



LUIS URÍAS –#9– INF

In San Diego, Luis Urías could become the next great Mexican player

- Dennis Lin, The Athletic / August 31, 2018

Rising from the Sonoran Desert, the Mexican town of Magdalena de Kino stands in tribute to Eusebio Kino, a 17th-century Jesuit priest whose remains are housed in a local crypt. Its most recognizable resident was Luis Donaldo Colosio, a presidential candidate and victim of a 1994 assassination in Tijuana.

Yet it is also home to a growing hope, contained within a sweet-swinging infielder named Luis Urías. The Padres prospect arrived at Petco Park on Tuesday, 46 years and one day after Sergio Robles, the only other major leaguer from the town, debuted with the Baltimore Orioles.

Robles, a strong-armed catcher, notched two hits across 21 at-bats before finishing his playing career in the Mexican League. He later transitioned to managerial and coaching work and still resides in Magdalena de Kino.

“I’ve had a lot of coaches through my life,” Urías said, “but he was one of them.”

Robles’ former pupil recently cemented a place in baseball history. In time, he might own a considerable swath of real estate.

Urías, a second baseman, took the field Tuesday as the 126th Mexican-born player in the majors. When the second pitch of the game was redirected, he ranged to his left, went full-extension to corral the ball and fired to first base to beat the runner. The next day, he logged three hits and narrowly missed a fourth when a line drive sailed past the right-field foul pole.

“I love everything about his game,” Padres shortstop Freddy Galvis said.

That is a common sentiment, particularly south of the border. Urías displays an advanced grasp of hitting and defensive positioning. While soft-spoken, he is not shy about his heritage. His walk-up music, “México lindo y querido,” is a traditional mariachi song. He counts his experience with Team Mexico in the 2017 World Baseball Classic among his fondest memories.

Urías’ presence on that stage spoke to his precociousness. Then 19, he was the youngest member of his nation’s roster. Seventeen months later, he continues to flash the ability to eventually join a pantheon of fellow countrymen.

Among Mexican-born position players, only four have compiled more than 10 bWAR over a major-league career: Bobby Avila (27.8), Vinny Castilla (19.4), Aurelio Rodríguez (15.2) and Jorge Orta (14.9). Three were older than Urías when they debuted. Even San Diego native Adrián González, arguably the most valuable Mexican hitter ever, was nearing his 22nd birthday when summoned from Triple A in 2004.

Urías, who turned 21 on June 3, was still a teenager when forecasts of future batting titles began to trickle out. In 2016, he hit .333/.404/.446 to earn the California League’s MVP and Rookie of the Year awards. He repeated as an All-Star last season in Double A and this season in Triple A. According to multiple lists, he is the top second-base prospect in the game.

“For the last two years, I would say almost every other day he’s been in the news because he’s always been doing something important in the minor leagues,” said Eduardo Ortega, a Tijuana native and the Spanish-language voice of the Padres since 1987. “That’s a great story for us in Mexican baseball, being so close.”

Both Urías and Ortega found themselves in high demand Tuesday. The broadcaster appeared on seven talk-radio shows in Mexico to discuss the infielder’s call-up. Later at Petco Park, a throng of media members, including several who had driven from Baja California, awaited Urías at his newly assigned locker.

Urías, after fielding the typical questions that follow a promotion, was asked about the significance of his heritage in a place such as San Diego.

“It means a lot to me,” he said. “I’ve been hearing that there’s a lot of Mexicans around here, and I think that will be great to show them who I am and what I can do.”

By Wednesday, Urías had relocated. His locker inside the home clubhouse now was adjacent to Christian Villanueva’s. The move had come at the request of the third baseman, who this season clubbed 20 home runs to establish a record among Mexican-born rookies.

“I’m super happy for [Urías],” Villanueva, presently shelved with a fractured finger, said through an interpreter. “We’ve been playing together since 2014 in winter ball, and we’ve become really close. Our families are close; obviously, we hang out a lot. I’m super excited to have him here.”

It has been close to a decade since two Mexican position players were in the same starting lineup at Petco Park. On Sept. 11, 2009, González and older brother Edgar batted third and seventh, playing first base and right field. An announced crowd of 18,022 watched the Padres fall to the Colorado Rockies.

Yet Adrián González’s tenure in San Diego — which included 161 home runs and three All-Star berths — at times stirred memories of an icon. Padres third base coach Glenn Hoffman played against the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 1980s before joining them in 1987, when Fernando Valenzuela, widely regarded as the greatest Mexican player of all time, remained a stalwart in the rotation.

“Just the energy,” Hoffman said, recalling that era. “The proudness of being from Mexico and the connection. It was ‘Fernandomania.’ They packed the house.

