



Padres Press Clips

Thursday, September 13, 2018

Article	Source	Author	Page
Bullpen's record day, big hits lift Padres to season sweep of Mariners	SD Union Tribune	Acee	2
Padres notes: Borrowing playoff push; Urias walking; Mitchell still has work	SD Union Tribune	Acee	5
Wild streak haunts Munoz, sinks Missions in Game 2	SD Union Tribune	Sanders	8
NL West storylines by the numbers	MLB.com	Cassavell	10
Hedges' 2-run HR paves way to sweep vs. M's	MLB.com	Cassavell	12
Renfroe's two-strike approach a strength in '18	MLB.com	Cassavell	14
Callis projects Gore as No. 5 prospect in 1 year	MLB.com	Callis	16
Padres Report: Assessing a season's worth of San Diego debuts	The Athletic	Lin	18
The Padres have two promising catchers once again, and this time it might be best to keep them both	The Athletic	Palmateer	22
Hedges, Renfroe homer, Padres top free-falling Mariners 5-4	AP	AP	26
#PadresOnDeck: Double-A San Antonio Down 0-2 after Second Straight Walk-off Loss	FriarWire	Center	28
This Day in Padres History, 9/13	FriarWire	Center	30
Hedges, Renfroe homer as Padres complete season sweep of Mariners	FOX Sports	AP	31

Bullpen's record day, big hits lift Padres to season sweep of Mariners

[Kevin Acee](#)

[Nelson Cruz](#)'s home run sailed into the upper deck of the left field seats at Safeco Field, soaring about 30 feet above the heads of the [Padres](#) relievers sitting and standing in the visitors' bullpen.

The phone didn't ring. No one began throwing. No one even stretched a muscle.

Before Andy Green could manage his bullpen the way he wanted, he was going to let rookie starting pitcher Joey Lucchesi try to see his way through Wednesday's fifth inning in what had become a two-run game.

"You're trying to give leash and latitude to a guy," Green said after the Padres completed a season sweep of the [Mariners](#) with a 5-4 victory. "... You manage things drastically different if you're in a different context."

That's just the way it is this Padres season — even this month, even with this bullpen that is so good and that Green would have loved to let loose more often.

The 2018 season has so often been about learning and growing, so much so that the possibility of losing doesn't get in the way of decisions Green makes.

But Wednesday, on the way to another result that meant absolutely nothing, was a series of events that showed what the Padres could be one day in a future that creeps ever closer.

For a rare instance, Green was able to accomplish the dual purpose of letting a young starter battle and actually pulling the strings on his bullpen the way a manager concerned primarily with winning would do.

The circumstances were right. The Padres, who have had so many short starts that their bullpen is often teetering on the edge of overuse, had not used any of their young pitchers since Saturday. They have a day off Thursday.

So there they were, with a lead and with four innings to play and with an abundance of live arms ready to pitch.

“For so long it’s just been survive,” Green said. “So this was nice to be able to set it up the way we wanted to.”

What happened was exactly how it was supposed to go, only exceedingly so.

“Nine straight strikeouts,” Green said. “I don’t recall seeing that before.”

No one had, at least not in the manner it happened between the start of the bottom of the sixth and the end of the eighth inning Wednesday.

When rookies Trey Wingenter, Robert Stock and Jose Castillo and veteran Craig Stammen strung together nine strikeouts, the Padres became the first team to ever have four different pitchers strike out every batter they faced in a game. It was the most consecutive strikeouts ever gotten by Padres relievers, and it tied [Jake Peavy](#)’s team record for successive strikeouts.

The Padres had gone up 5-0 on a couple errors, a couple home runs and a double.

[Austin Hedges](#) hit a two-run homer in the second and [Hunter Renfroe](#) hit a two-run homer in the fifth. [Eric Hosmer](#) reached on an error before Hedges’ blast, and Wil Myers reached on an error before Renfroe’s. Wil Myers’ double in the third inning, which scored Francisco Mejia from first base, accounted for the Padres’ other run.

Lucchesi (8-8) allowed three runs in the fifth.

Then the rookies went to work.

Wingenter struck out all three batters he faced in the sixth inning, Stock the only batter he faced in the seventh and Castillo the final two batters of the seventh and first one of the eighth.

Stammen, pitching in his third straight game (over four days), finished off the eighth with two more.

The streak stopped when [Kyle Seager](#) homered on the first pitch of the ninth inning from Kirby Yates, who would then close out his ninth save and third in three games.

Perhaps most encouraging to those involved is that while the three rookies all hit at least 97 mph on Wednesday, they also got strikes with their sliders.

“They’re starting to understand how they’re going to have to pitch here,” Yates said. “They’ve all made some adjustments, throwing breaking balls for strikes, pitching a little backward instead of trying to blow everybody away. Today, I was the only guy who didn’t strike out the side. It’s really impressive.”

The victory completed a sweep of the two two-game series against the Mariners – the first time either team has swept in the 21 years consecutive years they have played the interleague series. The Mariners are also the only team the Padres have swept this season.

The Padres completed their final long road trip of the season – an eight-game, 10-day trek – with five victories.

All that remains in 2018 is a six-game home stand against the Rangers and [Giants](#), a six-game trip to Los Angeles and San Francisco and a season-ending three-game series against the Diamondbacks.

Whatever happens in those 15 games, the knowledge that every key member of the bullpen is under team control at least through 2019 – with most being so for much longer – is among the things that has the Padres believing in a better future.

“It puts us in a really good position,” Hedges said. “We’ve got all these young starters, young bullpen guys, veteran bullpen guys. With the adjustments our offense has made, we’re really growing in the right direction. It’s fun to see.”

Padres notes: Borrowing playoff push; Urias walking; Mitchell still has work

[Kevin Acee](#)

The [Padres](#) can't experience a pennant race of their own just yet, so they will pilfer a little bit of the experience from another team's postseason push.

Eric Lauer's next start has been pushed back a day to Saturday, and Joey Lucchesi will swap starts with Bryan Mitchell so both can pitch against the [Dodgers](#) the second-to-last weekend of the season in Los Angeles.

"We're lining up the rotation for guys to pitch against certain teams in environments we want them to pitch in," manager Andy Green said.

The Padres being off Thursday could allow Lucchesi to move up a day and pitch Monday against the Giants at Petco Park. Or Lucchesi could pitch as scheduled Tuesday and then switch with Mitchell and start Sept. 23 in L.A. Whichever happens, the Padres plan to throw Lucchesi against the Dodgers.

Robbie Erlin will pitch Friday against the Rangers, Lauer on Saturday and Jacob Nix on Sunday.

