyer, Walter Hunt, Clay Beard and several other of our longtime managers have never bought into that philosophy. They buy and hold. Rich has won 1 TBL championship since 2003. Last year, Walter won his third title in 35 years. Clay is still looking for his first trophy. It's hard to win it all in TBL if you're not willing to endure the 45 win ice bath that nets you a Julio Rodriguez or a Bobby Witt, Jr.

This year, Rich will battle Cayman for the Williams division title with a club that is young and on the rise. And facing Mr. Meyer in a playoff series - which will happen for Zion this season – is always scary for the opposition.

## Pitching Old school.

12.5

It's an Old School starting rotation! 160 games are covered by these six pitchers. Fernando Cruz (Grade 10) opens a couple of times to adhere to rest requirements around doubleheaders.

Luis Castillo (Grade 13 C+16 HR-12, 33 starts) is the staff ace. He moved from pitching in a phone booth in Cincinnati to a more pitcher-friendly park

in Seattle. He's 31, so there are good years left. He's the only starter of Grade 13 and above, but he's got 20 more starts than Max Fried, who is the ace in Cayman.

There are another 80 starts between Jesus Luzardo (Grade 11 C+15 HR+13, 32 starts), 36 year old James Paxton (Grade 9 HR-24, 19 Starts), and Jon Gray (Grade 9, 29 starts). Zion is applying the quick hook to these guys - he wants them gone after 5 if the game is close.

## SNT: Matt McLain.

*McLain is a five tool middle infielder. He'll help Zion scare the daylights out of lefties this year.*



**Turnover Rate: 33%**

**Arrived:** Jose Alvarado, Luken Baker, Fernando Cruz, Zack Gelof, Ian Hamilton, Ben Lively, Matt McLain, Carmen Mlodzinski, Richie Palacios, James Paxton, Tyler Rogers, Abner Uribe.

**Departed:** Manny Banuelos, Andrew Bellatti, Dylan Bundy, Jose Cisnero, Nate Eaton, Scott Effross, Keston Hiura, Charles Leblanc, Trey Mancini, Michael Massey, Miles Mikolas.



Castillo: Staff ace

The back end of the rotation has Alex Cobb (Grade 7 HR+25, 28 starts), who has been here since 2013, and Zion's #2 pick in the 2023 draft MacKenzie Gore (Grade 9 C-23 HR-26, 27 starts). Gore is 25 years old and has the tools to



# ELDERS of zion

be an ace. This is a better rotation than Cayman's.

**BULLPEN.** This unit will get plenty of work. Abner Uribe (Grade 25\* C-62 HR+62, 31 IP) and Jose Alvarado (Grade 20\* C-24 HR+34, 41 IP) are the closers. They will be up in alternating months, so we won't see them together until November. There are 71 innings here. That should be enough.

There are three high quality setup men. Carmen Mlodzinski (Grade 17\* C-41 HR+32, 36 IP) - thank heavens Anton didn't try pronounce this one - has the best grade. He gets a couple of months off in the summer to work on his tan. Paul Sewald (Grade 15\* C-16, 61 IP) and Ian Hamilton (Grade 15\* C-32 HR+53, 58 IP) hang around all year, and are tasked

with holding late leads. The secret weapon is Taylor Rogers (Grade 12\* C+26 HR+24, 52 IP), whose solid peripherals make him a good alternative when the lead is at stake. The setup crew has 207 innings.

Behind them is a respectable set of middle relievers who will be needed when the lesser starters get roughed up. John Schreiber (Grade 12\* C-42, 47 IP) and Kenley Jansen (Grade 11\* HR+16, 45 IP) are here from the much-maligned Red Sox bullpen. Genesis Cabrera (Grade 11\* C-14, 56 IP), Fernando Cruz (Grade 10\* C-25 HR+26, 66 IP), and Luis Garcia (Grade 9\* HR+25, 60 IP) add another pile of innings - 274 in all.

There are no mops - the lowest grade in the bullpen is a 9\*. The Elders are not giving anything away - and Richard will make sure these cards perform.

**Offense: 10.0**  
**Power, not much on base.**

The good news is that there is power everywhere in this lineup. The bad news is that they don't get on base much. This is a tricky offense to evaluate.

There are no questions whatsoever about this guy: Cory Seager (1-1-6-6-6, 12 hits, 3 walks, R+1, 119 Games). He misses two months, but he'll be an absolute terror in the time he is active. He sits against

lefties (L-7) in favor of Matt McLain (1-4-5-6, 10 hits, 29 SSN for 19 attempts, L+5, 89 Games). McLain finished fifth in the National League Rookie of the Year voting last year.



Henderson, Seager: No questions

There are also no questions about Gunnar Henderson (1-4-5-5, 9 hits, 3 walks, 30 SSN for 13 SBA) actually won the American League Rookie of the Year voting in 2023. He will platoon at third base with Kyle Farmer (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, 120 games, L+10). Rookie Zack Gelof (1-5-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 16 SBA, L-16 R+2) is at second base in most lineups. He platoons as well - Brendan Rogers (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 46 games) starts against southpaws.