“You saw a little bit of it with Adrián. But now with Urías here, the sky’s the limit.”

Urías went hitless Thursday. But he reached on an error, was hit by a pitch and stole a base; through three games, he has gotten on base six times and provided staunch defense. Outfielder Franmil Reyes launched a walk-off homer in the 13th. The Padres beat the Rockies and celebrated their third consecutive win, a glimmer in a lost season, Urías a contributor in each victory.

“I know we don’t have that many Mexican players in the big leagues,” he said the day before. “Hopefully I can play for a long time in this game and I can be an example in the future for some kids.”

Urías is the 24th Mexican-born player in Padres history, the most of any franchise. Ortega puts the unofficial count at 26. “Mexico considers the Gonzálezes as Mexicans,” he said. “They were born in San Diego, but they are from a Mexican family and grew up near the border.”

Speaking before Urías’ debut, Ortega grew animated as he contemplated the ramifications of the latest arrival. He witnessed Valenzuela’s late-career stint with the Padres and Adrián González’s run in San Diego. Unlike Urías, neither was homegrown. This, Ortega said, already was the third-biggest development in the organization’s history of Mexican players.

In time, it might become something more.

“I’m very proud to be the team with the most [Mexican-born players],” Ortega said. “And I’m going to say on the broadcast tonight, ‘Just be prepared because tonight is one start, a great new story for Mexican baseball, a new episode.’ It could be one of the best ever in a single player.”

Luis Urias excites Padres with his arrival

- Kevin Acee, SDUT / August 28, 2018

The future arrived in a small package with big things expected – and to the biggest cheer any Padres player got in Tuesday’s pregame introductions.

What Luis Urias does over the next month should hint at his ultimate capabilities and give him a running start going into 2019.

“I’m a player who can get on base,” Urias said Tuesday afternoon prior to his major league debut. “... I’m just going to do my thing. I know the type of player I am, and hopefully I can help the team win.”

Hitting second in the Padres’ lineup, Urias grounded out to third base in his first at-bat, grounded out up the middle in the third inning, walked in the sixth and grounded out off pitcher Shawn Armstrong’s leg in the eighth inning, as the Padres beat the Mariners 2-1.

“It was great,” Urias said. “I couldn’t get the hit, but it was great to be out there. I’m really excited to be part of this club.”

The second-most impressive thing Urias did Tuesday was take a 1-2 change-up from Felix Hernandez just out of the zone in working that sixth-inning walk.

“I know everybody wants to get a hit first day on the job,” manager Andy Green said after the game. “But to get his first walk, I’d like to get that ball and keep it, because that’s what separates him from other people.”

Even before he batted, the young man from Mexico provided a glimpse of why the Padres believe he will be their second baseman for years to come.

On the game’s second pitch, Mariners lead-off hitter Mitch Haniger hit a grounder into the hole on the right side, well to Urias’ left. Urias laid out, fully extended on the grass, fielded the ball, stood and threw out Haniger by a step.

That brought another cheer from the sparse Tuesday crowd at Petco Park.

“I don’t know how I got it,” Urias said with a chuckle.

At the end of the first inning, as they jogged toward the dugout, first baseman Eric Hosmer smiled and shook his head as he patted the 5-foot-9, 185-pound Urias on the head.

“It was incredible, full extension,” Hosmer said of the play. “If that’s not five-star play, I don’t know what five star is... That’s one of those things where, first play of the game, even the other team kind of stopped and was like, ‘Man, that’s a pretty cool way to enter the league.’”

Padres veterans have been waiting for this.

“It’s like, ‘Hey, here’s a part of the future. Here are some things we’ve heard about,’” Wil Myers said Tuesday afternoon. “Everybody in here is excited to see him get going.”

Urias, all of 21-years-old, is the first landing of the first wave of talent the Padres anticipate crashing just off San Diego Bay in the next few years.

“It’s really exciting for us,” Austin Hedges said. “... You’re not hearing about it in the minor leagues any more – so and so called up to Double-A or Triple-A. It’s time to do it where it matters. To have him here is awesome. It’s time to go. Calling up guys like him is the beginning, so it’s really exciting.”

Urias is the 14th player to make his major league debut for the Padres this season, tying them with the Angels for most in the majors.

To now, the arrivals have been ripples. Brett Kennedy Eric Lauer, Joey Lucchesi and/or Jacob Nix may stick in the rotation. Trey Wingenter and Jose Castillo are expected to be anchors in the bullpen. Franmil Reyes might end up hitting 35 homers in a season.

But Urias is who super-agent Scott Boras was talking about at Hosmer’s introductory press conference in February when he referred to the Padres oozing “hot lava talent” in the minor leagues – along with Fernando Tatis Jr. and MacKenzie Gore and a bunch of others who are expected to follow him.