Not encouraging enough

Rookie second baseman Luis Urias was walking without crutches on Wednesday morning, about 12 hours after pulling his left hamstring while trying to beat out a grounder.

"He's moving around better than anticipated," Green said. "I still don't think it's likely we see him before the season is over. It's just too short a timeframe."

There is no reason to push Urias to play in a few games. The Padres got to see him, and he will enter [spring training](#) as their starting second baseman.

In the meantime, Cory Spangenberg, Jose Pirela, [Freddy Galvis](#) and perhaps [Javy Guerra](#) will get time there.

Spangenberg started Wednesday with Pirela likely to start Friday. Guerra, called up Tuesday, is expected to make his first major league start at shortstop Saturday, and Galvis will likely move to second base that day.

New man at the top

The Padres on Wednesday used their 10th lead-off hitter this season – tied for second-most in the majors – as Francisco Mejia went 1-for-4 as the designated hitter batting first.

“Definitely not the quintessential lead-off guy,” Green said. “... We’re not set up with a prototype at the top of the order when Travis (Jankowski) doesn’t play. So against left-handed pitching, we’re searching for that guy.”

Austin Hedges was the DH on Tuesday and caught Wednesday. Mejia caught Tuesday.

Jankowski has a .341 on-base percentage and 21 stolen bases in 71 games batting lead-off. All other Padres lead-off hitters have a .240 OBP and two steals.

Still evaluating Mitchell

The Padres are encouraged by what Bryan Mitchell has done in his past two starts.

The right-hander has allowed two runs in 11 innings, a vast improvement over a shorter time span than the 6.47 ERA over seven starts that caused him to be demoted to the bullpen in early May.

But not enough to declare even that he will be a part of the rotation competition in spring training.

“He’s had two good starts, two real positive steps,” Green said. “... He’s doing everything to to put himself in that consideration. That conversation will evolve as the offseason unfolds. He’s got a couple more starts in front of him. We want to see more of what we’ve seen these last two.”

Mitchell has pitched himself out of trouble, thrown strikes at a greater rate than in April and developed a two-seamed fastball.

“It’s about consistency,” Green said. “It’s about repeating performance as frequently as possible. Everybody is going to have some blips, everybody is going to have some hiccups. Before you get labeled a real major league starter, you have to go out time and again and have success.”

Minors Wild streak haunts Munoz, sinks Missions in Game 2

Jeff Sanders

Double-A San Antonio is one loss away from its season ending.

Again.

Hard-throwing closer **Andres Munoz** walked three and balked in the ninth inning and the winning run scored on a wild pitch in a walk-off [6-5 loss to host Tulsa](#). The Drillers are up two games to none in the best-of-five Texas League Championship Series.

The Missions faced that predicament the previous round before rallying for three straight wins.

This time, San Antonio was three outs away from evening the series when the 19-year-old Munoz – who has hit 103 mph this year – walked the leadoff batter in the ninth while trying to protect a 5-4 lead.

Munoz then balked the runner to second and **Keibert Ruiz** singled him in before two more walks ended the Missions closer's night.

Right-hander **Dauris Valdez** threw a wild pitch to allow the go-ahead run.

Left fielder **Josh Naylor** drove in two runs on three hits, including two doubles, and shortstop **Owen Miller** went 3-for-5 with a double, an RBI and a run scored.

Right-hander **Emmanuel Ramirez** allowed four runs in 4 1/3 innings in the start before right-hander **Lake Bachar** turned in 2 2/3 scoreless innings.

Right-hander **Eric Yardley** struck out two in the eighth to hand a 5-4 lead to Munoz.

After an off-day Thursday, the series resumes Friday at San Antonio's Wolff Stadium.

Right-hander **Jesse Scholtens** will face Tulsa right-hander **Dustin May**.

NL West storylines by the numbers

By AJ Cassavell

No game is defined by its numbers more than baseball. And the 2018 edition of the National League West has certainly seen its share of bizarre stats.

With 2 1/2 weeks remaining in the tightest three-way division race in baseball, here's a look at the key number which best explains why all five teams in the NL West find themselves in their current predicament.

D-BACKS

The number: 5

What it means: When the D-backs got rolling in 2017, they rolled. They pieced together winning streaks of 13 games, seven games and -- on three occasions -- five games.

This year, their longest winning streak has been five, and they've reached that mark only once -- in early May. Indeed, every time Arizona appeared poised to surge, it hit a snag. For a number of reasons, the pivotal pieces on the roster have yet to click simultaneously.

There's still time to salvage the season. The D-backs sit 3 1/2 games back of Colorado and two behind Los Angeles, with series remaining against the Rockies and Dodgers. But to do so, they'll need to finish with a hot stretch, the likes of which they've yet to produce this year.

DODGERS

The number: 27

What it means: The Dodgers' weakness is no secret. Their bullpen has blown 27 saves -- already 11 more than the 2017 club, which reached the World Series and saw its relief corps turn into a strength during its NL Division Series and NL Championship Series victories.

That's in part due to [Kenley Jansen](#)'s journey. The Dodgers closer wasn't particularly effective in the early stages, and he's missed time over the past two months with an irregular heartbeat.

But the 27 blown saves are more attributable to the 'pen around Jansen, which has struggled immensely -- whether Jansen's been there or not. Jansen has only blown four of those saves. [Erik Goeddel](#), [JT Chargois](#), [Pedro Baez](#), [Scott Alexander](#) and [Tony Cingrani](#) all have multiple blown saves to their name this year.

GIANTS

The number: 15

What it means: [Madison Bumgarner](#), [Johnny Cueto](#) and [Jeff Samardzija](#) were supposed to anchor San Francisco's playoff push this season. Instead, the Giants have won only 15 games when any one of those three has started. The trio has combined for nine victories.

Of course, that's largely been the product of injuries. Samardzija (right shoulder inflammation) and Cueto (Tommy John surgery) are done for the season, and neither has pitched since July. Bumgarner, meanwhile, missed the first two months of the season with a fracture in his left hand.

The Giants hung around for a while in a crowded NL West race. If there's one reason they've faded, it's the minimal contributions from their supposed front-line arms.

PADRES

The number: 16

What it means: It was always going to be a season for development in San Diego. Fifteen players have made their big league debut for the Padres. That number will grow when left-hander [Brad Wieck](#) takes the mound for the first time. (Wieck was recalled Tuesday, but he didn't pitch in either of the team's two games in Seattle.)

