

Cincinnati Reds Press Clippings February 9, 2019

THIS DAY IN REDS HISTORY

1920-The rule committee ushers in the era of the lively ball, which allows the use of a fresh ball and bans pitchers from using any foreign substances. The Reds were hit hard by this change with their two top pitchers, Hod Eller and Slim Sallee, being “trick” ball pitchers

MLB.COM

**Inbox: Will new skipper Bell have quick hook?
Beat reporter Mark Sheldon fields Reds fans' questions
By Mark Sheldon MLB.com @m_sheldon
Feb. 8th, 2019**

With the addition of veteran starting pitchers, do you expect David Bell to have a quick hook like Jim Riggleman and go to the bullpen early?
-- @j davidhicks on Twitter

I expect Bell and pitching coach Derek Johnson to be creative and focus on getting outs and doing whatever it takes to do that on a given day. Under manager Craig Counsell in Milwaukee, Johnson showed a willingness to color outside the lines when it came to the use of Josh Hader and others. The Reds bullpen has a few guys capable of multiple innings -- Raisel Iglesias and Michael Lorenzen among them. And keep this in mind: While the Reds rotation was 13th out of 15 National League clubs last season in innings pitched, the Brewers were 12th.

The Reds have done a lot of really exciting things this offseason. What do you see as the biggest missed opportunity from this offseason that no one is talking about? Marwin Gonzalez?
-- @08deters on Twitter.

Granted that I wasn't privy to the specifics about the negotiations, I'd say it might have been Indians ace Corey Kluber. The Reds definitely upgraded their rotation nicely with the additions of Sonny Gray, Alex Wood and Tanner Roark. But Kluber would have been a legitimate ace at the top of the rotation. Of course, I don't know exactly who Cleveland asked for in return for Kluber. I wouldn't be shocked if the conversation ended once Nick Senzel or Hunter Greene was brought up.

Hi Mark. With the Reds having upgraded their starting rotation, the only position they may be lacking in would be center field. Do you see the Reds possibly going after Adam Jones even if it's just for a one-year deal?
-- Randall, Cincinnati

In center field last season, Jones had a minus-18 defensive runs saved according to FanGraphs. I could see his power rebounding after it took a dip during his final season in Baltimore though. At this point, I'm not sure Jones would be better in center field than the in-house options like Scott Schebler, Yasiel Puig or Senzel.

Why would the Dodgers trade for Homer Bailey, when they seemed to be planning on releasing him right away?
-- Ted C., Tampa, Fla.

Because the average annual value -- or AAV -- of Bailey's contract helped get the Dodgers back under the threshold for a luxury-tax penalty. Even though he was owed \$28 million for the final year of his six-year contract plus the club option buyout for 2020, the AAV for Bailey was \$17.5 million. That was less than the \$20 million Matt Kemp's AAV. Because he's under contract for '19, Bailey can now sign with any club for the league minimum and still get paid the full price of his contract. He remains unsigned.

With all of the different options being talked about, why does nobody mention TJ Friedl to start in center? He has played the position and continued to produce at the Double-A level last season.
-- Garrett D., Charleston, W.Va.

Friedl had only a half-season at Double-A in 2018, so it really is premature. At the moment, projections see Friedl as a fourth outfielder in the big leagues, but he could work his way into being a regular center fielder down the road. He needs to keep working on his hitting and bunting to take advantage of his speed. I would say Jose Siri is ahead of Friedl currently among center-field prospects. His defense is big league ready now, but he's also still working on his hitting skills.

Mark Sheldon has covered the Reds for MLB.com since 2006, and previously covered the Twins from 2001-05. Follow him on Twitter @m_sheldon and Facebook and listen to his podcast.

CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

2019 Cincinnati Reds questions: Who hits leadoff and how will the lineup shape up?
Bobby Nightengale, Cincinnati Enquirer
Published 9:20 a.m. ET Feb. 9, 2019

Editor's note: With Spring Training approaching, we'll answer an important question about the Cincinnati Reds each day until pitchers and catchers report Feb. 12. Today's question: Who hits leadoff and how does the lineup shape up?