No platoon is required at first base. John Candelario (1-5-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks + 42, 34 SSN) is a journeyman corner infielder who will play first every day. The outfield regulars are Leody Tavaras (4 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, 30 SSN for 18 SBA), Austin Hayes (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks), and old friend Andrew Benintendi (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 33 SSN for 15 SBA). Charlie Blackmon (4 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks + 42), who might have been here during the Maddux era, is the regular DH. The catchers are Alejandro Kirk (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks, 5 24s) and Travis D'Arnaud (1-5-6, 8 hits, 3 walks, L+5).

There are only three starters in this lineup with 14 on base numbers or more. However, the players with 4 power numbers or more go 7 deep in the regular lineups. They have some excellent positive shifts against lefties. This lineup will be explosive - they will surprise high grade pitchers by bashing them into submission. They will also have days when they just don't hit.

**Defense: 5.0**  
**Will help the pitching staff.**

Zion is excellent defensively. Up the middle, they have Cory Seager (SS9) and Zack Gelof (2B8). The backups who get sent out against left-handed starters are Brendan Rogers (2B9, 46 games) and Matt McLain (SS8). Only McLain's starts are average – everyone else is looking slick. The infield corners are solid, if unspectacular. John Candelario (3B4, 1B3) plays first all year, which will pose some problems. Gunnar Henderson and Kyle Farmer (3B4) are both Fielding Two.

The primary catcher is Alejandro Kirk (C8, Th+0), who is excellent back there. Travis D'Arnaud (C7, Th-3) handles starts against left-handers, and is less accomplished with the leather. Richard's instructions ask that Kirk be used as a defensive replacement when things are close and late.

There are three top-tier outfield starters - Leody Taveras (OF3, 30 arm), Austin Hayes (OF3, 31 arm), and Andrew Benintendi (OF3, 33 arm).

There's nothing wrong with all this. The defense will help the pitching staff.

**Bench: 3.0**  
**The platoons and the hitting toy.**

The Zion bench is very flexible, due to the available platoon players. There's also a nice hitting toy - Richard Palacios (1-1-6-6, 10 hits, 2 walks, 2 10s). He'll be up in May, July and October. He'll DH against lefthanders when active. Akil Baddoo (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, 32 SSN for 17 Attempts) will be a nice pinch runner when available, and will spell the outfield starters in June and July.

This is one of the luxuries of having a team come together – there are ways to counter opponents' moves and pitching staffs.

**2nd** The TQs have Cayman and Zion 4 points apart, but Richard has a lot of tools in his belt this year. This is a race to watch.



**Waxing Crescent.** Not quite a Full Moon, this is an excellent club, the result of years of waiting and planning. They had a great draft and can do all the things – hit for power, catch the ball, and pitch.



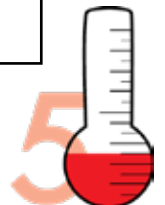
**ELDERS of zion**

Apparently, Richard isn't allowed to have nice things! Unfortunately, Matt McLain messed up a shoulder in spring training and underwent major surgery on his labrum. When he gets back, Zion will be set in the middle infield with McLain and fellow rookie Zack Gelof. That's a nice core to build around. The club has gotten younger and more talented, making Zion a team on the rise. They're not dynasty level yet, but assume nothing: Mr. Meyer knows how to do this . . . he's done it before.

Ages of players on the Zion roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 38: Blackmon
- 37: L. A. Garcia
- 36: Cobb, Jansen
- 35: D'Arnaud
- 34: F. Cruz, Paxton, Sewald
- 33: Farmer, Haniger, Ty. Rogers
- 32: J. Gray, Lively
- 31: L. Castillo
- 30: Candelario, Schreiber, Seager
- 29: Alvarado, Benintendi, Hamilton, Hays
- 27: L. Baker, G. Cabrera, R. Palacios, Rivas, Rodgers
- 26: Luzardo
- 25: Baddoo, Gore, Kirk, Mlodzinski, Taveras
- 24: Gelof, McLain, A. Uribe
- 23: Henderson

**TQ: 26.5**



# 2023 northboro PHOENIX in review



by Steve Stein

*What does [Bill James] know? We won 86.*

## 2023 in Review

### Final Record: 86-76 (2nd, Williams)

2022 was a down year in Northboro – we had mortgaged a bit of our future and gotten the 2021 league championship in return. We knew '22 wasn't going to be our year, so we traded Brandon Belt for a first-rounder and looked to 2023 to restore our squad to playoff contention.

Then we saw a couple of bright shiny objects and made a couple of big moves, trading 2023 and 2024 top picks for Jose Altuve and a half-season of Jake deGrom, hoping to parlay our way deep into the playoffs. We knew we were in a dogfight with Grand Cayman, but we expected to easily claim a playoff slot.