For a handful of those players, the first taste of the big leagues has proved wildly successful. Left-hander [Joey Lucchesi](#) has been arguably the Padres' best starter this season. [Franmil Reyes](#) could be establishing himself as a long-term presence in the outfield. Right-hander [Robert Stock](#) appears capable of becoming a big-time bullpen arm.

But the rookies who have struggled have still gained valuable big league experience. The building blocks are clearly in place. The Padres are optimistic those 2018 debutants can take a step forward in '19.

ROCKIES

The number: 40

What it means: The Rockies have already won 40 road games this season -- perhaps the biggest reason they own a 1 1/2-game lead in the division

The franchise record for road victories is 41, set in 2009 and '17, and Colorado still has nine more games away from Coors Field this season. That mark should fall shortly.

Of course, two of those remaining road series come against the Dodgers and D-backs -- the teams chasing them in the NL West race. If the Rockies -- who have thrived historically at Coors Field while struggling elsewhere -- can tack on road victories at their current .556 clip, they'll be in good shape for the first division title in franchise history.

Hedges' 2-run HR paves way to sweep vs. M's

Bullpen K's 9 straight batters; Renfroe's 2-run HR provides difference

By AJ Cassavell

SEATTLE -- [Austin Hedges](#) is still a defense-first catcher. Chances are, he always will be. But with his performance at the plate this year, Hedges has long since dispelled the notion that he might be "defense-only."

The Padres' backstop led the way in a 5-4 victory over the Mariners on Wednesday afternoon at Safeco Field. Hedges demolished a two-run homer to open the scoring in the second, and he went 2-for-4 to help finish a two-game sweep in Seattle, and a four-game sweep of the season series.

It's quite a statement from the 26-year-old Hedges, whose .242 batting average sits above the league average for catchers, and whose .739 OPS sits above the league average, period.

"Even last year, I think I did some things that you don't see a whole lot of catchers in the big leagues do," Hedges said. "Driving runners in, hitting home runs. Now I think I've taken it up to putting together better at-bats, being able to hit for a better average, a better on-base percentage.

"I want to be the best player I can be."

The Padres, of course, traded for [Francisco Mejia](#) -- MLB Pipeline's [top catching prospect](#) -- at the All-Star break. Since then, Hedges has asserted himself as a legitimate weapon on both sides of the ball. At this point, Hedges and Mejia are probably destined for a fierce battle for playing time next spring.

But Hedges' 2018 campaign didn't start quite so smoothly. He missed two months with a right elbow injury, and he saw his average dip to .165 upon his late-June return.

"It's been a roller coaster of a season, and I'm very proud of the adjustments and the improvements that I've made," Hedges said. "It wasn't easy. ... But it's brought a lot of peace to my game where I feel like I can just be me, and I can play the game."

Hedges' most noteworthy adjustment was a swing alteration in which he lowered his center of gravity to become a bit less upright.

"His power's played a lot more because of that," Padres manager Andy Green said. "I think the 'compete' factor to every at-bat is up. He's definitely very confident in the batters' box right now."

Hedges' 402-foot homer was his 13th of the season, and it came after he won an eight-pitch duel with Mariners starter [Wade LeBlanc](#). [Hunter Renfroe](#) also took LeBlanc deep, destroying a hanging breaking ball in the fifth to put the Padres up, 5-0.

San Diego starter [Joey Lucchesi](#) gave three back in the bottom of the frame, and he'd depart after five innings. Lucchesi allowed six hits and only struck out three, but he managed to limit the damage and left with a two-run lead. The bullpen took over from there.

BRILLIANT BULLPEN

The Padres' middle relief corps put on a show for the ages.

Between the sixth and eighth innings, nine Mariners came to the plate, and all nine struck out. It marked the longest string of strikeouts by Padres relievers in franchise history, and it tied the franchise record for consecutive strikeouts, set by Jake Peavy on April 25, 2007.

"That's what we're capable of on any given night," said rookie right-hander [Trey Wingenter](#), who opened the streak by striking out the side in the sixth. "It's a really deep bullpen, and whoever gets the ball, we trust that they're going to attack, have success and pass it to the next guy."

[Robert Stock](#) followed Wingenter with a strikeout to open the seventh before [Jose Castillo](#) whiffed three straight. [Craig Stammen](#) added two more to end the eighth. The four combined to throw 42 pitches, and they recorded 13 swings and misses.

"They punched out everybody," Hedges said. "It was awesome. We've got nasty guys out there. Everybody's throwing 100 [mph], and even our guy who doesn't throw 100 [mph], Craig Stammen, is punching everybody out because he's executing all his pitches."

The streak ended in the ninth when [Kirby Yates](#) surrendered a lead-off homer to [Kyle Seager](#), making it 5-4. But Yates slammed the door for his ninth save.

SOUND SMART

With their four victories over the Mariners this year, the Padres recorded their fourth season-series sweep of at least four games in franchise history. They went 7-0 against the Cubs in 2006 and the Marlins in '11, and they went 6-0 against the Pirates in '10.

HE SAID IT

"Kirby and Craig, they know how to go about their business. They're really professional. You get to see a guy right next to you in the locker room do it the right way every day, and it's rubbing off on the guys who haven't been around very long. It's huge for us." -- *Wingenter*

UP NEXT

After an off-day Thursday, the Padres host the Rangers on Friday night at Petco Park. [Robbie Erlin](#) takes the ball opposite fellow left-hander [Yohander Mendez](#), with first pitch slated for 7:10 p.m. PT. Erlin is looking for a strong finish to boost his case for a rotation place next season. He's posted a 2.05 ERA out of the bullpen this year, compared with a 7.46 mark as a starter.

Renfroe's two-strike approach a strength in '18

Urias unlikely to return this year; Lauer, Erlin flipped in rotation

By AJ Cassavell

SEATTLE -- It was precisely the type of situation that would've buried [Hunter Renfroe](#) a season ago. Down 0-2 in a big spot against a dominant right-hander, Renfroe would've stood no chance.

But it's a new year and a new Renfroe at the plate -- particularly over the past few months. And so when Renfroe fell behind 0-2 against Mariners closer [Edwin Diaz](#) to lead off the ninth Tuesday night, the battle wasn't close to being finished.

"I'm a lot more comfortable, and it's because I've been practicing it in the cage and [in batting practice]," Renfroe said of hitting from behind in the count. "I'm letting the ball get deep, shortening up a bit, making sure I'm as short and quick to the ball as possible. I need to be able to hit the inside pitch and the outside slider away. That's what I've got to cover."

On the whole, Renfroe is hitting .304 from behind in the count this year, compared with a .187 mark last year. Against right-handers, Renfroe has made huge strides this season -- he's hitting .326 since July 1 when behind in the count against righties.

