

Cincinnati Reds Press Clippings February 4, 2019

THIS DAY IN REDS HISTORY

1960-Edd Roush falls 56 votes short, and Eppa Rixey falls 60 votes short, of election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum

MLB.COM

Reds, Marlins deep in talks about Realmuto
Miami eyeing a bounty of prospects in return for All-Star backstop
By Joe Frisaro MLB.com @JoeFrisaro
Feb. 3rd, 2019

MIAMI -- The Marlins and Reds remain engaged in trade talks for All-Star catcher J.T. Realmuto, and one package being discussed includes catcher Tucker Barnhart and infield prospect Jonathan India.

MLB.com's Jonathan Mayo on Saturday reported that Barnhart, India and one or more "lesser prospects" are being discussed as a return for Realmuto. Another source told MLB.com that along with the Reds, the Marlins remain in substantive dialogue with the Padres, Dodgers, Braves and Rays.

A few days ago, the Rays appeared to be out of consideration, but they have re-engaged.

With Spring Training 13 days away for the Marlins, the organization is in advanced conversations with these clubs. Miami is expected to receive two to four players in return for Realmuto, who is expected to be dealt before camp opens.

One factor complicating the situation is finding a replacement for Realmuto to work with Miami's young pitching staff. Barnhart has been a Gold Glove winner.

Cincinnati has made a strong push of late for Realmuto, who by most advanced metrics was the top catcher in the sport in 2018. The Marlins have had interest in several of the Reds' top prospects, including infielder Nick Senzel, outfielder Taylor Trammell and India. According to MLB Pipeline, Senzel is the No. 6 overall prospect, Trammell No. 16, and India, No. 53.

The No. 5 overall pick in the 2018 MLB Draft, India is a former University of Florida standout as well as a South Florida native. He played high school ball at American Heritage in Plantation, Fla.

Realmuto, 27, was an All-Star for the first time in 2018. The Oklahoma native is regarded as the most athletic catcher in the sport, and he hit .277 last season, while setting career highs for home runs (21) and RBIs (74). In his second year of arbitration, Realmuto is signed for \$5.9 million in 2019, and he is eligible for free agency after the '20 season.

Joe Frisaro has covered the Marlins for MLB.com since 2002. Follow him on Twitter @JoeFrisaro and listen to his podcast.

Votto ranked No. 3 1B by MLB Network
MLB.com
Feb. 3rd, 2019

MLB Network's countdown of baseball's best players at each position will run every Saturday night through Feb. 9.

The fourth installment of the "Top 10 Right Now!" series featured the game's top first basemen and starting pitchers.

The five-week program hosted by Brian Kenny used rankings based on player performance over the last two seasons, a number of offensive and defensive metrics, both advanced data and traditional numbers and analysis by the MLB Network research team.

The series features appearances from MLB Network on-air personalities and former Major Leaguers Eric Byrnes, Cliff Floyd, Mike Lowell, Dan Plesac, Harold Reynolds, Ron Darling, Jim Thome and Joe Girardi, as well as roundtable discussions with Kenny, president of SABR Vince Gennaro, the Ringer's Ben Lindbergh and MLB.com analyst Mike Petriello. Each episode also featured a fan-generated Top 10 Right Now list compiled via voting on MLB Network's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages using #Top10RightNow.

Below is a breakdown of this year's rankings results:

Top 10 first basemen right now

Paul Goldschmidt is a human metronome: Over the last four seasons he has played in at least 155 games while batting a combined .310/.410/.538 with an average of 32 homers and finishing in the top 11 in NL MVP voting each year. He'll get a chance to build on a potential Hall of Fame resume in St. Louis this year.

1. Paul Goldschmidt
2. Freddie Freeman
3. Joey Votto
4. Max Muncy
5. Anthony Rizzo
6. Matt Olson
7. Justin Smoak
8. Jesus Aguilar
9. Rhys Hoskins
10. Jose Abreu

Players with the most WAR for their current club

By Will Leitch MLB.com @williamfleitch

Feb. 3rd, 2019

One of the great things about baseball is that history is always being made. Every hit, every pitch, every out, it's all documented, and it's all compared to everything that came before it and everything that will someday come. When you are watching your team, you are watching players you'll be thinking about, in one way or another, the rest of your life.