Urias is the fourth-ranked prospect in the Padres’ system. At No. 22, he is one of nine Padres minor leaguers among MLB.com’s Top 100 prospects in all of baseball.

“All the guys that came up we’re excited about,” General Manager A.J. Preller said. “You’re looking for championship-caliber players. So far, Luis has shown through the minor leagues he’s been better than the levels he’s played at. We’re looking forward to him showing that at the big-league level.”

Urias hit .296/.398/.447 at Triple-A this season. He was named to the All-Pacific Coast League team on Monday, same as he’d been named to the Double-A Texas League’s postseason team in 2017 and the Single-A Cal League’s postseason

team in 2016. He has never hit below .290 or had an on-base percentage lower than .370 in four full minor-league campaigns.

That's a big part of the anticipation.

"Everybody has a little different path," Preller said. "Some guys struggle, then come on later. ... Luis has been a guy from minute one who has played well and done it at a level where he was playing against older players and more experienced guys. Usually when guys can do that it's a good indicator of success (in the majors). But we'll get a chance to see if it plays here."

Addressing the media in front of his locker Tuesday afternoon, arguably the largest such gaggle of the season, Urias shrugged off any burden he feels being the first representation of the future. The new youngest player on the Padres knows more young players are coming.

"I'm just going to try to do my thing, and hopefully I can see some player, like Fernando Tatis, soon here," Urias said. "I'm just going to try to do my thing. No pressure. ... It means a lot to be an example for the youngest guys in the minor leagues. Hopefully they can come here and help the team to win."

The Future Is Now: Luis Urias Finds His Way To San Diego Through El Paso

Urias, 21, set for major league debut on August 28th in San Diego

- El Paso Chihuahuas | MiLB.com / August 28, 2018

Today, 21-year-old Luis Urias will accomplish a goal he has dreamed of since he can remember. He will be a Major League Baseball player.

Growing up in soccer crazed Magdalena de Kino, Mexico, Urías was first introduced to baseball by his father at age six. Although the game has turned into his livelihood, he remembers being reluctant to play at first.

"When I was six, my dad took me to play baseball and I remember not wanting to play, because I was so young," Urías said. "But after I began playing, I started to love it right away."

Urías' childhood, however, wasn't all fun and games. The son of two school teachers, Urías always knew where his priorities had to be.

"I used to really like school," Urías said. "I didn't get into a whole lot of trouble as a kid and since my parents are both teachers, I had to have good grades all the time."

Urias' parents instilled a good work ethic into Luis since he was a child. As Urías says, he knows how instrumental they have been to his career.

"My parents have been there for me through everything since I remember. My dad loves baseball and we all have a good relationship," Urías added. "My brother also plays baseball, so my parents have always done what they can to support us. Since I made the decision to only play baseball, they never told me no. They always wanted me to do whatever I wanted to do."

Beyond the care of his parents, Urías has another avenue of support that not everyone has. His older brother, Ramon, also plays professional baseball, as a member of the St. Louis Cardinals organization. While it was clear from a young age how talented Luis was, he says he didn't think he would play professional baseball until Ramon decided to do the same when he was 16.

"It's amazing to have a brother that plays the same sport as you. We played at the same level this year and we help each other a lot, so our relationship is great," Urías said. "I never thought I'd be playing professional baseball until I was about 13, when my brother decided at 16 to be a professional. That's when I told myself that I could play professionally too."

Although Urías couldn't sign at the same time as his brother, he continued to work on his craft and improve his skills while playing in an academy ran by the Diablos Rojos del México in Mexico City.

Three years after his brother signed at 16, Urías caught the eye of many scouts, but says the pursuit of his dream to be a major leaguer led him to sign with the Padres.

"At 16 in Mexico, everyone wants to sign for a team in the United States. I was playing with the Diablos in Mexico City and all I wanted to do was sign with an American team and play in the major leagues," Urías said. "It wasn't a hard decision when the Padres offered me a contract, so I saw the opportunity to follow my dreams and took it."

Listed at 5-foot-9, Urías knows the type of player he has to be to be successful as he moves up the ranks of the Padres system. To help him become the best player he can be, he looked to two similar long-time major leaguers.

"I liked the way Dustin Pedroia and José Altuve played the game whenever I was able to watch them growing up," Urías said. "They're both great players, leaders and people as well, so I always wanted to be like them."

"On the field, I like to focus on being a good defender first, but I think that I am also someone who is going to put the ball in play and get on base," Urías added. "I've always had the ability to hit the ball all over the field. My goal every at bat is to compete against the pitcher and I think my skill of being able to make contact has helped me reach that goal so far. I know haven't hit for a lot of power, but I've seen it in myself, so I'm going to keep working to get better at that part of the game."