It's a sign he's picking up pitches much better. And sure enough, on Tuesday night, Renfroe smacked a 97-mph fastball from Diaz to left-center for a single that sparked the Padres' go-ahead rally in the ninth.

"I'm recognizing pitches, because I'm not gearing up to swing as hard as I can," Renfroe said of his two-strike approach. "I'm just seeing the ball and hitting it."

Easier said than done, of course.

"It takes an effort to not swing," Renfroe said. "You see the ball coming, it used to be, 'OK, I'm going to gear up to swing as hard as I can.' Now it's, just put the barrel to the ball."

Renfroe has ticked the two most important boxes on the Padres' preseason checklist for him this season. He's made the proper adjustments at the plate to become a threat against right-handed pitching. And he's honed his tools in the outfield enough to add value defensively as a corner outfielder.

The next step? Simple: more of the same.

"I've really just got to keep doing it," Renfroe said. "That's the hard thing with baseball. ... It's a long season, and that's the challenge to it -- making sure your head's right and making sure you're doing it day in, day out."

On the year, Renfroe has posted an .837 OPS against righties -- which is actually better than his mark against left-handers. A year ago, he was 500 points *worse* against righties.

If Renfroe can be the player he's been during the second half of the season, that's an incredibly valuable piece on a winning roster. Since the All-Star break, he's hitting .277 with an .882 OPS and 14 homers.

But in Major League Baseball, status quo is never that simple.

"The league's going to adjust to him," said Padres manager Andy Green. "There's certain pitches he's hit very well recently, and they're going to go back to a different way of pitching him. He's just going to have to play that cat-and-mouse game a lot, which everybody has to do."

Urias still doubtful

A day after [Luis Urias](#) pulled his left hamstring while running to first base Tuesday night, the Padres continued to indicate that it's unlikely Urias returns before the end of the season.

"He's moving around better than anticipated," Green said. "I still don't think it's likely we see him before the season's over. It's just too short a timeframe." Urias -- the top-ranked [second-base prospect](#), according to MLB Pipeline -- was hobbled while lunging toward first on an eighth-inning grounder up the line in the Padres' 2-1 victory. He was 10-for-48 during his first big league stint after earning his promotion in late August.

Noteworthy

- Lefty-hitting shortstop [Javy Guerra](#) is expected to receive his first career start on Saturday -- the next time the Padres are slated to face a right-handed pitcher. When that happens, shortstop [Freddy Galvis](#) will likely shift to second base.

That's one of the Padres' plans for replacing Urias. [Cory Spangenberg](#) started at second on Wednesday, and the righty-hitting [Jose Pirela](#) could get the start Friday against Texas lefty [Yohander Mendez](#).

- [Francisco Mejia](#) started in the leadoff spot Wednesday, serving as the designated hitter. That's not necessarily the long-term lineup spot for the newly promoted Mejia, Green said. But it probably won't be the last time he's inserted there against a left-hander this season.

"We're not set up with a prototype at the top of the order when [[Travis Jankowski](#)] doesn't play," Green said. "Against left-handed pitching, we're searching for that guy right now. We'll take a look at it. ... I don't think it's hurting anybody to get him as many at-bats as possible at the top of the order."

- The Padres flipped [Robbie Erlin](#) and [Eric Lauer](#) in their starting rotation, meaning Erlin will start Friday and Lauer will take the ball Saturday against Texas. The move was made with the goal of giving the rookie Lauer a start in Dodger Stadium on Sept. 21, with Los Angeles in the midst of a pennant race.

"We're lining up [Lauer's] last few starts hopefully to pitch in some hostile, tough environments," Green said.

Callis projects Gore as No. 5 prospect in 1 year

By Jim Callis

We're not satisfied with just identifying the game's 10 best prospects as of now, which we've done at [MLB Pipeline's Prospect Watch](#), where Blue Jays third baseman Vladimir Guerrero Jr. sits atop our list.

Let's raise the degree of difficulty and look even deeper into the future. What will the Top 10 look like a year from now?

We've tackled this challenge at the end of the past two Minor League seasons, learning a few things in the process. Our research shows that nearly every player who finished one season among the Top 10 did so again 12 months later, provided he didn't graduate to the big leagues or get hurt. Prospects who ended the year ranked in the 11-25 range usually fill most of the Top 10 vacancies, a couple of players in the 26-50 range make a huge jump, and occasionally someone in the bottom half of the [Top 100](#) or completely off the list will do the same.

[Our prognostications from a year ago](#) went slightly askew because Nationals outfielder [Victor Robles](#), White Sox outfielder [Eloy Jimenez](#), Astros outfielder [Kyle Tucker](#) and Reds infielder Nick Senzel didn't graduate as expected and repeated on the Top 10 list. But we still nailed Guerrero as the No. 1 prospect, predicted that Rockies infielder Brendan Rodgers would remain in the Top 10 and foresaw that Padres shortstop [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) and Astros right-hander Forrest Whitley would make moves into that lofty territory. We also just missed on Padres left-hander MacKenzie Gore (No. 11 on the current Top 100) and called a breakout for Nationals outfielder [Juan Soto](#), who rocketed to the Majors.

Of the prospects currently in the Top 10 (none of whom should graduate by the end of this season), Guerrero, Tatis, Jimenez, Senzel, Robles, Rodgers, Tucker and Blue Jays infielder Bo Bichette all figure to be full-fledged big leaguers by the end of 2019. In case you are wondering about [Michael Kopech](#), who is the highest-ranked prospect right now that you don't see below, he will retain his prospect status since he never reached 50 innings pitched, but it's hard to see him as a Top 10 prospect a year from since he will still be recovering from Tommy John surgery.

1. Royce Lewis, SS, Twins (No. 1)

The No. 1 overall pick in the 2017 Draft had no problems handling pitching at two Class A levels at age 19, may have more power than expected and looked better at shortstop than anticipated.

2. Jo Adell, OF, Angels (No. 16)

Adell may have the best all-around tools in the Minors and erased any concerns about his bat by racing to Double-A as a teenager.

3. Alex Kirilloff, OF, Twins (No. 30)

After missing last season recovering from Tommy John surgery, Kirilloff led the Minors with 44 doubles, 71 extra-base hits and 296 total bases while looking like the successor to Guerrero and Jimenez as the game's best all-around hitting prospect.

4. Forrest Whitley, RHP, Astros (No. 7)

Whitley can miss bats with four pitches and could graduate in 2019, though the Astros are deep on the mound and he has barely pitched this year because of a 50-game suspension and some minor injuries.