So, today we are looking at the players on each active roster who are making history for their franchises every time they step on the field. We're looking at the player who has compiled the highest WAR (per Baseball Reference) for his current team so far in his career. This doesn't mean the player who has the highest career bWAR in his entire career; Robinson Cano isn't the pick for the Mets, for example. It's the one who has provided the most value in his career for his current team. The great thing about this: They'll be adding to this every day, and, when they're done, they'll end up being a legend in their own town. And you were there to see it all.

Reds: Joey Votto, 58.8 WAR

CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

How Cody Reed went from an 83-mph prep pitcher to the Cincinnati Reds

Bobby Nightengale, Cincinnati Enquirer

Published 1:00 p.m. ET Feb. 3, 2019 | Updated 1:14 p.m. ET Feb. 3, 2019

For high school pitchers, velocity is their currency. How hard can you throw? If they can hit 90 mph with their fastball, it usually means they are considered one of the top pitchers in their towns.

Cody Reed, who made his Major League debut with the Reds in 2016, vividly remembers the first time he found out he was throwing 90 mph. It just took him longer than most pro pitchers.

Growing up in Horn Lake, Mississippi, about 15 miles from Memphis, Reed was considered a great high school pitcher. He led his team to a district title. He later had his jersey retired. But there was one number that defined his arm: 83 mph.

It's a story, Reed says, that he loves sharing when he speaks to young baseball players. He wasn't much different than them.

During Reed's senior season, he had one scholarship offer to play college baseball: Northwest Mississippi Community College, which was about a 25-minute drive from his house. When his fastball was topping out at 83 mph, he didn't see a big future in baseball. Listed at 6-foot-5, he was still skinny, and the velocity wasn't there.

"All my high school buddies, they all joke with me, like, 'Who would've thought back then, when you couldn't throw an egg and break it against the wall,'" Reed said. "That was the big joke or I couldn't break glass with my fastball."

At the end of his senior season, Reed was invited to play in the state's all-star game, which featured some SEC baseball commits. The all-star team practiced beforehand, and Reed remembers players sizing him up. Here's this tall dude, who is left-handed and wears goggles on the mound. They figured he must throw 100 mph.

"I'm throwing bullpens, and they were like, 'Man, how hard do you throw?'" Reed said. "I'm like, 'Dude, I throw like 82-83 tops. That's all I got.' They were like, 'Really?'"

During the all-star game, Reed was given an inning to pitch, like most of the other pitchers. He took the mound and started warming up on the field before his inning started. After his final warm-up pitch, the catcher threw down to second base. Infielders, as usual, quickly threw the ball around before approaching the mound.

The shortstop asked Reed how hard he could throw. Not now, Reed said. It was time to focus on the upcoming inning, not joke around.

"He put the ball in my glove," Reed said, "and held it there and said, 'Your first warm-up pitch was 90.' I was like, 'What? 90!'"

Talk about an adrenaline rush. After every pitch during the inning, Reed quickly turned his head to catch the radar gun on the scoreboard. He topped out at 91 mph. He felt so good that he asked to pitch another inning.

One of Reed's coaches in the all-star game called Bill Selby, an assistant coach at Northwest Mississippi CC, during the game to talk about his recruit.

"It's in the middle of the game, 'Hey, I'm just giving you a heads up. Cody just threw an inning and he was 88-90,'" Selby remembered. "I said, 'Cody Reed?' He said, 'Yes, and I'm just here to tell you that Ole Miss is here to talk to him.' I said, 'Well, I would too if I saw that.'"

It was a revelation for Reed. He couldn't believe it. Ole Miss was suddenly interested and offered a chance to walk-on. Reed turned down the opportunity, knowing his family probably couldn't afford to send him there without a scholarship, and decided to go to his nearby junior college.