While his ability to make hard contact and spray the ball all over the field has always been with him, Urías says that his strike zone discipline has evolved over the past few years. In every season from 2014-17, the middle infielder accumulated more walks than strikeouts, which allowed his on-base percentage to improve every year.

"The first two or three years of my career, I didn't have the eye at all and I was chasing a lot of bad pitches. But, when I got to Double-A last year and even more this year, I've tried to make better decisions in the strike zone," Urías said. "I've had a high batting average in the past, but my on-base percentage needed to get better, because that is really what is going to help the team win."

While Urías piled up the individual accolades, before 2017, he had only played in two playoff games. The right-handed hitter was named the California League's MVP, a Midseason and Postseason All-Star in 2016, after leading the league with a .330 average.

In 2017, Urías led the Texas League in on-base percentage (.398) and finished second in walks (68), leading the San Antonio Missions to a 78-62 record and a playoff bid.

While the 2017 playoffs in the Texas League were a major step forward for Urías, he says one of the most important experiences for him that year was being named to represent Team Mexico at the World Baseball Classic, where he was the team's youngest player at age 19.

"It's was an unbelievable experience. When I found out I had the opportunity to play on that team and represent my country, I was incredibly excited," Urías said of being named to Team Mexico. "Having the chance to be around some of the big leaguers I watched growing up, like Sergio Romo and Adrian Gonzalez was amazing. Those guys taught me a lot in just a couple of days."

Because of his continued success in 2017, the Padres continued to challenge Urías, inviting him to Major League Spring Training and placing him on Triple-A El Paso's opening day roster, despite being only 20, making him one of the youngest players in the Pacific Coast League.

"I've always played with guys older than me, so this year was the same," Urías said of his age in the PCL. "I feel that throughout the years when I've played with older players, it's given me the confidence that if I fail, I will still get better because of it."

Failing didn't come often this year, as Urías rewarded the Padres with a SiriusXM All-Star Futures Game appearance and a PCL Midseason and Postseason All-Star selection. The middle infielder slashed .296/.398/.447, with career highs in doubles (30), triples (seven) and home runs (eight) in 120 games with El Paso prior to his promotion to San Diego on August 28th. Urías also leaves El Paso in the midst of a 2018 Chihuahuas season high 15-game hitting streak.

While Urías does not know what the future holds, he is well aware what is happening around him in the Padres' organization and he does know that Major League Baseball needs to be ready, because the Padres are coming.

"I see all of the talent in the system and that reminds me to keep working hard and keep getting better every day so that one day in the future, we can win a lot of games in the big leagues and do something very special in San Diego."

Scouting Padres prospect and soon-to-be major leaguer Luis Urías

- Dennis Lin, The Athletic / August 28, 2018

Luis Urías, a vital piece in the Padres' eternal quest for on-base percentage, will arrive Tuesday, in time to make his major-league debut against Félix Hernández and the Seattle Mariners. The second baseman is not projected to slug many home runs or run wild on the basepaths, but he, as much as any Padres prospect in recent memory, should help address the team's most glaring weakness.

Urías, who turned 21 in June, hit .296/.398/.447 this season with Triple-A El Paso. He has not gotten on base at lower than a .381 clip in any of his five years in professional baseball. Across the same span, the Padres have continuously ranked last in the National League in OBP. They will enter Tuesday's series opener with a .298 mark, a one-point drop from 2017.

So, why did it take this long for Urías to be called up?

One, the Padres are slogging toward their first 100-loss season since 1993; given Urías' youth and the current state of the big-league club, the organization did not feel the need to hasten a promotion. And two, only recently has Urías proven that he has nothing left to prove against Pacific Coast League pitchers.

After posting some uncharacteristic strikeout rates earlier in the season, Urías slashed .420/.480/.659 in August. He leaves El Paso on a 15-game hitting streak, having recorded multiple knocks in eight of those games.

"He got bigger and more home-run happy," said an American League scout who saw Urías during the first half of the season. "Looks like he's made some adjustment lately. Big 'K' numbers [were] unlike him."

Indeed, throughout his career, Urías has excelled at putting bat on ball. He is considered one of the best pure hitters in the minor leagues. He does not possess exceptional physical tools, yet *Baseball America* rates him the sport's 29th-best prospect.

"Covers the zone, solid contact where it's pitched and can hit line drives from foul line to foul line," one National League evaluator said. "Nothing really to dislike. He's not a base-stealer or home-run hitter, but he does everything else."

Scouts say Urías, while impressive at second base, is also capable at shortstop and third. His defensive assignments for the Padres should come primarily at second, with some short mixed in. The organization expects he will develop into its future at the keystone, forming a precocious double-play tandem with No. 1 prospect Fernando Tatis Jr.