5. MacKenzie Gore, LHP, Padres (No. 11)

Blister issues plagued Gore throughout his first full pro season, but he too has four bat-missing pitches, plus he pounds the strike zone and he's left-handed.

6. Wander Franco, SS, Rays (No. 40)

The next international megapropect, Franco is a switch-hitting slugger who broke into pro ball this summer by winning Appalachian League MVP honors and posting a 1.004 OPS as the Rookie circuit's second-youngest regular (age 17).

7. Taylor Trammell, OF, Reds (No. 19)

Trammell has potential plus tools across the board with the exception of his arm, and his makeup is off the charts as well.

8. Sixto Sanchez, RHP, Phillies (No. 18)

Elbow inflammation dogged Sanchez this season, but he's still the same guy that makes hitters look bad with his fastball, curveball and changeup, and he draws some Pedro Martinez comparisons.

9. Casey Mize, RHP, Tigers (No. 20)

Mize went No. 1 overall in the 2018 Draft because of his combination of stuff and command, which might already be the best in the Minors.

10. Dylan Cease, RHP, White Sox (No. 44)

MLB Pipeline's Pitcher of the Year, Cease overmatched Double-A hitters with a devastating fastball/curveball combination.

Padres Report: Assessing a season's worth of San Diego debuts

By Dennis Lin

SEATTLE — Brad Wieck entered rarified air without throwing a pitch on Tuesday. In receiving his first call-up, the 6-foot-9 lefty arrived at Safeco Field as the Padres' tallest player and *maybe* the tallest active player in the major leagues. He remained in the bullpen throughout a 2-1 victory over the Seattle Mariners, a contest devoid of low-leverage opportunities for a newcomer.

Yet Wieck, while impossibly long-limbed, is far from unique in the broader context of this season. When the 26-year-old next towers over a mound, he will become the 16th, and likely last, player to make a big-league debut with the 2018 Padres.

The discovery phase is far from over, of course. The majority of San Diego's best prospects have yet to surface, which means this year has been of heightened importance for young major leaguers seeking to establish themselves. Below are assessments of the players who already have debuted for San Diego, beginning with a second baseman whose season likely ended Tuesday night.

Luis Urías, 2B: Urías, the Padres' future at the keystone, suffered what appeared to be a significant hamstring pull running down the first-base line. He required assistance walking off the field, and afterward, manager Andy Green cast doubt on his chances of returning before the end of the season. If this is indeed the end of Urías' 2018, here is the brief summary: He generally upheld his reputation as a preternaturally gifted hitter in Triple A before batting .208/.264/.354 over 53 plate appearances. He is still only 21 years old. "He's looked so good at second base," Green said. "The (offensive) numbers aren't going to be what he wants them to be for the first short stint in the big leagues, but I don't think there's going to be anybody remotely concerned about that. He's got a long track record, and you saw some quality at-bats."

Francisco Mejía, C: Mejía technically made his big-league debut last season with Cleveland, but it consisted of 14 plate appearances and he did not start a game at catcher. Since ascending from Triple A last week, the elite, switch-

hitting prospect has homered twice in his first start and performed acceptably in three full games behind the plate. The bat speed and offensive profile are needed elements in a traditionally punchless lineup. Where Mejía winds up on defense is more complicated, but the Padres intend to give him a long look.

Javy Guerra, SS: Aside from his 2015 season in A-ball, Guerra has never hit much. He got hot for a spell in Triple A, but scouts suspect that was a byproduct of the friendly environs in the Pacific Coast League. The same scouts unanimously rave about Guerra's glove and arm, superior tools that should help him secure some kind of job at the highest level. Guerra, who was recalled Tuesday, will audition to be a bridge to top shortstop prospect Fernando Tatis Jr. The Padres may test his defensive versatility, as well. Anything he can supply on offense will be viewed as a bonus. "Anybody that's seen him play an extensive amount of time at shortstop knows he's really good there," Green said. "When you can defend that position you tend to find some sort of role in the big leagues."

Franmil Reyes, OF: Reyes, 23, has exceeded all expectations, going from a Rule 5 snub to a rookie with a clear ability to make adjustments. Nine of his 15 home runs have come since the start of August. His once-astronomical strikeout rate [has dipped](#). His defense, however, remains suspect, making him a better fit for the American League. Where there once was a fringe prospect, the Padres now have an intriguing young power bat they can deploy in trade talks. Alternatively, they can wait for more development to unfold before deciding on Reyes' future.

Joey Lucchesi, LHP: The first pitcher from the 2016 draft to reach the majors, Lucchesi arrived on April 5 and has continued to frustrate major-league hitters into September. He mostly relies on a two-pitch mix, yet he has averaged better than a strikeout per inning. Lucchesi looks like the best bet among the Padres' current starters for the next opening-day rotation. Year two will test his ability to hone a third pitch and handle the league's adjustments.

Eric Lauer, LHP: Lauer possesses a larger repertoire than Lucchesi, none of it overpowering. He, too, has shown aptitude, particularly in the July start in which he finished an out shy of a complete game. There is a slight chance he becomes more than a back-end starter.

Jacob Nix, RHP: Within the organization, Nix's debut generated significant excitement. He will need to start striking out more batters to maintain that level

of interest, but the changeup is a legitimate weapon. Six starts from a 22-year-old is a very limited sample, of course.

Brett Kennedy, RHP: Kennedy's season is likely over because of knee tendinitis. He logged a 6.75 ERA in six starts and might not receive another, but he certainly earned a shot with a strong PCL season.

Walker Lockett, RHP: Lockett pitched four games with the Padres, surrendering 16 runs in 15 innings. He did not receive a call-up after Triple-A El Paso's season ended.

José Castillo, LHP: Left-handed relievers who sit in the mid-90s are often matchup nightmares, and Castillo is already on his way to becoming one. In 32 innings, he has recorded 40 strikeouts against only 10 walks. Opponents have mustered a .147 average. Castillo, 22, looks like a long-term late-inning fixture.

Robert Stock, RHP: The former youth-ball and high school phenom is once again opening eyes. Now 28, Stock splashed onto the major-league scene as a hard thrower with one of the most resilient arms around. He has successfully supplied multiple innings on more than a few occasions, rare for someone who regularly tops out at 100 mph. Stock's versatility makes him an attractive option going forward.

Trey Wingenter, RHP: Wingenter also wields a lively right arm on a 6-7 frame. Scouts would like to see him throw more strikes before anointing him as a high-leverage weapon.