From there, Reed's velocity jumped. He went from touching 90 with his fastball to regularly throwing 88 mph before the start of his freshman season. A solid high school basketball player, it was the first time Reed focused solely on baseball. Plus, he attacked the weight room.

Reed attributes his spike in velocity to focusing on one sport and his body filled out. Selby liked how basketball gave him more athleticism, but he finally had time to do baseball-specific workouts with his arm.

“I just think it was a big case of ‘Really, you think I could do this?’” said Selby, who went to the same high school as Reed and played in 36 games with the Reds in 2001. “I think it took some limitations he may have put on himself off. When he’s like, ‘Dude, I was throwing that hard?’ It’s almost like a sense of adrenaline.”

When Reed was a second-round pick by the Kansas City Royals in 2013, his fastball touched 97 mph – a meteoric 14 mph jump in two years. Reed jokes that he couldn’t keep track of how many times he was drug tested afterward.

This offseason, he’s continued to throw bullpens and workout at his former junior college. He said he feels confident after a few solid starts at the end of the 2018 season and he had success pitching out of the bullpen.

He recently took the school’s baseball players to dinner at Zaxby’s and Selby believes Reed could make a good coach one day with how well he relates to younger pitchers.

“Everyone’s dream in high school is to play professional baseball and me topping out at 83, I was like I don’t really have a shot because you hear about these high school guys throwing 100,” Reed said. “You’re like, ‘How? I can’t do that.’”

"It’s fun to look back now and see the hard work that I’ve put in and where I’m at now."

Today's Cincinnati Reds question: Can Votto be Votto again?

John Fay, Cincinnati Enquirer

Published 8:13 a.m. ET Feb. 3, 2019

As spring training approaches — pitchers and catchers report Feb. 12 — we take a looking at 10 questions the Reds face heading into the 2019 season. Today’s question:

Can Joey Votto return to being Joey Votto again?

A lot of the attention this offseason for the Reds has been focused on the new guys.

Yasiel Puig became a fan favorite with a whirlwind visit last week. Sonny Gray, Tanner Roark and Alex Wood are being counted on to turn around the starting rotation.

The new guys have rekindled enthusiasm in Redsland — and sold a few tickets.

But none of the newcomers is as vital to 2019 fortunes as the most-tenured Red, one Joey Votto.

Votto is coming off his worst year when he was healthy for most of the season. He hit .284 with 12 home runs and 67 RBI in 145 games. He hit .320 with 36 home runs and 100 RBI in 162 games in 2017 and finished one vote short of his second National League Most Valuable Player Award.

His slash line went from .320/.454/.578 to .284/.417/.419 in one year.

Votto turned 35 on Sept. 10. Players tend to lose power as they age. Votto doesn’t think that was what led to a down season.

“I think that there was something slightly off with my mechanics this year,” he said after ending a career-long 36-game home run drought the day before he turned 35. “Instead of balls that have carried over the fence, balls that carry through the gap with good backspin; I think I’m coming at the ball with an angle that produces balls that turn, topspin or fade. I’m never going to be one of those guys that hits balls that just are hit so hard that no matter what direction – whether they fade or topspin – are going to carry out of the ballpark. I’m just not at that point in my career anymore.”

Votto hit .274 with three home runs after getting hit by a 94 mph Ryan Madson pitch on Aug. 4. That affected his overall numbers.

Votto has bounced back before. He had two knee surgeries in 2012. He missed 99 games in 2014 with a quad strain to the same leg as he had the surgery.

Conventional wisdom was that he'd never be the same hitter, especially from a lower standpoint. He answered that by hitting 29, 29, 34 the next three seasons.

Whether he can bounce back again is a fair a question. But there is no question that he will try to get back to what he was. That was his offseason plan.

"I was disappointed with my season," he said. "It probably the first time I had a bad year. I'm doing what I can to make sure that doesn't happen again."

If it doesn't happen again and Votto is Votto again, the old guy will have a bigger impact than any of the new guys.