There is hope, still, that both players will exhibit plus power in the major leagues. Urías, a sturdy 5 feet 9, regularly logs above-average exit velocities. He would not be the first of his type to experience a home-run spike. For now, most observers are predicting modest power numbers.

"He's not a savior by any means," the AL scout said.

"It will depend on the ball," the NL scout said. "If it's like last year, he'll hit 10 [home runs per season.]"

As previously mentioned, Urías might have gotten in trouble by attempting to be something he is not. What he likely can be: a top-of-the-order hitter who gets on base, racks up extra-base hits and plays strong defense. It has been years since the Padres enjoyed all three of those qualities in a young player.

Tatis, Urias give Padres glimpse at bright future

- AJ Cassavell, MLB.com / March 9, 2018

PEORIA, Ariz. -- In his **Thursday mailbag**, MLB Pipeline's Jim Callis made it known that he believes Padres Minor Leaguers **Fernando Tatis Jr.** and **Luis Urias** comprise the best prospect double-play tandem in baseball. Coincidentally, Tatis and Urias agree with that assessment.

MLB Pipeline's Twitter account teased the question by asking, "Are #Padres prospects Fernando Tatis Jr. and Luis Urias the best double-play duo in the minors?" Urias was quick to answer in the affirmative.

Of course, there isn't much argument otherwise across baseball. Tatis is the **No. 2-rated shortstop prospect by MLB Pipeline** and No. 8 overall. Urias **comes in second** among second basemen and is 36th overall.

Both are in big league camp this spring, and they've more than held their own. Urias is 8-for-20 (.400) and Tatis is 9-for-26 (.346) with an opposite-field homer, before Friday's game against the White Sox. When they played together for the first time as Padres last month, first baseman **Eric Hosmer** joked about "an infield that wasn't old enough to buy a drink."

Urias is 20, Tatis 19. They first met in instructional ball two seasons ago. But they didn't "become family," in Urias' words, until Tatis arrived in San Antonio last season. Their respect for each other is clear.

"It's awesome playing next to a guy that's so talented," Tatis said. "He's such a good player, and you can learn a lot from him. We're always talking and helping each other."

Said Urias: "We're young, we're kind of on the same page with our development. He's a great player, and he's a very fun guy to be around."

Their bond extends beyond baseball. They share similar tastes in video games and TV shows. Earlier this spring, Tatis and Urias saw "Black Panther" together in theaters. Afterward, the two decided that when they hit doubles, they'd cross their forearms over their chests, mimicking the "Wakanda Salute" from the film.

Perhaps fittingly, they've already combined for eight doubles -- Urias leading the team with five and Tatis tied for third with three.

"When you do that kind of stuff together off of the field, it makes it more fun to play together on the field," Urias said.

Tatis Jr.'s RBI.

Barring something unforeseen, neither Urias nor Tatis will break camp with the Major League club. The Padres feel both have more development left before they break through in the big leagues.

They might not be too far off. Urias spent last season as one of the youngest players in the Texas League. He batted .296/.398/.380 with Double-A San Antonio, and some predict a midseason debut.

Tatis, meanwhile, spent most of last year with Class A Fort Wayne before making the jump to Double-A for the stretch run. He batted .278/.379/.498 with 22 homers between the two levels. He could be destined for a September callup.

In theory, Tatis and Urias could arrive in San Diego around the same time and anchor the middle of the Padres' infield for years to come.

"It sounds great, if you look at the vision," Urias said. "It sounds fun, the idea to play for a long time with him."

No doubt, Padres fans everywhere are nodding in agreement.

Lin: The Padres' unlikely signing of Luis Urías is paying dividends

- Dennis Lin, The Athletic / March 22, 2018

PEORIA, Ariz. — The scout recognized a rare talent. He also perceived danger on the road to acquisition. Approaching from the south, alone in a rental car, would pose certain risks. Wary of bandits and drug traffickers, Robert Rowley devised an alternate route.

From Panama, where he was based, Rowley flew to Houston. There, he boarded a second flight. After landing in Tucson, Ariz., he paid \$300 for a ride. In a weathered Ford sedan, he and a friend of a cousin drove into Mexico. Fifty miles past the border, they reached a small town in the Sonoran Desert. They had arrived at Magdalena de Kino, the home of an infielder named Luis Urías.

After some cajoling, Urías' parents granted their approval: Their son would sign with the Padres. The Chicago White Sox had offered to purchase his rights from the Mexico City Red Devils for \$300,000, though Urías would have netted only 25 percent of the total. While San Diego's bid was worth a mere \$100,000, Rowley had arranged for the family to receive the entire sum. Urías' father was impressed for more than financial reasons.