When newly-acquired Reds pitchers Tanner Roark and Alex Wood talked about their new team this offseason, they immediately complimented the lineup. It wasn't easy navigating through those hitters last year.

On paper, the Reds should be one of the top offensive teams in the National League. For those imagining lineup possibilities, it starts at the top.

The Reds had three primary leadoff hitters last season, José Peraza, Scott Schebler and Jesse Winker, and it appears they will choose again from those three. Peraza is the biggest threat on the bases, Winker had the highest on-base percentage and Schebler is a mix between the two.

Assuming Schebler wins the center field job and Winker starts over Matt Kemp in left field, here's my guess for the lineup: Peraza, SS; Scooter Gennett, 2B; Joey Votto, 1B; Eugenio Suárez, 3B; Winker, LF; Yasiel Puig, RF; Schebler, CF; Tucker Barnhart, C; Pitcher.

Peraza fits the old-school mold of a leadoff hitter because he's fast and he doesn't strike out often. The Reds would like to see him draw more walks, which is probably the next step in his development. He had a .326 on-base percentage last year, slightly above the league average mark (.318).

During the 2018 season, Peraza stole 23 bases in 29 attempts. It was his third consecutive season with at least 20 stolen bases. His speed gives him extra value by advancing from first to third base on singles or scoring on hits in the gap.

Winker said last season was the first time in his life that he hit leadoff. He isn't a threat to steal bases, but he makes up for it with his ability to reach base. He had a .405 on-base percentage last season, which ranked among the National League leaders before his season-ending shoulder surgery.

When the Reds were at their best in June and July last season, Winker was usually hitting fifth or sixth in the lineup. He thrived with runners on base, recording a .366 batting average and .474 on-base percentage in those situations.

"I think I could be a very, very good leadoff hitter," Winker said earlier this week on MLB Network Radio. "Somebody brought to my attention when I was dropped down to the five and six hole, my numbers kind of were better. They said, 'Does that have any effect?'"

“To be honest with you, I don’t think about it. I love being able to get on for the guys behind me. I love being able to get the opportunity to get to drive them in.”

Winker said he dealt with pain in his right shoulder for two or three years before he underwent surgery. With a healthy shoulder, it’s possible that his power could increase and that could make him a more intriguing option in the middle of the order. He had seven homers in 89 games last season.

Schebler will compete for the center field job with top prospect Nick Senzel, Puig and Phillip Ervin. Schebler had a .335 on-base percentage as a leadoff hitter last year. He’s never stolen more than five bases in a season.

There’s a lot of ways to balance the left-handed hitters, Gennett, Votto, Winker and Schebler with the rest of the lineup and the Reds have depth. Kemp was an All-Star in 2018 and should benefit from Great American Ball Park. Senzel is considered one of the top pure hitters in the minor leagues.

THE ATHLETIC

Egger: Reds fans have a big reason to want the DH – Joey Votto

By Mo Egger

Feb. 9, 2019

I’ll take Rob Manfred’s bait, and write a column about the designated hitter.

Major League Baseball’s commissioner did something sneaky this week, and a bunch of us fell for it. With little to write about except for the same old goey pieces on the warmth we’re supposed to feel when we see footage of those first games of catch in Florida and Arizona, he decided to get people talking about a new twist on an old topic: the designated hitter being universal throughout MLB.

OK, this isn’t really what happened. Actually, Ken Rosenthal did some of his typically excellent reporting, informing the rest of us that baseball suggested to the players’ union rules that would require pitchers to face a minimum of three batters. That would force managers to think even further ahead when they make pitching decisions than they already do, potentially allowing for more second-guessing, which is part of the fun of being a baseball fan.