Rowan Wick, RHP: The former catcher-turned-outfielder is a little more than three years into his pitching career. Like Wingenter, he could be challenged to limit the walks, but the arm talent is there.

Colten Brewer, RHP: Brewer was signed to a major league deal last offseason. The opportunities, to date, have been scarce. He will turn 26 in October, so the Padres will need to get some looks at him this month.

Kazuhisa Makita, RHP: Makita's unorthodox, soft-tossing style simply hasn't translated to the majors. The two-year deal he received, while inexpensive, has looked like a dud.

September Snub?

Padres officials have indicated that Tuesday's call-ups — Guerra, Wieck, Brewer and Makita — were the last of the season. Two of the organization's

better pitching prospects, Logan Allen and Cal Quantrill, are done for the year after El Paso's playoff run concluded. Both arms accrued significant innings in 2018. Both will compete for opening-day rotation jobs next spring.

The same expectation applies for Colin Rea, though the 28-year-old's circumstances are decidedly different. Rea, once one of the Padres' top young arms, returned from Tommy John surgery this season and produced subpar numbers overall, logging a 5.73 ERA between Double A and Triple A. He also missed time with lat and shoulder injuries.

Rea put together a strong finish, however. Over his last six outings, including one playoff start, he allowed a total of five runs. The lack of a September call-up for one of the organization's more diligent workers did not go unnoticed.

"We are disappointed," Joe Speed, Rea's agent, said. "He has been very, very good his last six starts, and we felt like he deserved the opportunity again."

Rea, who was optioned earlier this season, is just shy of "Super Two" status, which he could have attained this month with two more days in the majors. Super Two players become eligible for salary arbitration a year earlier than other players who also have not collected three full years of big-league service time.

"I cannot speculate on the Padres' motives regarding Super Two status," Speed said. "I just believe he deserved to be called up, regardless."

Reached Tuesday, Padres general manager A.J. Preller maintained that other factors contributed to the decision not to recall Rea.

"It was nice to see at the end of the season that he threw the ball the way we know he's capable of," Preller said. "For us, there are a lot of other young arms that have come up and are getting an opportunity, and we want to make sure there's an opportunity for guys when they come up and pitch. Right now, we're looking at a few other guys that throughout the year have performed, and I think Colin's going to get an opportunity next year, for sure. The way he finished the season, we're looking forward to him having a nice year for us next year."

The Padres could have filled the vacancy left by Kennedy, but they opted to go from six starters to five partly because there are three more off-days this month.

The Padres have two promising catchers once again, and this time it might be best to keep them both

By Dustin Palmateer

The last time the Padres had two catchers worthy of everyday starting duties was 2014, when Yasmani Grandal and René Rivera combined to [lead the league in defense](#) and post the [sixth-best wRC+](#) at the position.

That promising duo was abruptly dismantled during A.J. Preller's first offseason as general manager, however, when Grandal was traded to the Dodgers as the centerpiece of the ill-fated Matt Kemp trade and Rivera was spun to Tampa Bay as a small part of the Wil Myers three-team blockbuster.

The results were largely disastrous: Grandal turned into a stealth star in LA, while Kemp flopped in San Diego. Furthermore, Derek Norris — the pick to replace the departed catching tandem in San Diego — failed to deliver similar results behind the plate in 2015 and 2016.

Now, almost four years later, things have come full circle.

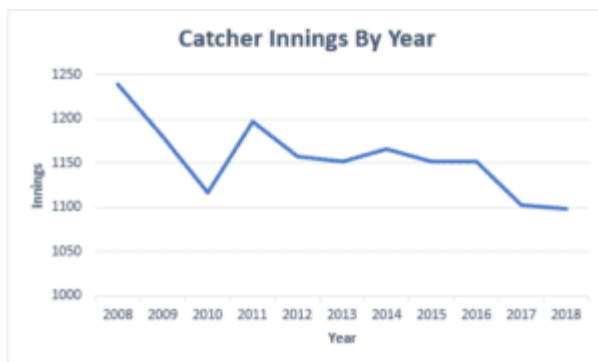
Austin Hedges, once the catcher-in-waiting behind Grandal and Rivera (and later Norris), has become the steady mainstay at the position. After an off-the-charts defensive year in 2017, he's improved his wRC+ by 24 with the bat this season but regressed some in the field. But after almost two years of an unchallenged everyday gig — flanked only by journeymen backups, like A.J. Ellis this season — Francisco Mejía has arrived. Suddenly, the Padres have another quarterback-like controversy on the diamond.

The 22-year-old Mejía, acquired from Cleveland for relievers Brad Hand and Adam Cimber in July, made his Padres debut last week and promptly delivered two home runs in his first start. Like Hedges, he's currently viewed strictly as a catcher, although he has limited minor-league experience at third base and left field. To make matters incrementally more crowded, the 24-year-old Austin Allen is auditioning for Hedges' former role. A fourth-rounder from Preller's first draft back in 2015, the offense-first Allen slashed .290/.351/.506 in Double-A San Antonio this season and lurks in the minors.

Thanks to another logjam at the position, the Padres could once more use catching depth to fill holes elsewhere, dealing from a surplus at one position to supplement another. Then again, given leaguewide trends at the position — plus the aftermath of San Diego’s last catcher sell-off — perhaps sticking with two good catchers makes even more sense.

A decade ago, Jason Kendall was the ironman of catchers. Even as a 34-year-old in 2008, he started 149 games at catcher for the Brewers and completed 145 of them, good for 1,328 1/3 innings of squatting, throwing and dodging — and sometimes not dodging — wild pitches and foul tips. Kendall [led the league](#) in innings caught that year for a ninth and final time, but three other backstops — Russell Martin, Kurt Suzuki and Joe Mauer — reached the 1,200-inning mark with another four catching at least 1,100 innings.

Fast forward to last season. Martín Maldonado led the league with an 1,146 1/3 inning workload with the Angels, nearly 200 fewer frames than Kendall caught a decade earlier. Only Yadier Molina joined Maldonado in the 1,100 club, and a total of just four catchers reached a measly 1,000 innings. This season, with less than three weeks to play, only the Cubs’ Willson Contreras has a realistic shot to surpass 1,100 innings (or roughly 122 games) at the position.



The graph above shows the average number of innings from the 10 busiest catchers in each season since 2008. That average has dropped from a highwater mark of 1,239 innings in 2008 to the 1,150 range in the middle of this decade to just 1,100 over the last two seasons (2018 data is projected through the rest of the season).

Rather than a single reason for the disappearance of the super catcher, there’s myriad potential factors.