"You're the only scout," he told the visitor, "that ever had the balls to come all the way over here."

The trek has proven worth the trouble. More than four years later, Urías stands among baseball's top prospects. In a farm system loaded with athletes, his physical attributes do not distinguish him. Rather, at 5-feet-9, the 20-year-old owns a preternatural sense of the strike zone and an uncanny dexterity inside the batter's box. For the scout who signed him, \$100,000 was hardly a gamble.

"What he's done so far is really no surprise to me," Rowley said. "I always knew he was going to be a big-leaguer."

Urías is close to attaining that title, yet his estimated arrival time remains unclear. Early last week, the Padres reassigned him to minor-league camp at the Peoria Sports Complex. Rowley worries that the organization has too many infielders. Would the Padres deal Urías away?

So far, the team has shown little inclination to do so. In late 2014, after Urías' first professional season, the Braves raised his name in trade talks (Atlanta executive Chad MacDonald oversaw international scouting for San Diego when Urías was signed). The Padres ultimately surrendered four players to acquire Justin Upton, but they declined to include Urías. Similar requests have also been rebuffed.

"I'd like to think, in a few years, I'm going to look back and say that was one of the best hitters I ever saw in Double A," said Phillip Wellman, who manages the Padres' San Antonio affiliate and has coached former top prospects such as Jeff Francoeur and the late Oscar Taveras. "I honestly think he's going to end up being a very good hitter in the big leagues."

Rival officials share the same view. During the last international signing period, the Padres obliterated a franchise record by spending more than \$78 million on 47 players. Yet multiple evaluators have predicted that Urías will have a better career than all of them. Among position prospects in San Diego's system, he ranks second only to Fernando Tatis Jr., a close friend and double-play partner.

In 15 years with the Padres, Rowley signed such players as Ernesto Frieri, Luis Durango and Tayron Guerrero — all three reached the majors after receiving bonuses totaling \$23,000 — but Urías is poised to become the biggest bargain.

Said the now-retired scout, "There's kids there that got a million-and-a-half that can't hold Urías' jock and never will hold his jock."

Familiarity aided Rowley in his pursuit. The scout initially discovered Urías playing sandlot baseball in Hermosillo, Mexico. Rowley was struck by the 14-year-old's hands, bat speed and fluidity in less-than-ideal conditions.

Two years later, at a sparkling baseball academy in Oaxaca, he stumbled upon Urías again; the young shortstop had signed with the Red Devils at 15. Realizing that Urías was no longer a secret, Rowley secured permission to bring him to the Dominican Republic for a tryout.

Urías impressed, but Rowley did not feel confident about San Diego's chances of landing him. The Padres had authorized a \$100,000 offer, roughly 3 percent of their annual international signing budget at the time. Accepted practice would reduce Urías' actual windfall to a pittance; a Mexican League team that owns a player's rights typically retains 75 percent of his signing bonus.

Still determined, Rowley presented the bid to Mexico City executive Roberto Mansur. Rowley had cultivated a longstanding relationship with the team; when the Red Devils won a league title in 2008, they gifted the scout a championship ring. Mansur informed Rowley that the White Sox had submitted a far more lucrative proposal. He also offered to explain the situation to the Red Devils' owner.

Alfredo Harp Helú proved a willing listener. With a minority stake in the Padres, the Mexican businessman holds interests on both sides of the border. After speaking with Mansur, Harp green-lit an exception: He would not charge the Urías family any commission if they agreed to the Padres' offer. "It was his money and his kid," Rowley said. "The White Sox understood perfectly."

Rowley's attempt to sign the teenager no longer looked like a Hail Mary, but he still faced obstacles to closing the deal. The scout undertook the circuitous journey to Magdalena de Kino. Urías' father originally held out for more money; Urías' mother said she preferred college for her son. Even after Rowley convinced them, they had to search the town for a notary public.

"I thought I was going to lose him," Rowley recalled. "I said, 'This is Mission Impossible.'"

But, by the end of that December day in 2013, Rowley was successful. Urías became the newest member of the Padres organization, fulfilling an unlikely fate for the son of two schoolteachers.

Hidden athleticism might have run in the family. In January, the St. Louis Cardinals purchased the contract of Urías' older brother from the Red Devils.

"I'm not exactly sure where the talent came from," said shortstop Ramon Urías, a 2017 Mexican League All-Star, "but obviously we're grateful for it."

Neither brother is blessed with above-average height or blazing speed. For Luis Urías, a lack of standout measurables contributed to a modest bonus, which in turn worked against him early in his career.