### What went right?

The first half of the season went pretty well. After July we were one game behind Grand Cayman in the Williams and four games ahead of Kansas for the second wild-card spot. Altuve was everything we hoped for, and we were productive offensively (but usage was tight).

### What went wrong?

October and untimely dice. We stumbled a little and lost some ground in August and September, but October did us in. We went 6-16 as Kansas went 16-6 and held on to score the last playoff spot.

Bill James discovered that a team's winning percentage can be predicted as a function of the number of runs a team scores and the runs the team allows which mirrors the Pythagorean Theorem. We scored 706 runs and allowed 597. Bill James would have predicted we'd win 94 games. But what does he know? We won 86.

Adding injury to insult, Jake deGrom only pitched 6 games in 2023 and Jose Altuve only played 90 games. Staff ace Nestor Cortes also spent more than half the season on the IL. 2024 is going to be very thin.

### 3 Things

1. *I don't know! Third base!* We're set on the who (Yandy Diaz at 1B) and the What (Altuve at 2B) and even I Don't Care (Dansby Swanson at SS) But we're going on 11 years now since Scott Rolen retired. Since then it feels like we've had a different 3Bman every season. Even Chris Iannetta got a turn! Our current 3B du jour is Jordan Westburg. Maybe he's the answer.



Diaz: Great bat

2. *Pitching* Pitching pitching. Preferably healthy pitching. deGrom may pitch this year and we'll see what he has left. Nestor Cortes and Joe Ryan are starting reasonably well. Joey Butto and Justin Steele may round out quite a good rotation if they all stay healthy. But they're pitchers! I'm sure they won't. Sigh.

3. *Power* Will Smith, Jose Altuve and Yandy Diaz have consistently put up good power numbers. Teoscar Hernandez and Joc Peterson have been less consistent. There have been flashes from Jurickson Profar. If these guys hit (and stay healthy), we may have a formidable offense once again. Here's hoping!

# northboro PHOENIX



Bob Jordan (25th year) / Steve Stein (22nd year)

*What to do? Likely what they're doing.*

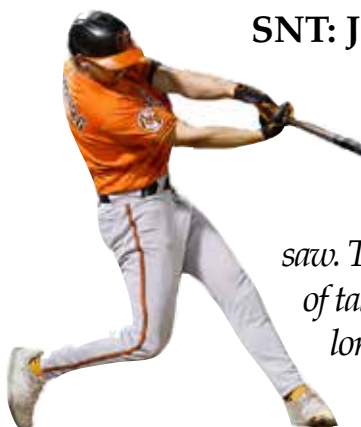
It all sort of came apart. 2021 was the well-earned championship; 2022 was a step back, 2023 a step forward (but not as much of a step as they, or the *Annual*, expected). Then, well, *spluge*. (This is a technical term, referring to the sound of something soft crashing into something hard.) The soft was the fragile roster, especially the pitching staff. The hard was reality. Welcome to 2024, Bob and Steve.

Yandy Diaz, Teoscar Hernandez, Dansby Swanson, Jose Altuve; Justin Steele, Nestor Cortes, Jacob deGrom, Joe Ryan. Those are the names we like. They mostly didn't have the seasons we'd like, though, and the roster – which couldn't be fixed very much since the bills for 2022 and 2023 came due – had to be filled with (as Mr. Jordan would put it) uniforms with "Guy" stenciled on the back.

**Turnover Rate: 25%**


**Arrived:** Jonathan Aranda, Phil Bickford, Brandon Bielak, Jose Butto, Grant Hartwig, Blake Sabol, Adam Wainwright, Jordan Westburg, Joey Wiemer.

**Departed:** Jesus Aguilar, Jose Alvarado, Jalen Beeks, Dylan Coleman, Matt Foster, Dany Jimenez, Corey Kluber, Nomar Mazara, Mike Zunino.



## SNT: Jordan Westburg.

*For both power and speed, the ceiling is higher than what we saw. This young man has lots of talent, and may be the long term answer at third base for Northboro.*



**Waxing Crescent.** There's still talent on the roster, but the team has a long way to go to return to the winner's circle. This will be a long season, but if there are some comebacks, they may be better soon.

It goes without saying that this is going to be a very long season in Northboro. But for the smoking crater where the Warrenton Giants used to be, this would be a last-place finish.

**Pitching: 3.5**  
**Practically a bowling team.**

It takes nine pitchers to fill out the rotation, mostly due to injuries. The upper half of them are not bad, but then it gets ugly. As for the relievers, there just aren't enough of them and they are going to have to do the best they can. It is practically a bowling team. (If you actually recognize that *Annual* reference, you've been in this league a long time.)

ROTATION. The sublime is Jacob deGrom, who had six great starts (Grade 17 C+43 HR+34). But there are only six. He and rookie Jose Butto (Grade 14 C-55 HR+35) are the guys who can steal 8s. The best full time starters are the dominant Justin Steele (Grade 10 C+32 HR+32), who was a nice surprise, and Joe Ryan (Grade 8 C+32 HR-31).