The Major League Baseball Players Association reportedly shot back with a detailed proposal that included, among other things, lowering a club’s draft position if it failed to win a certain number of games in so many seasons (which is something that all sports leagues should do), the dreaded 20-second pitch clock (which would have almost no effect on you and me), and – gasp! – the long-feared universal designated hitter, as soon as – whoa! – 2019! Rosenthal’s piece didn’t exactly melt the hot stove, but after months on end of baseball essentially going through a winter lockout, we actually talked a little baseball, firing up some hot takes even, as we kicked around these jarring developments.

If you think Manfred wasn’t at least a little relieved to hear that people still cared enough about his sport to have opinions on these things then you must also think his NFL counterpart has lost sleep this week worrying about how only close to 100 million people watched his sport’s lame championship contest last Sunday.

So I’m going to write about the DH, and I’ll expect my handwritten thank you note from Mr. Manfred sometime before Opening Day.

Thing is though, I’ve never felt strongly either way about the designated hitter. It’s been around for my entire life, so it’s not like I’m old enough to pine for a time when American League pitchers were allowed to bat. And the hard lines that once distinguished the American and National Leagues from each other have been almost completely erased for so long that it seems silly to identify with one league or the other. I watch NL games with pitchers batting, and it’s fine. I check out AL tilts, and aside from occasionally missing the senior circuit’s built-in reminder of where we are in a team’s batting order when a hurler comes to the plate, I don’t even notice that the pitchers never get to hit.

The no-DH National League doesn't feel purer because the pitchers don't just pitch, nor does the American League seem more wild and progressive just because each team has one more hitter in the lineup. As entertainment and a pastime, there aren't significant differences between the baseball being played in Cincinnati, St. Louis and Philadelphia and the games being played in Kansas City, Cleveland and Detroit.

The two leagues were dissolved as legal entities almost 20 years ago, which more or less destroyed whatever loyalty one might have had to one side or the other. With free agency into its fifth decade and interleague play – now nearly an everyday thing during the season – into its third, whatever trends that might have affected one league more than the other a half-century ago simply spread throughout one larger, more unified entity. There's almost no distinction between MLB's two halves.

Except that one plays its games with a designated hitter.

Beyond the basic absurdity of a sports league having half its membership play under a different set of rules than the other – a concept we'd all mock if it was proposed as a new idea in 2019 – the biggest issue with this is that big-league teams playing under the National League banner are working at a disadvantage with things like free agents, expensive contracts and older players. Even if the entire sport has re-thought the value and practice of giving out exceedingly long and exceptionally lucrative deals to players that will be well past their prime in the final seasons of their contracts, American League clubs can at least have the blow softened by using an aging, expensive player in the batting order while keeping them mostly off the field. No one is ever going to label the 10-year/\$240 million contract Albert Pujols is still playing under with the Angels as a “good” deal, but imagine how painful it would be if the greatest right-hand hitter of my lifetime had to man first base 145 times a year.

This brings me to Joey Votto.

Votto is coming off of, by his insane standards, a down season in 2018. Even if you believe that his one-year dip in production will prove to be an outlier, one of the more fascinating questions about Votto is whether last year is the beginning of slow, steady decline. He's 35 years old, and even if his primary skill set actually ages pretty well, the list of quality players whose production started to fall for good in their mid-30s is longer than the list of angry tweets I'll get from people who love to watch pitchers hit when I put this column on social media.

Votto has five years and \$125 million guaranteed remaining on his contract that gives him full no-trade protection. His defensive skills aren't exceptional, and at times he's been downright lousy with the glove, something that's not likely to substantially improve with age. And as incredible of a hitter as Votto is – and I've been making his Hall of Fame case for a while – his yearly statistics by the time he's in his late-30s will likely look paltry compared to the numbers he put up in his prime, even if his annual salary will almost demand that he keeps producing like a much younger player. And a player who missed a total of eight games from 2015 through 2017 will undeniably require more days off the older he gets.

There might not be a player in the National League who could benefit more from not having to play the field than Votto, and in turn, there's probably not an NL team that would stand more to gain than Votto's.