At the time of Urías' signing, his father had shared a condition with Rowley: He did not want his son to debut in the Dominican Summer League. More advanced players started in Arizona, and Ramon had previously traveled to the Caribbean for a tryout before returning without an offer. "I don't like the Dominican Republic," the father told Rowley. The scout agreed to those terms.

Yet, in 2014, Rowley noticed that Urías' first two games had come in the Dominican. The scout phoned Juan Lara, then the Padres' player development and international operations manager. Lara explained that pricier signees were occupying infield jobs in the Arizona Rookie League.

"So, you're measuring all of this crap not by the ability but by how much money we gave him. That's bullshit," Rowley remembers saying to Lara. "Take him out of there and send him to the Arizona League."

A call to MacDonald confirmed that the Padres had indeed made an agreement with Urías' father. After a total of 10 at-bats, Urías headed to the U.S.

Urías, then 17, demonstrated his aptitude in Arizona. Over 43 games with the Padres' rookie affiliate, he hit .310 with a .393 on-base percentage. The next year, he batted .299 with a .388 on-base percentage across the short-season and low-A levels. He further tormented pitchers in 2016, when he was named the California League MVP and Rookie of the Year after hitting .330 with a .397 on-base percentage.

"He is always 2-0, and we have certain guys who are always 0-2," Padres farm director Sam Geaney said. "He has a very simple swing and puts himself in really good positions to see the baseball... He gets in counts where pitchers have to start coming to him."

The Padres continued to challenge Urías last season, sending him to Double-A San Antonio. He began the year as the Texas League's youngest player. He ended it with a .296 average, a .398 on-base percentage, 68 walks and 65 strikeouts.

“He’s the one guy that, if he got rung up on a pitch and he came back to the dugout and told me the ball was two inches off the plate, I believed him,” Wellman said. “Invariably, I would go look after the game and, sure enough, it was two inches off the plate. I think he knew the strike zone better than a lot of the umpires.

“If [opposing pitchers] got him on something, that was the only time they were going to get him on it. I’d see other players punch out three times on the same sequence. It’s like the old saying: If a mule kicks you the first time, it’s the mule’s fault. The next time it kicks you, it’s yours. He never let it kick him a second time.”

While Urías hit just three home runs in 2017, a closer examination revealed more than an elite contact hitter. According to Trackman data, he produced the farm system’s third-highest number of exit velocities of at least 95 mph.

“He hit plenty of doubles, but I think as he gets bigger and stronger, which he has, you’re going to start seeing some of those doubles turn into home runs,” Wellman said. “It wouldn’t surprise me if, one day, he’s a guy who hits 20 home runs in a year in the big leagues. It goes back to the most important aspect of hitting, which is getting a pitch to hit, and he understands that.”

Urías suspects that years of facing older competition — at 15, he was playing for a Red Devils affiliate — cultivated his approach to the game. But few other prospects his age are as advanced. Urías played much of last season as a 20-year-old, yet he led the Texas League in on-base percentage.

“A lot of guys ask me how I can control the barrel to the ball,” Urías said. “To be honest, I don’t know. I think it’s just a talent.”

“It’s easy to say some are chosen, but he is,” Wellman said. “He doesn’t panic. He knows he can hit with two strikes. His strike-zone discipline and knowledge of the strike zone are way above and beyond his age and experience.”

Urías began carving a résumé alongside major leaguers 12 months ago, when he temporarily left Peoria to team with Adrián González and other Mexican players in the World Baseball Classic. This spring, he recorded eight hits, including five doubles, in his first 14 Cactus League at-bats.

An o-for-14 stretch preceded a demotion that had always been expected. Urías, who won’t turn 21 until June, spent much of his final hour in big-league camp where he has spent virtually every morning: the batting cage.

“Obviously, he has a God-given talent,” Ramon Urías said, “but he’s also a really hard worker, and he puts in time to get better. That’s what makes him a good hitter.”

Similar dedication in the field has made Luis Urías an impact defender. After signing as a shortstop, he shifted to second base, where he was deemed a more natural fit. Over the last year, however, Urías has gained unprecedented confidence and exposure at his original position.

The Padres, angling for versatility, split his time between both middle-infield spots in 2017. His growing comfort carried through the offseason and into this spring. He demonstrated his progress in three Cactus League appearances on the left side of the infield.

“This guy has enough arm and enough range to be a really good shortstop as well,” one rival executive said.

The question, then, is not whether Urías will be ready this year, but when the Padres will be ready for him. He will continue playing both second and shortstop for Triple-A El Paso, though the exact breakdown remains to be seen. San Diego presently fields a surplus at Urías’ primary position, with second basemen Carlos Asuaje and Cory Spangenberg locked in a tight race. Either Asuaje or Spangenberg could be optioned to El Paso, where shortstop prospect Javy Guerra likely will join Urías.