RedsXtra: More moves are likely coming with so many free agents available

John Fay, Cincinnati Enquirer

Published 1:55 p.m. ET Feb. 2, 2019

The guess here is the Reds have another move or two left in them before pitchers and catchers report.

As far as what those moves will be, I've got no guess. I don't think they'll sign Bryce Harper or Manny Machado. Beyond that, who knows? The Reds, to their credit, have been unpredictable this offseason. If you told me in October that they were going to get Yasiel Puig, Matt Kemp and Alex Wood for Homer Bailey and a prospect, I would have guffawed loudly and proposed a large bet.

But they did just that.

And they're still trying to land catcher J.T. Realmuto (as are a host of other teams). No one would have predicted they add a catcher with Tucker Barnhart under control through 2021. But they've been thinking outside the box. Way outside the box would be trading for Realmuto and then flipping him another player – that's a possibility.

There are a lot of other possibilities as well. The market is still flooded with free agents. The Reds reached a deal with reliever Zach Duke, their first free agent signing this offseason. That deal will become official if Duke passes his physical next week.

For the Reds – a team with some money spend – it has to be tempting to try to swoop in and pick up a bargain or two.

That might happen.

"In the past, we've been one of those clubs that's been patient and done things this time of year because of we've waited for the opportunities," president of baseball operations Dick Williams said. "We'll go into spring (to add) if the right opportunity presents itself.

"But there's a preference to having a good idea who's on your club before you get there. I do think there will be movement around the industry this week because clubs and players want to get certainty. With this many people unsigned, I don't know."

Again, what might that be is hard to say.

A true center fielder seems like the most pressing need. But the free agents out there like Adam Jones, Denard Span and Cameron Maybin don't rate well defensively.

Williams made it sound like center field is top prospect Nick Senzel's job to lose.

“We have Nick coming in as a bit of a wild card,” Williams said. “But he will be given every opportunity to focus on center field, play center field, learn center field, improve in center field to see where he stacks up against our other options.”

That quote, by the way, played very well on Twitter. Reds fans want to see Senzel in the lineup. And the other in-house options – Scott Schebler and Yasiel Puig – aren’t great choices defensively.

Senzel will get enough time in center during spring training for the club to make a call on him. Arizona with its high, usually cloudless sky is a good test for outfielders.

If Senzel struggles, the Reds could always make a move during spring training.

The other area they could address is the bullpen. Adding Duke is the kind of low-key signing that paid off with Jared Hughes and David Hernandez last year.

Duke, 35, gives them a left-handed specialist. He was 5-5 with a 4.15 ERA, but he held left-handers to a .220 batting average. His ground-ball rate (59.4 percent) and home run rate (one in 72 innings) make him ideal for Great American Ball Park.

There are plenty backend-of-the-bullpen pitchers available. Brad Boxberger, Tyler Clippard, Dan Jennings, Sergio Romo and Bud Norris remain unsigned.

“I think it’s definitely a possibility,” Williams said. “We have resources left. There are guys still out there. It’s not going to be at the very top of the market, but I think we can find a very good contributor. I think we’d still like to.”

THE ATHLETIC

Get to know Tommy Thrall, a new voice for Reds radio listeners

By C. Trent Rosecrans

Feb. 4, 2019

The call to the big leagues isn’t just experienced by the players, but throughout minor league baseball, there are people trying to work their way up to the highest rung of the ladder of professional baseball, people like Tommy Thrall.

Thrall, who turns 35 this month, called three games for the Reds last summer and has gotten his call-up to the big leagues for 2019. He will serve as a sort of utility man for the radio crew, hosting the postgame show, working on pregame interviews and filling in for Marty Brennaman on play-by-play when he is off. Thrall said he can’t speak to what will happen after 2019 following Brennaman’s last year as the team’s radio broadcaster.

Thrall has spent the last seven years as the radio voice of the Pensacola Blue Wahoos, serving as the team’s radio and television broadcaster since the franchise’s inaugural season in 2012.

Thrall called three games last September during the weekend of Brennaman’s golf event, earning his big-league shot. He was offered a full-time job in November with the Reds as a member of the radio team. He’ll be at home games and on the road, doing whatever needs to be done for the broadcast team.