Steele: Dominant

That gets the Phoenix 72 starts into the season. Add 13 starts of Brandon Bielak (Grade 9 C-26) and 12 from last year's ace, lefty Nestor Cortes (Grade 8 C+14 HR-22) they get up to 97.

Then it gets dicey. Dakota Hudson (Grade 6 C-22 HR+21) gets 12 starts, but the rest will be scrimmages for Bailey Falter (Grade 3 C+25 HR-32) and Adam Wainwright (Grade 1). For Wainwright, it's like the tail end of Steve Carlton's career: a lot of work and very little success.

The starters are going to have to go deep if at all possible, which is going to cost some games.

BULLPEN. End of game duties will fall to Ryan Thompson (Grade 14\* C+22 HR+22, 32 innings), with help from James Karinchak (Grade 15\* C-62), Daniel Bard (Grade 11\* C-62 HR+35) and Huascar Brazoban (Grade 11\*vC-42 HR+32). Phil Bickford (Grade 10\* C-43 HR+16), added off waivers, may help here too. That's 214 innings of exceptionally wild relief, they would be an interesting lower end group for a contender; but here they play a crucial role. Oy.

For the low end of the pen, Caleb Ferguson (Grade 9\* HR+41, 60 innings) is the best of the lot. Grant Hartwig (Grade 7\* HR+33) and Alex Vesia (Grade 7\* C+22) add 85 more, and Dylan Floro (Grade 2\* C+25 HR+44) has good peripherals for a surrender pitcher.

Getting this entire staff through the season is going to be a challenge.

**Offense: 6.5**  
**Better names than cards.**

The players on the field have some pretty good names, but there are many games missing in



Altuve: Exceptional

part due to injury. Also, the names are better than the cards, which is part of the reason for the team's downturn.

Jose Altuve has an exceptional card for his 90 games (11 hits, 4 walks, 1-0-0-0, 34 SSN); he will mostly

serve as the DH. The regular secondbaseman will be Cavan Biggio (8 hits, 4 walks+42, 3 0s, 28 SSN); his double-play partner is Dansby Swanson (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-4-6, 34 SSN).

The overall best card in the lineup is Yandy Diaz, who came out of nowhere to win a batting title (11 hits, 4 walks+22, 1-0-0-0, L+5 R-3). He'll be a nice card to roll all year. The former power source, Teoscar Hernandez, has a good card, but it's a step down from last year (10 hits, 2 walks+22, 1-5-6, 30 SSN). The same is true for Joc Pederson (8 hits, 5 walks+42, 1-0-0).



Diaz: Best card

Most of the catching games belong to Will Smith (9 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-0-0); as for the outfield, Kyle Isbel (9 hits, 2 walks, 4 0s, L+6 R-3, 34 SSN), Ramon Laureano (8 hits, 3 walks+42, 3 0s, 35 SSN), Jake McCarthy (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 2 0s, 33 SSN), Jurickson Profar (9 hits, 4 walks+22, 3 0s) and Joey Weimer (8 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-6-6, 28 SSN) will fill in games, none making any great impact. Third base will be manned by rookies Jordan Westburg (9 hits, 3 walks, 4 0s, 31 SSN) and Jonathan Aranda (8 hits, 4 walks+42, 3 0s).

The lineup is far from a total loss, but it lacks enough hard hitting cards for consistent impact.

**Defense:**  
**Mostly Fielding Two.**

**3.5**

There are a few highlights. Biggio (2B8) and Swanson (SS9) are Fielding One, as is Smith (C8 Th-1) behind the plate; Kyle Isbel is an OF3 (30 arm), and though Ramon Laureano has gone down to OF2, he still has a boss arm (37); the rest of the outfielders are OF2s with average arms.

Yandy Diaz is a 1B4, but may get some time at third as well (3B4). Westburg and Aranda are both 3B3s, however. Altuve is only a 2B7, and may get some time there since Biggio misses a third of a season. Aledmys Diaz can play in several places (3B4 SS8 2B7 1B4).

The defense could be better, given the pitching, but it shouldn't extend innings too much.

**Bench:**  
**A few spare parts.**

**2.5**

As with so many rebuilding teams, the best players are generally on the field. There are a variety of outfielders that can be mixed and matched depending on matchups, so there may be choices on the bench during the season.

Aledmys Diaz is the Swiss Army knife of the bench. He doesn't hit much (8 hits, 1 walk+42) but, as noted above, can play everywhere. The two backup catchers, Garrett Stubbs (C7 Th-1, 7 hits, 31 SSN) and Blake Sabol (C6 Th-2, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, 26 SSN) will get a little bit of playing time, but not too often.

**3rd** Thanks to the disassembly of the Warrenton franchise, Northboro gets to finish third instead of fourth. But they're likely to get close to 100 losses. What to do? Likely what they're doing, which is to hunker down and hope for better times in the future. The *Annual* still likes the names on the roster, but until the cards change it'll be a long season in Northboro.



