



Padres Press Clips

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Padres could bring up Luis Urias early, but probably not right away

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 3/1/18

Luis Urias is on the verge of the major leagues at 20 years old. Bartolo Colon is on the verge of retirement after 20 years in the major leagues.

A double by Urias off Colon in the second inning of a Cactus League game Thursday continued the prospect's impressive spring, one that is showing what he may well do in the regular season in a Padres uniform — probably sooner than later but not right away.

“He has good at-bat after good at-bat,” manager Andy Green said. “... He's a guy we're excited about, and we know at some point in time he's going to be impactful for us. We still like the other guys who are competing for that job. He's doing everything he possibly can.

“I think he's got some more to learn. I think there's things he can continue to pick up, and his time is coming. We'll see how quickly he forces our hand.”

It remains likely that Carlos Asuaje and/or Cory Spangenberg are manning second base to start the season. Asuaje, who hit .270/.334/.362 in 89 games for the Padres last year, is playing to good reviews so far this spring. Spangenberg has been sidelined by a wrist injury but is expected to play soon.

Further, the Padres pushing back Urias' arrival until at least the 16th day of the season would give them an extra year of control before he reaches free agency.

What Urias has done this spring, though, is leave little doubt his future is soon — and it may well look like what the Padres have anticipated since shortly after they signed him out of Mexico in 2013.

All four of his hits (in nine at-bats) have been doubles. He has also walked three times. His swing and miss at a pitch high out of the zone gave him his second strikeout of the spring. It was a rarity for the player who led the Double-A Texas League with a .398 on-base percentage last season.

For the record, Urias was born exactly two months after Colon made his major league debut on April 3, 1997. Perhaps they could meet in a real big-league game in late June when the Padres visit Texas.

Kids, kids, more kids

In the bottom of the fifth inning, Urias became the old man in the Padres infield.

At first was 19-year-old Hudson Potts. At third was Gabe Arias, two days removed from his 18th birthday. At shortstop was 17-year-old Justin Lopez.

Additionally, 18-year-old center fielder Jeisson Rosario checked in. In the sixth, 19-year-old Esteury Ruiz replaced Urias, and the Padres finished the game with an all-teenage infield.

Rosario made a nice play coming in to catch a line drive and throw out a runner at the plate for a double play to end the eighth inning. He also started to run in from his position after catching the second out of the fifth.

Potts, Arias and Lopez all hit singles. Arias' sliding grab of a hard grounder and throw to first was the game's final out.

"There were some really nice things," Green said of the teenagers, one of whom he evidently didn't get a birthday card. "That play to end the game, that's a 17-year-old on a major league spring training field making a backhand sliding play in a position he never plays except when he plays with us."

The prospects are expected to play fewer innings as veterans play more and go longer in games. But the Padres had a "B" game Thursday morning in which they put a number of major leaguers.

Maki mania

The first batter to face Kazuhisa Makita hit a 54 mph curveball into left field for a single. The next batter struck out swinging late on a third-pitch fastball clocked at 78 mph.

The Japanese submariner surrendered a run in his first spring training game in the United States with the aid of a wild pitch, but his mix of pitches from all angles and at all speeds made for only the one well-struck ball. The inning of work was about what the Padres expected.

The exceedingly polite Makita said he was nervous — and that it was “awkward” pitching against the Rangers, who also tried to sign him this offseason.

“As far as speed-wise, I wasn’t trying to throw it hard-hard,” Makita said through an interpreter. “But as far as the high fastball, I felt like it was working. I was pretty happy with that.”

Extra bases

- It is becoming clearer almost by the day that Franchy Cordero will be virtually impossible to keep off the opening day roster. The outfielder, who is hitting .385/.429/1.000 in Cactus League games, hit a ball to right-center in a “B” game against the White Sox on Thursday morning and made it to third base standing up. This was two days after he hit one of the easiest inside-the-park home runs anyone could recall seeing. Said Green: “Franchy’s got every tool there is. He’s getting better and better, too. We’re really excited about him, and he’s going to make a really strong push to be on the club.”
- It was a big day for Colin Rea and Robbie Erlin, who each threw two innings in the “B” game. It was their first time throwing in game conditions since their respective Tommy John surgeries in 2016. Both looked reasonably sharp and were mostly pleased to have gotten back on the mound.

Christian Villanueva stays hot for Padres with grand slam

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 3/1/18

Score: Padres 9, Rangers 9

Batter's box: Christian Villanueva hit a grand slam in the third inning. He has two home runs and seven total hits in 14 spring at-bats. ... Before Villanueva's slam, the Padres scored a run on three walks and Chase Headley's bloop single. The Padres averaged 2.8 walks a game in 2017, which contributed to their league-low .299 on-base percentage. ... Wil Myers' first-inning home run was his first of the spring. ... Hunter Renfroe doubled off left-hander Brett Martin. He is 2-for-4 with a home run against lefties and 1-for-13 against right-handers this spring.