For one, teams [and players alike] have slowly become more aware of the demands of the position and the possibility for negative short- and long-term

side effects from overuse. In the *2015 Hardball Times Annual*, Shane Tourtellotte found that catchers who played a lot — roughly 117 games or more — posted their worst collective OPS in September. The same was not found for heavily used non-catcher position players, as their performance remained mostly flat from month to month.

Further, as R.J. Anderson of CBS Sports [detailed last year](#), concussion awareness has received increased and overdue attention in recent years. The advent of the seven-day concussion disabled list and the 10-day DL has given teams more options for banged-up backstops, incentivizing more frequent DL trips over a play-though-it attitude. Last season, both Hedges and his backup, Héctor Sánchez, hit the seven-day DL due to lingering concussion-like symptoms after taking foul balls off the face mask.

Beyond injury and workload issues — and possibly related to them — teams now seem more willing to split time at the position between multiple catchers instead of pinning the burden primarily on one player. Among the teams with the 10 best records this season, seven have had some sort of timeshare behind the plate. Mejía's former team, for example, has successfully platooned the offensively-minded Yan Gomes and the defense-first Roberto Pérez for four years now.

Other teams have shifted catchers to different positions. The Red Sox, for instance, have carried three catchers for much of 2018, deploying Sandy Leon and Christian Vazquez in similar amounts, while using Blake Swihart in a roving role and switching him between occasional catching duties, the infield and the outfield. Other position flippers in recent years include Contreras (left field, first base) and the Dodgers' Austin Barnes (second base).

Whatever the reasons, the catcher position has slowly morphed in recent years. Even among the teams who favor one guy, plenty of innings are available for backups. And for much of the league, the position has turned into a job for two or three players.

If the Padres aren't convinced by the rest of the league, perhaps a re-examination of their own 2014 season could give them a prudent path forward. That year the Padres used Grandal and Rivera in a near equal split behind the dish that year, but they also got the then-25-year-old Grandal's promising bat into the lineup more frequently by starting him 33 times at first base. All told, Grandal received 114 more plate appearances than Rivera, but both guys

played often and well, buoyed by above-average hitting and excellent pitch framing.

Hedges and Mejía could conceivably mesh in a similar fashion, with each skill-set complementing the other. Hedges, of course, brings world-class defense. Despite a slight slip this season, he still ranks second in baseball since the start of 2017 in BP's FRAA, just a tick behind the Braves' Tyler Flowers. Mejía, on the other hand, offers the bat to dream on; despite concerns about his long-term viability behind the plate, he ranked as a consensus top 25 prospect in baseball this winter. Mejía's switch-hitting bat could make a platoon even more palatable, with Hedges sitting more often against right-handed pitching.

Although Mejía's apparent insistence on sticking at catcher helped push him to the trade block in Cleveland, there's also a chance he gets some time in a corner next season. Toss in a handful of games where the DH is available — like last night, in Seattle, when Mejía caught and Hedges DH'ed — and there could be plenty of opportunities for both players. And that's without even considering a potential injury or downturn in performance from either one, which would open up more playing time for the other and make Allen a useful insurance policy in 2019.

In modern baseball, there are worse problems than having two good catchers. As the position has progressed into more of a two-man job in recent years, it's almost become a requirement for good teams. The last time the Padres found themselves in such a situation, they dealt from a position of strength but manufactured a weakness. This time around, if they stick with both Hedges and Mejía, they could regain an advantage at one of the game's most important positions.

Hedges, Renfroe homer, Padres top free-falling Mariners 5-4

Associated Press

SEATTLE -- The Padres opened their bullpen gate and slammed the door on the Mariners' chances of a comeback.

Four San Diego relievers set a franchise record by striking out nine consecutive batters, preserving a two-run lead in the Padres' 5-4 victory over Seattle on Wednesday.

[Trey Wingenter](#) struck out the side in the sixth in relief of [Joey Lucchesi](#). [Robert Stock](#) fanned pinch-hitter [Ben Gamel](#), the only batter he faced. [Jose Castillo](#) whiffed the next two batters in the seventh and [Robinson Cano](#) to start the eighth. And [Craig Stammen](#) completed the run by getting [Nelson Cruz](#) looking and [Ryon Healy](#) swinging.

The totals: nine batters faced, 42 pitches, 31 strikes, zero balls in play.

"A lot of really good slider strikes early (in the count)," Padres manager Andy Green said. "You see what the fastball does after they've seen those sliders -- it just blows by those guys."

[Austin Hedges](#) and [Hunter Renfroe](#) hit long home runs for the Padres, who finished off a two-game sweep of the fast-sinking Mariners.

The Padres swept the interleague season series against the Mariners after taking two games in San Diego on Aug. 28-29. It was the first time since the two teams started meeting annually in 1997 that either club won every game in a season.

"For us to be successful, you are going to have to do that to five or six teams in the season," Green said. "That will be big if we start doing things like that."

The Mariners have lost 10 of 15 since Aug. 26 to fall out of contention for the AL wild card.

"Certainly we have not had a good run," Mariners manager Scott Servais said.

Hedges helped the Padres jump on [Wade LeBlanc](#) early with a two-run homer to left field in the second inning, ending the left-hander's 19-inning scoreless streak. [Eric Hosmer](#) reached leading off the inning on shortstop [Gordon Beckham](#)'s errant throw.

Cruz homered for the Mariners, his 35th of the season, and drove in his 1,000th career run. He's one of 11 active players to reach that total.

[Wil Myers](#) put the Padres ahead 3-0 with an RBI double to right-center in the third.

Seattle's infield defense was sloppy again in the fifth. With two outs, third baseman [Kyle Seager](#)'s throw on Myers' ground ball skipped short of Healy in the dirt. It was Seattle's third error of the game and its ninth during the eight-game homestand.

Renfroe followed with a home run to left, his 22nd of the season.

"We've been there. Everybody has been there -- putting guys on base with the unforced error, or the walk," Renfroe said. "It is very deflating. ... We were on the good end of it this time."

Lucchesi (8-8) allowed three runs on six hits in five innings, winning his second start of the season against the Mariners.

The Mariners' run of futility at the plate ended in the ninth when Seager led off with a homer against [Kirby Yates](#), who then settled down to earn his ninth save in 10 opportunities.

[Mitch Haniger](#) had a run-scoring triple in the fifth, and Cano followed with an RBI groundout before Cruz's homer.

LeBlanc (8-4) allowed five runs, two earned, on four hits in five innings.