Swanson: Fielding One



northboro PHOENIX

Ages of players on the Northboro roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 43: Wainwright
- 39: Bard
- 36: DeGrom
- 34: Altuve, Brazoban
- 33: A. Diaz, Floro
- 32: Y. Diaz, Pederson, R. Thompson
- 31: T. Hernandez, Profar, Stubbs
- 30: Swanson
- 29: Biggio, Cortes, Hudson, Laureano, W. Smith
- 28: Bickford, Bielak, Karinchak, Ryan, Steele, Vesia
- 27: Falter, Ferguson, Isbel
- 26: Aranda, Butto, Hartwig, McCarthy, Sabol
- 25: Westburg, Wiemer

**TQ: 16.0**



# 2023 warrenton GIANTS in review

by Walter Hunt



*Mr. Murphy knows what was in the package when he took it off the shelf.*

## 2022 in Review

### Final Record: 80-82 (4th, Williams)

It was an indifferent season in Warrenton, one that, regrettably, management did not live to complete. Captain Jack, like other boom and bust managers in TBL, enjoyed either great success or deep rebuild – muddling about in the undistinguished middle was unpleasant and foreign. The team ended at just about .500, and coming off a 114-win campaign it would have been a great disappointment.

The team is now in the hands of Ray Murphy, who has changed the face of the team. By the time it emerges from the downturn, it will be fundamentally different.

### What went right?

The biggest bat in the lineup was Mike Trout (.275-33-99, 70 walks). He was not the only good hitter: Xander Bogaerts hit 21 homers and had a .305/.365/.465 slash line, and rookie Adley Rutschman was also excellent (.304/.388/.502, 15 homers). Christian Walker hit 28 homers, and Patrick Wisdom hit 24. The team hit pretty well overall, spurning the DH as Jack had always done.

Yu Darvish and Gerrit Cole took the lead as top starters. Darvish (11-9, 3.72) struck out 215 in 208 innings; Cole (13-11, 3.85) struck out 288 in 241. Ryne Stanek recorded 26 saves.

### What went wrong?

The pitching was overall not impressive. Joe Barlow won 11 but had a 4.64 ERA and yielded 34 homers, and Lucas Giolito (11-15, 5.96) was badly treated by opposing hitters.

Warrenton's hitters struck out 1,564 times, most in TBL, with seven regulars whiffing more than 100 times (led by Wisdom at 162 in 480 at-bats.) They only stole 22 bases, and scored fewer runs (752) than they gave up (760). Far too many batters were basically 8 hits and 3 walks with a 22.



Trout: Big bat

### 3 Things

1. *Taking it all apart.* Mr. Murphy saw the writing on the wall and sent much of the roster away. Virtually all the pitching has left the building, along with several of the key players, including Xander Bogaerts. This will be a miserable year out in Warrenton.
2. *Get younger.* This goes without saying, and could only be started in 2024. The core of the Warrenton had become, and still remains, over the hill; it will take some time for that boat to be turned around.
3. *Patience, patience.* Mr. Murphy knows what was in the package when he took it off the shelf, and it will take time to bring it back to contention.



# warrenton GIANTS



Ray Murphy (30th year; 1st year back at the helm)

*Rent, not buy.*

Probably the only positive event emanating from the sudden passing of Captain Jack Chapman was the return of Ray Murphy to the manager's stable. Ray's first season in TBL was 1992 when he took over the Sacramento Aces mid-season. It took Mr. Murphy four years to move that team to Portland and build them into a contender. In 1996, the Portland Possum won 99 games with a team that featured Manny Ramirez and Jim Abbott, who was a 21-game winner that year. Ray's first playoff appearance was in 1997, when his 105-win Possum lost to Munich in the conference championship.

It took another nine years for the stars to align and bring Ray his first TBL title. The mood statement at the top of his instructions that year was *All In*. That loaded club had Manny Ramirez and Roger Clemens, who won 19 games that year. They barely survived two seven-game series against Richmond and Clay Beard's Hudson Generals before squashing Greater Ohio in 4 games in the World Series.

Ray stepped away in 2014 to concentrate on work and family but was there to rescue us when we had a commissioner outage a few years ago. In the interim, he has emerged as one of the most respected fantasy baseball authorities in the country.

This team is a strange mix of huge talent and gaping holes. They are not expected to compete this

**Turnover Rate: 61%**

**Arrived:** Grant Anderson, Sam Bachman, Ji Hwan Bae, Jake Bauers, Griffin Canning, Oscar Colas, Reid Detmers, Jordan Diaz, Mason Englert, Erick Fedde, Michael Grove, Eric Haase, Michael Harris, Ryne Nelson, Ryan Noda, Liover Peguero, Tayler Scott, Noah Syndergaard, Matt Vierling, Joey Wendle, Joey Wentz, Brendan White.