Balls and strikes: Starter Tyson Ross got five outs to begin his outing, then loaded the bases on a walk, single and hit batter before getting a strikeout to get out of his second start without allowing a run. ... Chris Young allowed two runs on three hits in his first inning following Ross, then pitched a scoreless fourth. ... Cal Quantrill, the Padres' first pick in the 2016 draft (eighth overall), made his big-league spring training debut and didn't record an out until three runs had scored and a would-be fourth was tagged out at home on a double. Quantrill allowed four runs on four hits, a walk and a hit batter in the one inning.

Extra bases: Headley, playing in his first game of the spring, dove to his left to spear a hard grounder in the hole and throw out Ronald Guzman in the fourth. ... Myers made a nice throw on a line from shallow right-center that almost got a runner at third base.

On Deck: Royals, 12:10 PT at Peoria. Bryan Mitchell will make his second start for San Diego.

Padres catcher Raffy Lopez gained perspective from tragedy, struggle

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 3/1/18

In the last four seasons, Raffy Lopez has played for four major-league organizations and, briefly, for the Bridgeport Bluefish of the independent Atlantic League.

He signed a minor league deal with the Padres this winter in hopes of earning their backup catcher spot, and it looked like a decent proposition until spring training started.

His task got much more difficult a few days into camp when the team signed 10-year veteran A.J. Ellis.

“You roll with everything,” Lopez said the day after Ellis arrived. “It doesn’t change anything.”

And before anyone rolls their eyes at a platitude as well-worn as sandlot catchers gear, they should know that in Lopez’s case some clichés are truer than others.

“For me,” he said, “the way my career has gone, and with some things off the field I’ve dealt with, I just gained a perspective. ... I learned you get to go home at the end of the day and take a deep breath.”

Two years ago, on the eve of Lopez’s wedding, two hours before the rehearsal dinner, his mother suffered a brain aneurysm. She was in a coma while her son recited his vows, and she died a short while later.

“It was the worst thing that ever happened to me, but it turned into the best thing,” Lopez said. “It just changed my outlook on things.”

Lopez, 30, maintains the intensity and drive to play at this level. He isn’t seen sitting still very often, hustling to the batting cage between catching live batting practice and bullpens, working early and late on blocking balls in the dirt. Catchers are the busiest players in spring training.

He has simply gained the perspective that what is going to happen is going to happen.

“Am I going to be upset if I do poorly? Yes,” he said. “But I’m going to go home tonight and feel differently than I used to.”

It took a year of severe struggles to absorb that into his identity.

Lopez spent part of the 2016 season that followed his mother’s death with the Cincinnati Reds’ Triple-A affiliate and also a month in the Atlantic League. He hit .213/.262/.297 with one home run in 155 at-bats in Triple-A.

“I had a hard time dealing with it,” he said. “There were other deaths in the family that happened in that span too. There was a lot of bitterness, anger. I had the worst year of my life.”

The game he loved turned into something he despised.

“It became my enemy in a sense,” Lopez said. “If I lined out, I was upset. I was thinking, ‘I should have good luck now.’ ... I remember going through that year hating showing up to the field, hating everything.”

He drove home to St. Louis at the end of that season, on his 29th birthday. His wife was asleep when he arrived. He spent the next day as he had on the drive home — contemplating his situation, the past and future and how it all might be different.

His wife, an OB-GYN resident, arrived home from work and joined him and their dog on the couch.

“I don’t want to have another year like this,” Lopez eventually told her.

“Neither do I,” she replied.

Now, Lopez remembers it simply as a decision to stop wallowing.

“Something went off in me that said, ‘You can’t live this way,’ ” he recalled. “I just decided to kind of appreciate things more. ... We just decided we can’t live angry, pissed, feeling unlucky.”

He hit .293/.368/.551 with 12 homers in Triple-A last year and homered four times in 54 at-bats for the Toronto Blue Jays. He said he made some “swing changes” but that the real difference was the change in mentality.

“It’s just a different outlook that allows me to be me, allows me to play a little more relaxed,” he said. “Obviously, the game is important and there is a lot of livelihoods the line, a lot of money on the line. But you also realize the other side.”

It would be difficult for the Padres to cast aside Ellis, who is a solid defender and has already established himself as a clubhouse leader. That sort of presence is something the Padres have purposefully sought in multiple additions to their roster.