Imagine what it would be like if Votto, probably the most studious and well-prepared hitter in the game, only had to focus his time and energy on batting. Even if he continued to man first base in the short-term, think of the impact of occasional pseudo-days off by Votto still being in the lineup, but not playing in the field. Think of, if somehow the offensive-tilted 2019 Reds with its current surplus of outfielders, could benefit from being able to use an extra bat. Then think of, regardless of the makeup of the 2022 Reds, what it would mean if their old first baseman was no longer an old first baseman.

Simply put, the Reds have a better chance of getting more from Votto by having him do less. Since it's very difficult to turn someone making Votto's dough into a part-time player, the best way to maximize his value is by preserving his body while enabling him to do what he does best.

Having a DH slot would do that.

I know where this will go. Old heads will yelp that the DH, which has been around for more than 45 years, is a gimmick that cheapens the sport. They'll say it makes far too simple the otherwise nearly impossible mental hieroglyphics that NL managers have to contend with when they go through the internal struggle of whether or not to allow the pitcher to bat for himself. Other fans that find bunts entertaining will plead their anti-DH cases as well. But if you understand that the designated hitter is not going anywhere in one half of the sport, if you grasp the stupidity of having two sets of rules existing for one league, and if you're one of those Reds fans that either continues to grumble about the money being spent on the team's highest-paid player or simply worries about how the back-end of Joey Votto's career will play out, then once the DH comes to the National League, you'll be glad it did.

You might even thank the commissioner, the same way he should thank me for writing this column.

ESPN.COM

NL Central prospect guide: Who to watch on the Cubs, Reds, Brewers, Pirates and Cardinals

Feb. 9, 2019

Keith Law

ESPN Senior Writer

We already ran down the top 100 prospects in baseball, so now it's time go deeper by division. Today, it's the National League Central.

Cincinnati Reds:

The Reds were on the edge of a top-five system before trading away two of their top 10 prospects as well as some depth, although it's still very strong up top and features three prospects who are the envy of almost every other farm system in baseball.

1. Nick Senzel, 3B/2B/SS/CF (ranked No. 6)
2. Taylor Trammell, OF (ranked No. 12)
3. Hunter Greene, RHP (ranked No. 16)
4. Jonathan India, 3B (ranked No. 76)
5. Tony Santillan, RHP (ranked No. 83)
6. Tyler Stephenson, C
7. Mike Siani, OF
8. Bren Spillane, OF
9. Vladimir Gutierrez, RHP
10. Lyon Richardson, RHP

Tyler Stephenson wore down last summer, in his first full season catching without injuries or other interruptions. He still has an outside shot to be a regular catcher because of his power and arm strength, although he hasn't been as successful as expected in throwing out runners, and his receiving is still below average.

Mike Siani was the Reds' fourth-round pick, but he signed for well over slot, and it was a shrewd pickup, as Siani had a poor spring thanks to a private hitting coach who changed his swing to try to improve his launch angle. Siani is unlikely to be a power hitter. But he is a plus runner who has the hand strength for hard line-drive contact and projects as at least a 60-grade defender in center with a plus arm (he was throwing 93 to 94 mph off the mound for his high school team).

Bren Spillane, Cincinnati's third-rounder in 2018, mashed at the University of Illinois in the spring; but then he struck out in 41 percent of his plate appearances in the short-season Pioneer League over the summer, an inauspicious debut for a 21-year-old who has to play a corner. He is big and physical but moves well enough that he might be OK in right field, boosted by his plus arm. He has to make more contact to be a regular.

The velocity of Vladimir Gutierrez will sit at 95 mph, which he complements with a solid-average breaking ball that lacks deception and a below-average changeup. He has been altering his arm slot to try to fool hitters and had success as a starter, but the stuff and arm action make it more likely he ends up in relief.

Lyon Richardson was primarily a position player in high school but blew up as a pitcher last year, mostly due to arm strength. He's really a thrower, not a complete pitcher, and there's a ton of reliever risk here. But he is throwing in the mid-90s now, and he could end up in the upper 90s with some refinement.