**Departed:** Joe Barlow, Richard Bleier, Xander Bogaerts, Aroldis Chapman, Jesse Chavez, Gerrit Cole, Brandon Crawford, Charlie Culberson, Tyler Danish, Yu Darvish, Adam Duvall, Adam Engel, Yusei Kikuchi, Evan Longoria, Alejo Lopez, Matt Reynolds, Craig Stammen, Ryne Stanek, Max Stassi, Christian Walker, Patrick Wisdom.



**New Moon.** Ray Murphy gets to start almost from scratch. There's Rutschman, and now there's Michael Harris, and there's still Mike Trout.

Build around them, or build down further?  
There are a couple of years' work ahead.

season. But Commissioner Murphy's master class on rebuilding a TBL franchise is now in session.

**Pitching:**

**2.0**

**No mercy rule.**

ROTATION. Teams in a deep rebuild take their Cy Young starter (Gerrit Cole) and ship him to Riverwolf for a nice haul. One of the cookies coming back was Reid Detmers (Grade 9 C-14, 28 starts) – a 25 year old lefty who will be a part of the solution in the next few years. Detmers is one of two Grade 9s who form the top of the Giants' rotation this year. Lucas Giolito (Grade 9 C-14 HR-34, 33 starts) went to Boston so he could blow up his arm a short ride from quality hospitals. Griffin Canning (Grade 9 C+22 HR-21) is also here, but instructions do not call for him to start. Between the two 'aces', there are 61 starts – just over half a third of a season of relentlessly average pitching.

**SNT:**

**Michael Harris.**



*Part of the payment for Gerrit Cole, he's at least something to build around. He has talent in many areas.*



# warrenton GIANTS



Detmers: Present and future

Unfortunately, there's no Mercy Rule that would end the season on the fourth of July. So, Ryne Nelson (Grade 4 C+14 HR-15, 27 starts) and 40 year old Zack Greinke (Grade 4 C+41 HR-22, 27 starts) will entertain the fans with their cunning deliveries.

Noah Syndergaard (Grade 1, C+33 HR-42, 26 starts) will offer moments of melancholy nostalgia. Joey Wentz (Grade 1, 15 starts, 25 IP) will try to avoid getting pounded for three months before going to the bullpen to close out Warrenton's nail-biting victories. The last start goes to Spencer Turnbull (Grade 1). To paraphrase Obi Wan Kenobi

– "these are not the starters you're looking for – move along."

**BULLPEN.** The bullpen is assigned the task of cleaning up the mess left behind by the starters. We at the *Annual* would like to wish them good luck.

The closers are Trent Thornton (Grade 14\* C+33 HR-16, 31 IP) and Joey Wentz (Grade 14\*, 25 IP) in the months when he's not starting. They won't be up together, so the 56 innings should be enough for close and late situations.

The core of the bullpen is two starters who will probably pitch almost every day. Griffin Canning (Grade 9 C+22 HR-21, 127 innings) and Jake Bird (Grade 7\* C+15 HR+36, 89 IP) are the setup men and their 215 innings will be used when Warrenton has a chance to win a game. When things get out of hand, Gary Anderson (Grade 6\*, 36 IP) and Brendan White (Grade 6\* HR+25, 41 IP) will do what they can.

There are plenty of mops. Mason Englert (Grade 3\* C+21 HR-26, 56 IP), Jonathan Hernandez (Grade

4 C-22 HR+15, 32 IP), Samuel Bachman (Grade 11 C-61 HR+62, 17 IP) and Mike Grove (Grade 1 C+23 HR-16, 69 IP) add another 174 innings of pure desperation.

This pitching staff is what you would expect to see from a team aiming to snag the first pick in the 2025 draft.

**Offense: 4.0**  
**Largely placeholders.**

One interesting question for the Rebuilding Illuminati: does this team hang on to Mike Trout (1-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks + 42, 82 games)? Trout is 34 years old in August, so one assumes he's on roller skates. If he has a great year, September could be interesting as contenders jockey for position.

The Guy We All Want is Adley Rutschman (1-0-0, 9 hits, 5 walks, 154 games). Rutschman came over in a trade from Las Vegas a year ago and has quickly established himself as the best young catcher in the game. Ray will stretch this guy out to 162 games by limiting him by plate appearances. You don't see a lot of catchers play 162 games.



Rutschman: Guy we want

Another A-Lister is 23-year-old Michael Harris (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks, 32 SSN for 24 SBA). He was one of the keys players on Riverwoolf's first contending team in eight years, so of course he gets traded here. Ray will happily run him out in lineups for the next decade.

There are two other cards that are half-decent. Mike Yastrzemski (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-10 R+1, 106 games) is a holdover from the days when the team was stockpiling San Francisco Giants. He'll be a nice source of power for five months. Ryan Noda (1-0-0, 7 hits, 6 walks+42, 128 games) is the regular first baseman. His oddball card will be amusing and give fits to some pitchers with poor control.