But Lopez is doing what he can with the deep-seated conviction that is all he can do.

A home run and a single Tuesday against the Mariners were exactly what the Padres would want from his left-handed bat off the bench.

His time in the majors — 83 plate appearances in 39 games over parts of three summers — has been spent with the Cubs, Reds and Blue Jays. He also was at Triple-A with the Angels organization for a time in 2015.

In all, between the minor and major leagues, this is his 15th clubhouse since being drafted by the Cubs in the 16th round in 2011 out of Florida State.

“I feel that’s what makes me attractive,” he said. “Just plug me in. I’m like a chameleon. I blend in.”

He gets it, too. He brings perspective.

“It’s a difficult lifestyle,” he said. “But you can only play for so long.”

Padres' Rea, Erlin take big step toward return

AJ Cassavell MLB.com 3/1/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- It was only a "B" game on a Peoria back field, played in front of a couple dozen spectators. But to Robbie Erlin and Colin Rea, it meant a whole heck of a lot more.

Both Rea and Erlin had their 2016 seasons shut down because of elbow trouble, and both would later undergo Tommy John surgery. They missed the entirety of the '17 campaign.

And so Thursday marked the first time that Rea or Erlin had faced Major League hitters in their recovery processes. If they were rusty, it didn't show. Facing White Sox hitters, both pitchers tossed two scoreless innings, recording two strikeouts apiece.

"Nothing simulates being in a game," said Rea, who worked out of a first-and-third, none-out jam in the sixth. "I told myself to just be free and easy. I felt like my fastball was coming out well, and my timing was good. I just tried to ride that."

So often linked by their 2016 surgeries, Rea and Erlin took similar roads back to the mound this spring. But there were a few differences. Most notably: Erlin finished his recovery late last season.

The Padres weren't about to rush Erlin back to the big league mound. Instead, they set him on a schedule that allowed him to pitch instructional league games in September and October before he was shut down for the offseason.

"A lot of guys blow through an offseason, throwing, and at some point the next season they get fatigued or their innings are limited or there's some sort of restriction," Erlin said. "The thought was to finish rehab last year, get a normal offseason and approach this year as a normal season."

Rea's story was a bit more complicated. The Padres dealt him to Miami in July 2016, but he was returned to San Diego in a separate deal after suffering a partially torn UCL. Rea didn't undergo Tommy John surgery until November, and Thursday marked his first time facing hitters.

Both Erlin and Rea are eyeing places in the rotation, which currently features eight pitchers battling for three spots. Erlin is out of options, and there's a chance the club would keep him as a relief option.

"They both have an opportunity to make the club, both have an opportunity to impact us for a long time," said Padres manager Andy Green. "They've put a ton of work in behind the scenes. ... They've both pushed incredibly hard. They're both wired right. It's good to see them back on a field fighting for a job."

Camp battles

- Luis Perdomo is an early favorite for one of those three available rotation places. He made his first appearance of the spring, starting the "B" game against Chicago, and he was hit hard in the first inning. Perdomo surrendered three runs on four hits, as the inning was halted with just one out (a classic "B" game quirk). He bounced back in the second, needing only five pitches to retire the side.
- Outfield candidate Franchy Cordero tripled in Thursday's "B" game, giving him five extra-base hits in the six games he's played this spring.

Injury updates

- Left-hander Matt Strahm, who underwent knee surgery last July, is nearing a return to game action. The Padres are still mulling whether to use him in the rotation or bullpen. Should they choose the latter, he'd almost certainly be ready for Opening Day. But if they decide to stretch him into a starter's role, it's likelier he'd need some time in the Minors.
- Carter Capps, who had October surgery to address thoracic outlet syndrome, threw a live batting-practice session Thursday, and Green noted the righty reliever could be "a couple days out" from pitching in a game. The Padres are hopeful Capps will be at full health by Opening Day.

Up next

Bryan Mitchell starts Friday when the Padres host the Royals at 12:10 p.m. PT, live on MLB.TV. The right-hander, who came to San Diego in an offseason trade with the Yankees, tossed two scoreless frames in his debut last week. It's possible Friday's game serves as something of a reunion, too. Eric Hosmer could face his former team, though his status in Friday's lineup is uncertain.

Hosmer mentoring SD's next wave of talent

AJ Cassavell MLB.com 3/1/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Earlier this week, the Padres' coaching staff devised a situational-hitting contest called "target practice." They chose four veterans to serve as captains who would divide the camp into four teams.

The newest Padre, Eric Hosmer, was one of those captains. And when it was his turn to pick, he chose a couple players with whom he's become very familiar: shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. and second baseman Luis Urias, the two best hitting prospects in the system.