The Athletic caught up with Thrall recently to ask about his new role and what lies ahead. (Some questions and answers have been edited for length and clarity.)

Holy shit, man, you got the call to the big leagues...

Yeah. It’s pretty wild, it’s certainly an exciting time, that’s for sure.

So, what exactly are you going to be doing?

I'll be doing the postgame show, I'll do some interviews, I'll provide some content for the pregame show, as well. Then I'll fill in a handful of games during the season and handle the play-by-play. I think, basically, I'll be filling in when Marty's out.

When you did the games last year, did you know this was a possibility?

No. I really didn't. Any time you get an opportunity to do something like that, you treat it as though it could be an opportunity that leads to more. Going in, I didn't know.

It wouldn't have mattered, either way, I guess, it was a call to the big leagues – you take your swings...

Right. That's how I treated that opportunity last year. That was an opportunity for me to prove that I can broadcast at that level and get a taste of the big leagues. That was a tremendous experience last year.

How many games was it? Wasn't there a doubleheader?

No, there was just a lot of rain. It was three games, it felt like with some of the rain delays it was a doubleheader, but it was just three games over a weekend, if I remember correctly, it was a Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Did that come up earlier in the year? When did it come up and how did it come up?

That actually came up pretty late, I think it was in August. I was in Biloxi with the Wahoos and they called and asked if I'd be willing to fill in and I said, 'Absolutely, sign me up.' I couldn't say yes fast enough to that.

I remember being in the car listening to a game with you and Jeff Brantley and you guys seemed to have a good, solid rapport right off the bat. How did that happen?

It was incredible. I've had the good fortune of working with some talented people, doing this. Whether it's TV partners I've had or some broadcast partners along the way. I think working with so many different people lets me adapt to things quickly. When you get someone like Jeff, it's really, really easy to just be comfortable with him. He knows the game so well, he's passionate about the game, he loves it. For whatever reason, our personalities seemed to gel and we seemed to click right away, even in spring training when I sat in and did a few innings in spring training. I just really felt like we worked together really well then and it's easy when it's a guy like Jeff. He's so easy to work with, makes you feel welcome and comfortable right off the bat. It was a lot of fun, to work with somebody with as much knowledge of the game and the experience that he has. That was a lot of fun for me because I love the game of baseball and I like to constantly learn as much as I can from as many different perspectives. He's got as good of a perspective on the game as anybody. It's fun to pick his brain a little bit.

Then being around Marty, you didn't broadcast with Marty, you were his fill-in, but even though you're not a Cincinnati native, Marty Brennaman, that name still carries a bit of weight, right?

Oh, without question. I am, besides just loving the game of baseball, I grew up loving broadcasting and the craft of broadcasting. I used to sit in my living room and listen to the radio because I thought the radio was mesmerizing, so I've always had a real appreciation for broadcasting and the people who do it. That includes Marty Brennaman. This is one of the legends of the game and one of the legends of the craft. The opportunity to be around him, it's hard to put into words what that means.

You grew up in Kansas City, so even though you're not from here, you can understand the way the city feels about Marty just from being around Denny Matthews and knowing something similar.

Being a fan of broadcasting, I certainly understand what he means to the fans and the community and not just that, but what he means to the industry. There's certainly a lot to it. It's pretty cool.

When did this job come about?

It's hard to say. The call really came, I was covering the state championship, the Alabama State 3A championship game, I was just reporting on it for a local TV station down here, our ABC affiliate. It was about 10-15 minutes before kickoff. The phone rang and I knew where it was from, so I answered it. The game was played at Auburn. Auburn has a new press box and there's no real easy escape to get out of the press box, so I'm just in the back of the press box near the meal tables when the job was being offered to me, so it was a pretty big thrill. I was trying, the best I could, to temper my excitement without causing a scene in the Auburn press box.

You were in Pensacola for quite a while, seven seasons. Is it a typical career path to be in the minors and then get this kind of gig you're getting or is every path in your business different?