Keury Mella (11) has had two brief call-ups in the past two years, and he was more successful in his second Double-A go-round in 2018. He is a fastball/slider guy with just enough of a changeup to maybe spend time as a fifth starter, although the Reds' plan to compete in 2019 probably makes him a long man or reliever. Outfielder Mariel Bautista (12) is toolsy and very projectable, wiry with lots of room to fill out, and while his setup at the plate can be a little noisy; his swing looks geared to drive the ball out to left-center. He is a plus runner who could stay in center long term, and unlike a lot of the toolsier players in this system, he rarely strikes out.

Outfielder Jose Siri (13) is a classic tools goof, with plusses and 70 grades all over his scouting report and very little idea of what he's doing at the plate, hitting .239/.294/.449 between High-A and Double-A last year with a 30 percent strikeout rate at age 22. He has power, speed and arm strength, but he probably has a 30-grade present hit tool with no signs of progress over the past two years. He is here because if he ever figures out a little pitch recognition, he'll end up in the majors in some capacity.

Shortstop Jose Israel Garcia (14) impressed scouts with his defensive gifts, from his hands to his range to his arm, but he didn't hit at all last year, walking just 19 times in 517 PA and making low-quality contact when he put the ball in play. He does need to get stronger, but with no plan at the plate, he won't be more than a defensive replacement. TJ Friedl (15) is a nice extra outfielder with a decent eye at the plate but very little power, unlikely to hit enough to be a regular and not fast enough to be an impact defender in center.

Jimmy Herget (16) is a low-slot right-hander who could have pitched in the majors last year as a righty specialist, although he had a reverse platoon split in Triple-A last year that I don't think means anything long term. Shortstop Miguel Hernandez (17) has good actions at the position and projects to stay there, but he needs to add a lot of strength to his lean, wiry frame just to hit enough to profile as a backup. He'll turn 20 in April and will likely start the season in Low-A. Outfielder Michael Beltre (18) is now entering his seventh year in the system and hasn't reached Double-A yet, despite above-average power and run tools, mostly because he makes too much weak contact, including a ground ball rate over 58 percent last year between Low-A and High-A. He was Rule 5 eligible, but the Reds elected not to protect him. Given his size -- he is listed at 6-foot-3, 220 pounds -- he seems like a candidate for Max Muncy-style swing change.

Reliever Ryan Hendrix (19) will touch 97 mph with fastball to go with a hammer-of-the-gods curveball; there was no good reason for him to spend all of 2018 in High-A, striking out 36 percent of opposing batters, at age 23. His fastball can be true and he walked too many guys, but he needed the challenge of Double-A. Lefty Scott Moss (20) has a fastball that is light at 88 to 92 mph, but he has an average slider and throws a ton of strikes, enough that he could end up a sixth starter/long man type.

Others of note: Right-hander Joel Kuhnel throws up to 98 mph but with no average second pitch, throwing a lot of strikes with a stiff arm action that's going to make it hard for him to spin the ball. I'd like to see him try a splitter, given where his hand is at release. The Reds' 28th-rounder from 2018, Rylan Thomas, had a strong pro debut in the Appy League at age 21, showing some patience and power, but he was old for the level. He has power, but he is limited to first base, and he struck out way too often at the University of Central Florida.

2019 impact: Senzel has been working out in center field and could end up winning that job in the spring or (cough) about two weeks of service time into the season. Herget would fit in their bullpen at any point this year.

Sleeper: Bautista is fascinating because he has physical tools and yet has at least shown signs of plate discipline in short-season leagues. There are little issues with his swing, and he has to fill out as projected, but I could see a profile as an above-average regular in center field coming from where he is today.