When Hosmer considered signing with San Diego during the offseason, he did plenty of research into the organization's future. In particular, he liked the potential of the farm system, and he figured he could have an impact on some of those young players.

"To watch the videos and just read up on these guys was extremely helpful," Hosmer said. "... But that's one thing. To get out here and get on the field with them and see how they go about it, it fires you up as a player, because the talent's real."

It's no coincidence that Hosmer routinely found himself in batting-practice groups alongside Tatis and Urias. The Padres have done their best to mix their youngsters and veterans during drill work.

Beyond that, however, Hosmer has clearly taken to Tatis and Urias, who could one day share an infield with him in Petco Park. They've spent time chatting around the cage and in the clubhouse, with Hosmer making himself available for any questions.

"It's great learning from a guy that's been around this game for so long, is a World Series champion," said Tatis. "You just learn a lot. We're always having fun with him, and it's great to be a part of."

Added Urias: "I see him like a leader. He laughs with us and wants to have fun with us, but when we have to work, he works hard."

Urias was playing instructional ball as a 17-year-old when Hosmer led the Royals to a World Series title in 2015. Tatis recalled watching Hosmer in consecutive Fall Classics as a teen growing up in his native Dominican Republic.

"I always admired him, because he's a great player," Tatis said. "Kansas City never backed down, played hard, and he was a part of that."

Hosmer has already compared these Padres to the early-2010s Royals, who were loaded with homegrown talent. Tatis and Urias are ranked eighth and 36th, respectively, among the game's top prospects, according to MLB Pipeline.

They're both destined to start the season in the Minors. But the Padres haven't been shy about putting their top prospects on a fast track to the Major Leagues, and both could arrive in San Diego before season's end. They've impressed thus far in Spring Training.

Hosmer has certainly enjoyed working alongside the young talent in Padres camp.

"The other day, we had an infield that wasn't old enough to buy a drink yet," he joked. "The wave of talent we have coming up, it's pretty special to watch. You hear about it, you kind of hear about prospects and all that. But to finally see the guys -- and see the [pitchers] as well -- it gives you a lot to look forward to."

Ultimately, Hosmer's team fell to A.J. Ellis' squad in the first round of target practice. But Hosmer wasn't about to second-guess his selections.

"Tatis and Luis are two of the best players walking in this room," Hosmer said. "If it's any competitive situation, I'd want to pick those guys."

Makita, Green pleased with righty's SD debut

AJ Cassavell, MLB.com, 3/1/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Kaz Makita's long-awaited Cactus League debut went about as expected -- slow fastballs, slower breaking balls and some serious deception in his submarine-style delivery.

The 33-year-old right-hander signed a two-year deal with the Padres during the offseason, after spending seven years with the Seibu Lions in Japan. He's expected to work as something of a righty specialist in the San Diego 'pen this year.

Even by sidearm standards, Makita is quirky, featuring a six-pitch mix and peppering all parts of the strike zone. He pitched the sixth inning of the Padres' 9-9 tie against Texas on Thursday, allowing a run on two hits with one strikeout.

"He was solid," said Padres manager Andy Green. "About what I was hoping for -- just get on the mound, get through it, feel good physically. ... You saw, when those fastballs are up in the zone, guys don't take great swings at him."

No pitch has generated more buzz in Padres camp this spring than Makita's slow curveball. He used it multiple times in his live batting-practice session last week, getting a big-time swing-and-miss from Manuel Margot.

Makita only threw one curveball on Thursday, and he left it thigh high. Rangers third baseman Christian Lopes macked it to left field for a leadoff single. The reading on the stadium scoreboard: 54 mph.

Makita's slider and changeup were clocked in the high 60s, while his fastball touched 81. After the outing, Makita noted that there's more in the tank, and that he was merely getting his feet wet.

"Speed-wise, I wasn't trying to throw it hard-hard," Makita said. "But as far as the high fastball, I felt like it was working. I was pretty happy with that."

Makita got Jose Cardona to strike out swinging with a heater up in the zone, and Luis Marte popped harmlessly to first on the same pitch. Lopes, who stole second, would come around to score when Charles Leblanc chopped a single through the left side before Makita escaped the inning with a ground ball.

The Padres have lined things up so that Makita's throw days don't line up with many National League West opponents. When they do, Green plans to hold Makita out of game action in favor of work on a back-field mound. Green and the Padres believe Makita's deception is one of his most important traits, and they're attempting to maximize it in any way possible.

"I don't want guys that he's going to see all year to see him, because there's some value in such a unique look and not having exposure [to it]," Green said. "We'll adjust his schedule accordingly."