I think every path is very different, that's part of what makes it so hard. There's no real direct road to a Major League job, so that presents a challenge. That's something that I think for everybody in broadcasting, it's hard to know the best way to get there because there is no direct path. I look at the guys from our league that have made it, everyone has a similar, but different path. It seems like everyone has at some point gone through the minor leagues because it's such a great opportunity to get consistent reps and work every day to get better.

There have been plenty of former Blue Wahoos to make it to the big leagues and you're just the latest, so you've seen a lot of these guys come through and it must be nice to have a familiarity with a lot of the players.

Oh yeah, I think there's a comfort level there. Any time you go into a new situation, having some level of familiarity always helps. It'll be nice to see so many of the guys that have gone on and made it to Cincinnati and had success.

Are you moving up here?

I'll get an apartment up there for the summer and see where things go?

Will you be in spring training?

I'm not sure exactly when I'm headed out there, but I'll be out there for the duration.

So you'll start your work calling games this spring?

I think I'm on the schedule for 20 games if I'm not mistaken.

I know you can't speak beyond this year, but what it's like to see your name as perhaps the replacement for Marty Brennaman?

I try not to think about that at all. Honestly, it is what it is. For whoever ends up doing that job, that's a pretty dubious task. He is a tough guy to replace, whoever has to do that. For me, I just have to focus on doing the best job I can do this year and at the end of the season kind of let everything fall into place, whatever that may be. I think you can get caught up in that a little bit and I'm just going to try to focus on this season and doing the best job I can when I'm asked to fill in.

ESPN.COM

Keith Law's 2019 ranking of all 30 MLB farm systems

Feb. 4, 2019

Keith Law

ESPN Senior Writer

While these rankings are ultimately subjective -- this is, after all, my opinion of each system's relative merits -- I base them on as broad a collection of information as I can. I've seen many of these prospects, I've talked to many scouts and executives about prospects, and I've talked to team officials about their own systems.

Within each system, I'll rank at least 10 prospects, but these rankings consider everything in each system. Most teams have more than 10 players within their minor leagues who project to be better than replacement-level big

leaguers, and all of those guys count. Players who have lost Rookie of the Year eligibility (more than 130 at-bats, 50 innings or 45 days on the active 25-man roster) do not count toward these rankings.

I'd rather have potential stars, even if there's some risk involved, but there's also real value in being able to provide your own fifth starters or utility players without having to pay for them on the open market. That means some teams here toward the top of the list got "credit" for 20 or more players in their systems, whereas those in the bottom third top out around 15 names.

I do favor prospects with higher upsides (or "ceilings") over those with less potential to become stars but higher probability of reaching the majors in some role. Few clubs are able to afford stars on the open market, so developing your own is critical for half or even two-thirds of the franchises in baseball. And if you have a prospect who projects as a star, you have the currency to acquire almost any major leaguer you want. The teams in the top 10 have potential stars and a lot of second-tier prospects with future big league value, while the teams in the bottom 10 don't have much of either, with two clubs lacking any top-100 prospects at all.

I'm most surprised by how unbalanced the farm systems across the game are right now. The top four were easy for me to choose, and the bottom six were too, but there are gulfs between them. To some extent, this is a natural outcome of the process of building a good system, contending, and then graduating or trading off your best prospects to enhance or extend your window of success.

We're also seeing more teams concentrate wholeheartedly on their farm systems, however, to the detriment of the big league club -- it's not "tanking" the way it exists in the NBA, but it is the baseball equivalent. A strong farm system is good only to the extent that it leads to major league wins.

6. Cincinnati Reds

2018 rank: 6

This could change, as the Reds already have dealt two prospects from their top 10 in the big Dodgers deal and a prospect from their top 20-25 in the Sonny Gray deal, and I've heard they've made other prospects beyond their top three available, including 2018 first-rounder Jonathan India. But for now, the Reds are in good shape, thanks to years of productive drafts that have given them a strong cluster of prospects who look like they'll hit the majors in the next two years, along with long-term high-upside play Hunter Greene.