The fallen: Cincinnati's 2017 second-rounder, Stuart Fairchild, was too old for Low-A, where he started the year, but he didn't hit at all after a midyear promotion to High-A, slugging just .350 for Daytona even though he was actively

looking to pull the ball. He runs well enough to be a quality fourth outfielder who can fill in at all three spots, but this debut was a big disappointment given his age and past projections for his bat.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Reds open camp with remade roster, hopes of moving up

Posted: 4:22 PM, Feb 08, 2019 Updated: 4:22 PM, Feb 08, 2019

By: Joe Kay | AP sports writer

CINCINNATI (AP) — Sonny Gray had a few hours to make a career-changing decision. The Yankees no longer needed him. The Reds wanted another starter, and they were willing to deal for him so long as he agreed to a three-year contract extension.

That's a big commitment to a team that's lost 90 games each of the last four seasons. Sure, Gray had a personal connection with Cincinnati — his dad tried out for the Reds' farm system, and Gray attended his first big-league game at Great American Ball Park. Still, the Reds have languished in last place for four straight years.

What to do? Gray signed on.

"I think it's obviously notable what the Reds have been doing," said Gray, who agreed to a deal adding \$30.5 million from 2020-22. "I've got a really good feeling that we're trying to turn the corner here and we're trying to start winning a lot of baseball games."

After four years of shedding veterans and tossing rookies onto the field to see what they've got, the Reds decided it was time to start moving up again. They rebuilt the rotation through three trades, adding Gray, left-hander Alex Wood and Tanner Roark while getting rid of Homer Bailey.

They also overhauled the lineup by acquiring outfielders Yasiel Puig and Matt Kemp from the Dodgers.

The remake wasn't confined to the field. They hired David Bell as a first-year manager to oversee the metamorphosis from rebuilding to contending — or, at least, being competitive in the short-term. Significant attendance drops during the rebuild prompted the moves that made the Reds an intriguing team as spring training opens.

Instead of wondering how low they'll go, it's now more a question of how much ground they can make up in one year in the formidable NL Central.

"I think we've got a good chance to win now," Gray said.

Some things to watch as the Reds fit the new pieces together in Goodyear, Arizona:

New look: The rotation got a total makeover, with the three newcomers joining Anthony DeSclafani and Luis Castillo. Bell has to decide how to arrange his new staff. Also, the arrival of Puig and Kemp give the outfield a new dynamic with center fielder Billy Hamilton gone.

Rookies to watch: Unlike the last few years when rookies came and went, there should be much more focus on veterans. Nick Senzel could have the biggest impact of the youngsters. He's a career infielder, but the Reds haven't ruled out giving him a chance to win the open job in center field.

They're set: The infield returns Joey Votto, Scooter Gennett, Jose Peraza and Eugenio Suarez. The back of the bullpen is set, too, with David Hernandez and Jared Hughes setting up closer Raisel Iglesias.

They're not: Center field is their biggest question. They could move Scott Schebler or Puig to the spot, or let Senzel try to grow into the role.

On deck: Puig and Kemp are free agents after the season, along with Roark, so if it doesn't work out, there could be trades in July and the Reds could be back to starting over in some ways. At least the fans will have something different to watch when the Reds open their spring schedule against the Indians on Feb. 23 and the regular season at home against the Pirates — a division rival they're looking to overtake — on March 28.

TRANSACTIONS

02/08/19

New York Mets signed free agent 2B Danny Espinosa to a minor league contract and invited him to spring training.

San Francisco Giants sent RF John Andreoli outright to Sacramento River Cats.

Miami Marlins sent RF Isaac Galloway outright to New Orleans Baby Cakes.

San Francisco Giants sent RHP Derek Law outright to Sacramento River Cats.

Arizona Diamondbacks signed free agent LHP Marc Rzepczynski to a minor league contract and invited him to spring training.

Arizona Diamondbacks signed free agent RHP Ricky Nolasco to a minor league contract and invited him to spring training.

Washington Nationals signed free agent RHP Jeremy Hellickson.

Washington Nationals designated RHP Trevor Gott for assignment.

Arizona Diamondbacks signed free agent LHP Lucas Luetge to a minor league contract.

Arizona Diamondbacks signed free agent RHP Michael Kohn to a minor league contract.