The rest of the lineup consists of guys who are best advised to rent, not buy. Matt Vierling (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks) is the third baseman and fifth place hitter. Ji Hwan Bae (0-6, 8 hits, 3 walks, 28 SSN for 33 SBA) will play second and steal a few bases. Joey Gallo

(1-1-0-0, 6 hits, 5 walks) will prove that you can hit under .200 as long as you hit home runs. Eric Haase (2 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks, L-10 R+2) is the DH. Joey Wendle (3 0s, 8 hits) is the regular shortstop.

Outside of Harris and Rutschman these guys are place holders - nothing more.

**Defense: 3.0**  
**Only a few standouts.**

There are two guys that really matter - Andy Rutschman (C9, Th+0) and Michael Harris (OF3, 32 arm). They will be here in three years when Warrenton is back in the playoff conversation. Ray will not have to expend draft capital to acquire a catcher or a center fielder. Both are outstanding defenders.

Mike Yastrzemski (OF3, 30 arm) is solid in one outfield corner. Matt Vierling (3B4, OF3, 30 arm) is a very good outfielder who will spend most of the season at third base. Mike Trout (OF2, 33 arm) is competent in the outfield as well.

Other guys are pretty much just getting some sun. Ryan Noda (1B3, OF1, 30 arm) plays first. Ji Hwan Bae (2B7, SS7, OF2, 30 arm) plays second. Joey Wendle (SS8) is the regular shortstop. Joey Gallo (OF1, 35 arm) has a good arm, but may experience turbulence in right field. There's no defensive stud to replace them, so there's no cavalry coming.

**Bench: 2.0**  
**In case of injury, break glass.**

These guys will play only if needed: *in case of injury, break glass*. Jake Bauers (1-0-0-0, 7 hits, 4 hits) has a little power. Llover Peguero (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+6 R-5) can hit lefties. But there really isn't a reason to take these guys out of the envelope.

**4th** Last in the Williams. Warrenton and Northboro are both poor teams, but no one in TBL is as deep in the rebuilding swamp as the Giants. It may take a surprise from someone like Turnbull or Fedde, returning from injuries, to give some hope; Warrenton has a big draft in 2025, which will help. Next year, this team will look completely different.



Turnbull, Fedde:  
Comeback kids?



**warrenton GIANTS**

Ages of players on the Warrenton roster, as of 07/01/2024:

- 40: Greinke
- 33: Wendle, Yastrzemski
- 32: Ta. Scott, Trout
- 31: Haase, Syndergaard, Turnbull
- 30: Gallo, Thornton
- 29: Delay, Giolito
- 28: Azocar, Bauers, Bird, Canning, Noda
- 27: G. Anderson, Grove, J. Hernandez, Vierling
- 26: Nelson, Rutschman, Wentz
- 25: Colas, B. White
- 24: Bachman, Bae, Detmers, Englert
- 23: J. Diaz, M. Harris, Peguero

**TQ: 11.0**



---

# breakthrough

There are fringe players on TBL rosters right now who might be important players on rosters in 2024. Some of those names appear in the list below. Some won't make it, but last year's list included Corbin Carroll, Gunnar Henderson, MacKenzie Gore, Riley Adams, and Kyle Bradish – as usual, a pretty good list (though our top 10 was a bit disappointing).

---



**1** **Evan Carter, OF, Rye.**  
A true five tool player, he will likely be in the Rye lineup for years to come. He's the real deal.



**6** **Colton Cowser, OF, New Westminster.**  
Just a speed option this year, he's got a minor league track record that will come through in the majors in 2024.



**2** **Jordan Westburg, 3B, Northboro.**  
Power and speed are both part of his game. Could solve the Northboro third base hole that has been there for years.



**7** **Masyn Winn, SS, Munich.**  
Some raw power will come through. A good glove too.



**3** **Cole Ragans, P, Knoxville.**  
If he can harness his control he could be a top starter; the change of venue helped a lot.



**8** **Reese Olson, P, Hudson.**  
A very young hard thrower, he could have significant upside in the future.



**4** **Brayan Bello, P, Vegas.**  
An emerging ace, he could be Boston's – and Vegas' – number 1 starter in years to come.



**9** **Korey Lee, C, Brobdingnag.**  
A nice waiver pickup that's nothing but a glove right now, but there may be a bat in the future.



**5** **Logan O'Hoppe, C, Melrose.**  
A good fit for a skill position, he's got a great bat – which is what Melrose has always been about.