SHUFFLING LINEUPS

Padres: San Diego had a surprise leadoff hitter Wednesday -- catcher [Francisco Mejia](#), who was playing his seventh game with the team after being promoted from Triple-A El Paso. With [Luis Urias](#) injured, Green said he doesn't have a settled leadoff hitter against left-handers.

Mariners: Servais said he wanted to throw a "few different faces" at Lucchesi after he struck out nine in six-plus innings in his previous start against Seattle. Bench players [Kristopher Negron](#), [David Freitas](#) and Beckham got starts Wednesday.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Padres: 2B Urias (left hamstring) was "moving around better than anticipated" before the game, Green said, adding that it was still a long shot the prospect would play again this season. Urias injured himself trying to beat out a ground ball in the eighth inning on Tuesday. [Cory Spangenberg](#), [Jose Pirela](#) and [Freddy Galvis](#) will get playing time at second.

Mariners: A virus continues to do damage inside the clubhouse. SS [Jean Segura](#) sat out his second consecutive game and was unavailable to do any pregame work. LHP [James Paxton](#) is so sick that he won't even travel with the team Thursday night. "His (scheduled) start Friday is a big question," Servais said. ... It's also uncertain whether RHP [Felix Hernandez](#) (right hamstring) will take his turn or not this weekend. ... With a shortage of healthy starters, Servais said it is likely one of the weekend games at the [Los Angeles Angels](#) will be a bullpen day. ... LHP [Marco Gonzales](#), who has logged a career-high 150 2/3 innings, will be on a limited pitch count over his final four starts.

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Padres: LHP [Robbie Erlin](#) (3-6, 4.42 ERA) will switch places with LHP [Eric Lauer](#) and start the opener of a three-game series at the [Texas Rangers](#) on Friday. Lauer is now slotted for Saturday.

Mariners: RHP [Mike Leake](#) (9-9, 4.11) takes on the Angels on Thursday in the opener of a four-game series and a 10-game trip. Leake has a team-leading 18 quality starts and is seeking to win at least 10 games in back-to-back seasons.

#PadresOnDeck: Double-A San Antonio Down 0-2 after Second Straight Walk-off Loss

By Bill Center

Tulsa scored a second straight walk-off win Wednesday night to give the Drillers a 2-0 lead in the best-of-five Texas League Championship Series against the Padres Double-A San Antonio affiliate.

After a travel day Thursday, the series will resume in San Antonio for Friday's third game. Games four and five, if needed, will be played in San Antonio Saturday and Sunday.

The Missions scheduled starters the next three games will be right-hander **Jesse Scholtens**, left-hander **Nick Margevicius** and right-hander **Chris Huffman**. The Missions also rallied from a 0-2 deficit to defeat Corpus Christi in the Southern Division Championship Series.

Wednesday night's walk-off decision ended on a wild pitch delivered by San Antonio reliever **Dauris Valdez**. San Antonio had taken a 5-4 lead into the bottom of the ninth against the Dodgers' Double-A affiliate.

Left fielder **Josh Naylor**, 21, the [Padres' No.15 prospect](#), led San Antonio by going 3-for-4 with two doubles, two RBIs and a walk. He is 5-for-9 in the first two games of the series. Shortstop **Owen Miller**, the [Padres' No.30 prospect](#), was 3-for-5 with a double, a run scored and a RBI and is 4-for-10 in the first two games.

Second baseman **Matthew Batten** (.200) was 1-for-4 with a walk, a RBI and three runs scored. Right fielder **Taylor Kohlwey** (.125) was 1-for-4 with a run scored.

Right-hander **Emmanuel Ramirez** started the game for the Missions and allowed four runs on six hits and two walks with four strikeouts in 4 1/3 innings. Right-hander **David Bednar** allowed two hits and a walk with two strikeouts in 2 2/3 scoreless innings. Right-hander **Eric Yardley** (0.00 earned run average) struck out two in a perfect inning while working a second straight night.

Right-hander **Andres Munoz** started the ninth and took the loss, allowing two runs on a hit and three walks with two strikeouts in two-thirds of an inning. Valdez threw the decisive wild pitch on his second pitch.

The Missions placed right-hander **Jason Jester** on the disabled list Wednesday morning and promoted right-hander **Elliot Ashbeck** from the Advanced Single-A Lake Elsinore.

This Day in Padres History, 9/13

By Bill Center

Sept. 13, 1971—**Clay Kirby**'s bid for a no-hitter ends on **John Edwards**' one-out double in the eighth. Houston goes on to a 3–2 walk-off win at the Astrodome. Kirby allows three runs (two earned) on three hits and three walks with five strikeouts in 8 2/3 innings.

Sept. 13, 1976—**Tom Griffin**'s bid for a no-hitter ends when San Francisco's **Ken Reitz** singles to lead off the eighth. The Giants win 3–2 in 10 innings. Griffin allows two runs on two hits and no walks with five strikeouts at San Diego Stadium.

Sept. 13, 1991—Catcher **Benito Santiago** is 5-for-5 with a double, a home run, five RBIs and three runs scored as the Padres score a 13–2 win in San Francisco.

Sept. 13, 1993—Outfielder **Phil Plantier** hits a walk-off homer in the 11th inning as the Padres defeat the Dodgers 4–3 at San Diego Jack Murphy Stadium.

Sept. 13, 1999—Right-hander **Woody Williams** allows four hits and two walks with five strikeouts over eight shutout innings and is 2-for-4 with a RBI as the Padres defeat Atlanta 3–0 at Qualcomm Stadium.

Sept. 13, 2004—**Phil Nevin** drives in four runs with a pair of homers as the Padres defeat the Dodgers 9–7 in Los Angeles.

Sept. 13, 2007—Third baseman **Kevin Kouzmanoff** singles in his first at-bat to tie the Padres' record with eight straight hits in as many at-bats in 6–3 loss to the Dodgers in Los Angeles.

Hedges, Renfroe homer as Padres complete season sweep of Mariners

AP

SEATTLE (AP) — [Austin Hedges](#) and Hunter Renfroe hit long home runs, and the [San Diego Padres](#) used a record-breaking run by their bullpen to beat the fast-sinking [Seattle Mariners](#) 5-4 on Wednesday and finish off a two-game sweep.

Trey Wingenter, [Robert Stock](#), [Jose Castillo](#) and [Craig Stammen](#) struck out all nine batters they faced in relief of Joey Lucchesi, setting a franchise record for consecutive strikeouts and preserving a two-run lead.

The Padres swept the interleague season series against the Mariners after taking two games in San Diego on Aug. 28-29. It was the first time since the two teams started meeting annually in 1997 that either club won every game in a season.

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