That's just fine with Makita.

"My job, when I get the call, is to go out there and be ready to pitch," he said. "I'm [OK] with whatever [Green] says."

Padres phenom Tatis Jr born to play in the big leagues

Bernie Wilson, AP, 3/2/18

PEORIA, Ariz. (AP) — There's no question Fernando Tatis Jr.'s birthright is to play major league baseball.

Having just turned 19, the phenom is in his first big league camp with the San Diego Padres. He's one of baseball's top prospects, is the son of a former major leaguer and, until Eric Hosmer signed as a free agent, was probably the one player in the organization that fans of the downtrodden Padres were most eager to see.

If the shortstop plays as well as he did last year in making the jump from low Class A to Double-A, he could get his first call-up, perhaps in September.

Why is he so good, so young?

"This kid was born in the big leagues," his father said from San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, which often is referred to as "The Cradle of Shortstops."

Tatis Jr. was born on Jan. 2, 1999, just before his dad's third big league season. Fernando Tatis' 11-year big league career ended just eight years ago.

"I was already there playing for the Cardinals," the elder Tatis said. "As soon as he opened his eyes, everything he watched was big league baseball."

Fittingly, Tatis Jr. is the face of the Padres' rebuild around young players. He was obtained as the team scrapped its failed win-now attempt with high-priced veterans, coming over from the White Sox in the deal that sent James Shields to Chicago in June 2016.

Tatis Jr. said he talks with his father by phone every day.

The senior Tatis will visit his son in spring training soon. Tatis Jr. hit an impressive opposite-field home run in his second Cactus League at-bat and has been making nice plays at shortstop.

"He's happy for me, man," said Tatis Jr., the youngest player in any big league camp. "He brought me into this game since I was a kid and now here we are, since a young age and doing stuff and playing the good baseball."

Tatis recalls being a clubhouse kid.

“I remember my dad was taking me to the field. It was fun. It was great. It was a thing that I love and that was the first love that I brought to this game.”

Padres general manager A.J. Preller was with the Texas Rangers when he first saw Tatis Jr. when he was 14 or 15. Tatis Jr. ended up signing with the White Sox. That Padres scouting department continued to follow Tatis Jr., so when the Padres moved Shields, the young player was a “priority guy,” the GM said.

“When you see guys you like, that are interesting, obviously the son of a big leaguer and everything like that, those guys stick with you,” Preller said.

The GM likes Tatis Jr.’s lineage.

“In general, being familiar with being around the ballpark, being in the clubhouse, having an understanding what offseasons look like, and work ethics, all of those things come into play,” Preller said. “You’re given another experience at an earlier age than guys obviously if your dad didn’t play. We see it as an advantage from a bloodline standpoint. Not all the time, but the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree in a lot of these situations.”

Tatis Jr. had a big 2017 season, when he started at Low-A Fort Wayne and tore up the Midwest League before being promoted to Double-A San Antonio in August. Spring training will give the Padres a better look at how close he is to coming up and, if expectations play out, stop the revolving door at shortstop.

The Padres have had a different starting shortstop each of the last four opening days. They traded for Freddy Galvis, who has one year left on his contract, to keep the spot warm for Tatis.

“I think I’m ready,” said Tatis who at 6-foot-3 is four inches taller than his father. “Everything’s a process, but what can I say. I’ve worked hard for it and am still going to keep going until I get a call.”

Preller said Tatis likely will start the season at Double-A. A promotion to the bigs will depend on a lot of factors, a big one being how he does against pitchers in the Texas League.

“The good ones, they come quick,” Preller said. “We’re going to try to challenge guys. We’re not going to put them where they drown.”

Last Friday, in his second Cactus League at-bat, Tatis Jr. hit a monster opposite-field homer on a seemingly effortless two-strike swing.

He struck out three times in his next game and had two more 0-for-3 games, but then had two hits during a seven-run sixth inning Wednesday , as well as a nice defensive play.

Tatis and other young players “are going to push as hard as they can to be here as fast as they can,” manager Andy Green said. “We want them to do that. It’s our job to tap the brakes and take our time with them if we think they need more time and seasoning. They’re clearly dynamic baseball players and we’re excited to have them.”

Cal Quantrill, himself the son of a former big leaguer, played with Tatis Jr. last year.

“He’s the real deal,” Quantrill said. “He’s obviously extremely young but he’s gifted well, well beyond his years. We shall see.”

Tatis’ biggest fan is his father.

“I’m telling you, they’re going to have a shortstop forever because he’s only 19 years old. Oh my God. He might be there 20 years. Who knows?” Fernando Tatis said with a laugh.