**10** **Alec Marsh, P, New Westminster.**  
Picked up in the waiver draft, he may emerge as a solid reliever.

---

**Honorable mention:** Jo Adell, OF, Hoboken; Daironn Blanco, OF, Calusa; J. J. Bleday, OF, Kansas; Jose Butto, P, Northboro; Jose Caballero, SS, Hudson; Lucas Erceg, P, Calusa; Erick Fedde, P, Warrenton; David Fry, C, Rye; Vaughn Grissom, 2B, Melrose; Matthew Liberatore, P, Vegas; Nick Lodolo, P, Munich; Yunior Marte, P, Gotham City; Trevor Megill, P, Melrose; Brandon Pfaadt, P, Columbus; Sixto Sanchez, P, Maracaibo; Jared Shuster, P, Blue Hill; Josh Smith, 3B, Hudson; Nolan Schanuel, 1B, Brobdingnag; Tyler Soderstrom, C, Brobdingnag; Spencer Torkelson, 1B, Munich; Spencer Turnbull, P, Warrenton; Drew Waters, OF, Grand Cayman; Garrett Whitlock, P, Midwest; Jacob Young, OF, Munich.

---

---

# 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. Eight of our top ten last year were top 2024 choices (the other two were taken early as well). Eight of our honorable mentions made it to round 1 as well. You be the judge.

---



## 1 Jackson Holiday, IF, Baltimore.

MLB's overall #1, he will be a top choice in TBL next year. The Orioles are taking their time with him, but he'll make his impact soon.



## 6 Jared Jones, P, Pittsburgh.

He's been lights out in his early appearances in the majors. He won't go all season like this, but he's clearly a top arm.



## 2 Yoshinobu Yamamoto, P, L.A. (N).

A big splash overseas signing, he is starting to hit his stride in MLB.



## 7 Shota Imanaga, P, Chicago (N).

A bit overshadowed by Yamamoto, he's been lights out early on with the Cubs. He'll go early in our draft.



## 3 Jackson Chourio, OF, Milwaukee.

Hard-hitting prospect who is ready to make a big splash in the majors. Power and speed.



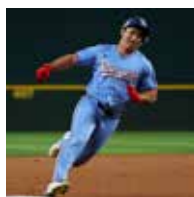
## 8 Jung-Hoo Lee, San Francisco.

The injury to his shoulder may affect whether he actually belongs on this list, but he's a top-notch player.



## 4 Mason Miller, P, Oakland.

A hard thrower, he could be someone's closer at this time next year.



## 9 Wyatt Langford, OF, Texas.

A top prospect, he's already making highlight reels for the Rangers. He'll be an impact player in 2024.



## 5 Paul Skenes, P, Pittsburgh.

His arrival in the majors was much heralded, and he'll make a major impact for the Pirates in 2024.



## 10 Michael Busch, 1B, Chicago (N).

A former Dodgers first rounder, he's a nice power addition to the Cubs' lineup.

---

**Honorable mention:** Samuel Basallo, C, Baltimore; Junior Caminero, 3B, Tampa Bay; Max Clark, OF, Detroit; Dylan Crews, OF, Washington; Pete Crow-Armstrong, OF, Chicago (N); Jassen Dominguez, New York (A); Kyle Harrison, P, San Francisco; Walker Jenkins, OF, Minnesota; Jackson Jobe, P, Detroit; Colt Keith, 3B, Detroit; Jordan Lawlar, SS, Arizona; Marcelo Mayer, SS, Boston; Jackson Merrill, OF, San Diego; Ceddanne Rafaela, IF/OF, Boston; Ethan Salas, C, San Diego; James Wood, OF, Washington.

---

## **captain jack**

by Craig Musselman

*The Annual staff appreciates Craig Musselman stepping up to give us a retrospective on Jack Chapman. I met him during his first tour through TBL, and always found him an interesting and knowledgeable baseball manager and fan, a little – just a little – larger than life.*

*He will be missed – Ed.*

“Captain” Jack Chapman passed away suddenly in October, 2023 after managing the TBL Warrenton (*née* Fair Oaks) Giants for eleven years. In APBA, Jack was larger than life. He was masterful in managing his roster, having completely broken down his team three times over the eleven years, while returning to playoff contention within a year or two each time.

His team was never in the doldrums for long. He won one TBL championship, in 2015, and lost in the playoffs four times. His best team, in 2022, got summarily bounced out of the playoffs by Hudson in five games. Such is TBL baseball. A lifelong Giants fan, he was always on the lookout for a Giant, but there were recurring objectives of breaking down or quickly rebuilding his roster. He loved

double-switches, and detested the designated hitter, so much so that he played TBL games with his pitchers hitting versus teams using the DH, until baseball changed forever. His three division opponents graciously agreed to accommodate his passion by continuing to reject the DH. He flew cross country repeatedly from his home in Oregon for TBL drafts held in Massachusetts.



Jack was larger than life beyond TBL. For service on a helicopter crew in Vietnam, he was awarded a Bronze Star. He attended UCal Berkeley and had a long career with Bechtel, the global design build company.

He retired from that to start his offshore fishing career, with his charter fishing boat named after his wife.

I’m sure we all have known a handful of people who we’d describe as larger than life. Jack was one of them. Those of us in the TBL were fortunate to have known him.

---

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](mailto:rmurph3@comcast.net)**

or TBL's unofficial recruiter and analyst, Walter Hunt, at

**[hotc@walterhunt.com](mailto:hotc@walterhunt.com)**.