Should an injury befall veteran shortstop Freddy Galvis, the Padres may turn to Urías first. If he rakes against Pacific Coast League pitching, as most scouts believe he will, he could force the club’s hand at second base. Asuaje and Spangenberg might not receive a long leash.

“They know he’s coming,” Padres manager Andy Green said recently. “They’re smart guys. They look, and they watch him play baseball. They’re sitting on the bench, and they see what he does.”

Rowley still tracks Urías' progress from Panama. To this day, he continues to apologize to Urías' father for a signing bonus that did not reflect the infielder's talent. The elder Urías replies that his son will be in the majors soon enough. It is difficult to affix a value to that.

"I can say I started from the bottom," Urías said. "I think at the beginning nobody knew me. But I think it's a great thing. Where I came from, I wasn't the prospect that I am right now. That motivated me to keep working hard."

Magdalena de Kino, a community of roughly 30,000, has produced only one major leaguer. In the 1970s, catcher Sergio Robles collected two hits over 16 games with the Orioles and the Dodgers. More than four decades later, an infielder looms on the horizon. Last season alone, he logged four hits in five different games.

"If I do it at the end of the year or during the year, I don't care," Urías said. "I just want to be in the big leagues."

Representing Mexico 'point of pride' for Padres' Luis Urias

- Jeff Sanders, SDUT / March 7, 2017

As a kid, Luis Urias often put Mexican players like Adrian Gonzalez and Sergio Romo on the same team when he played "MLB: The Show" on PlayStation. On Tuesday, the Padres' 19-year-old prospect was still very much boy among those men as he started at shortstop for an exhibition against his organization-mates.

Team Mexico's youngest player, Urias might even find himself in manager Edgar Gonzalez's starting lineup there in the World Baseball Classic when Pool D play starts Thursday in front of his parents and a handful of friends at what should be a raucous Estadio Charros de Jalisco for the opener against Italy.

"It's a huge point of pride," Urias, speaking through an interpreter, said before collecting two hits in four at-bats in the Padres' 7-3 exhibition win over Team Mexico. "Growing up as a kid, I always wanted to play for Mexico and represent my country."

The honor is the latest feather in the cap for the fast-rising prospect.

The California League MVP and batting champion after pairing a .330/.397/.440 batting line with five homers and 52 RBIs, the right-handed Urias jumped from 29th last year to sixth in Baseball America's most recent assessment of the Padres' farm system. Inside the organization, the front office is intrigued enough with Urias – a second baseman by trade – to give him looks this spring at shortstop.

While the Padres' depth at the position in camp hasn't translated to a lot of time there yet, the organization plans to see what his attributes – soft hands and excellent footwork – look on the other side of the diamond, where the 22-year-old Javier Guerra is coming off a disastrous introduction to the Padres and their top teenage prospects have yet to play a full season in pro ball.

"We think he's got the capability to do it," Padres manager Andy Green said of Urias' ability at shortstop. "I think he's really solid. He just needs more reps. He was at high-A last year. There's no expectation that he's ready to take the shortstop job here at the major league level, but the potential is there."

Urias' play in the World Baseball Classic could give the Padres an extended sample to study as Team Mexico isn't exactly teeming with experience or depth at shortstop: Luis Alfonso Cruz last played in the majors in 2013 and two other middle infielders on the roster – Esteban Quiroz and Jose Manuel Rodriguez – don't have any experience in affiliated ball.

While Edgar Gonzalez will try another option in Wednesday's exhibition against the Diamondbacks, Urias' initial audition – turning a double play in the field, singling through the left side of the infield and later lining an opposite-field single to right – left a positive impression on Team Mexico's 38-year-old manager.

"Very impressive composure," said Gonzalez, a former Padres infielder who teamed with younger brother Adrian Gonzalez in San Diego in 2008 and 2009. "He doesn't act like a young guy. He acts very mature. He's always under control, his feet are always in the right position. If you watch him, nothing ever hurries up on him, which I love."

“Nothing is going to be too big for him.”

Not yet anyway.

Of course, Urias had just 30 games at shortstop as a pro before the Padres threw the position at him again this spring.

So far, so good.

“I’ve felt good there,” said Urias, who signed in 2013. “I think I’ve been focusing on every area I need to hit and honestly know I can get a lot better, but I’ve felt good so far working with the coaches in San Diego.”

The experience with Team Mexico will only help.

“I grew up playing these guys on PlayStation,” Urias said. “I’d make a team knowing they’d be the best team – I’d put them all together. It’s great (to play with them for real). It’s a really good experience just to be around them, talk to them, ask them how they think about things and be able to gain as much experience as I can.”