



# Padres Press Clips

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# Padres spring training primer: Infield

**Dennis Lin**

With pitchers and catchers set to report Feb. 14 to [spring training](#) in Peoria, Ariz., we're providing an overview of each area of the [Padres'](#) roster. Today, the infield:

## 2017 recap

First baseman [Wil Myers](#) signed a franchise-record extension, declared his goal of a 40-40 season, and underwhelmed. While he did launch 30 home runs and swipe 20 bases, he batted .243 with a .328 on-base percentage, failing to live up to his prodigious talent. Myers' defense, which earned him [Gold Glove](#) consideration in 2016, provided another reason for concern. Still, 30-20 seasons are nothing to sneeze at, especially in San Diego. The infield lacked other standout contributions, though Yangervis Solarte, Carlos Asuaje and [Cory Spangenberg](#) had positive stretches. The Padres' shortstop problem continued to fester with [Erick Aybar](#), Dusty Coleman and Allen Cordoba all taking turns. Ryan Schimpf, a pleasant surprise a year earlier, was figured out by opponents and later traded. [Christian Villanueva](#) flashed intriguing power in a September call-up.

## Current picture

The Padres dealt Solarte to Toronto in January, but a logjam persists. A December exchange brought [Chase Headley](#) back to San Diego. If he's on the opening-day roster, the veteran will start at third base, where Spangenberg and Villanueva also are options. Asuaje more than held his own at second, but slick-hitting prospect Luis Urias is nearing his major league debut. At first, Myers has spent his offseason adding muscle in an attempt to become a more forceful presence. He could be asked to move to the outfield if the Padres sign [Eric Hosmer](#), whom they have courted amid a comatose free-agent market. The team at least appears to have struck on a shortstop solution; trade acquisition [Freddy Galvis](#) is very good with the glove, albeit limited at the plate.

## On the farm

Urias could push for a midseason call-up, perhaps necessitating another trade. (The Padres do like the approach of Asuaje, another undersized player who doesn't tend to yield in the batter's box.) By the end of the year, young shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. could become the game's top prospect, a title that should fuel interest for 2019. Like Urias and Tatis, first baseman Josh Naylor will be in major league camp, working on unlocking considerable power.

## Potential moves

The Padres could use a trade or two before opening day. Hosmer, 28, would bring clout on and off the field, but agent Scott Boras has continued to seek a hefty deal. In recent days, more industry sources have opined that Kansas City is the likelier choice.

# Padres, El Paso Chihuahuas extend player development contract

**Jeff Sanders**

The Padres and El Paso Chihuahuas on Tuesday announced that they had extended their player development contract through 2020. The Chihuahuas had been the Padres' Triple-A affiliate in the [Pacific Coast League](#) since the MountainStar Sports Group acquired the Tucson Padres in 2013 and moved the franchise to El Paso.

The current player development contract was set to expire after the 2018 season.

“We are extremely proud to continue our partnership with El Paso,” Padres General Manager A.J. Preller said in a statement. “As we work to build a championship-caliber organization, our baseball operations group has come to depend on the tremendous leadership and professionalism of Alan Ledford (MountainStar Sports Group president), Brad Taylor (Chihuahuas general manager) and the entire Chihuahuas organization. El Paso provides our top prospects with not only best-in-class facilities but also a truly passionate fan base.”

El Paso has played in two straight Pacific Coast League championship series, including its 2016 title. The Chihuahuas have finished .500 or better all four years as the Padres' Triple-A affiliate.

To date, 28 former Chihuahuas have made their major league debut with the Padres, including center fielder Manuel Margot, right fielder [Hunter Renfroe](#), catcher Austin Hedges, infielders [Cory Spangenberg](#) and Carlos Asuaje and outfielders [Travis Jankowski](#) and Alex Dickerson.

Former big league catcher [Rod Barajas](#) will manage El Paso for the third straight season.

The Padres and Chihuahuas will play an exhibition at Southwest University Park on March 26 to kick off the team's fifth season in El Paso.

“On the field and off, the Padres have been tremendous partners,” Taylor said in a statement. “This relationship exceeds just wins and losses. The two organizations share a commitment to their communities. It's rewarding to have an MLB affiliate where so many personal relationships have translated to productive ideas and success.”

# Questions loom about 2018 rotation

San Diego has plenty of starting options, but it's uncertain who will land spots

By AJ Cassavell MLB.com @AJCassavell

Feb. 6th, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- There's a clear plan in place for the future of the Padres' rotation. Already, the starting five has seen an infusion of youth, with the emergence of [Dinelson Lamet](#) and [Luis Perdomo](#). A handful of arms in Double- and Triple-A should join them soon. Then, presumably, the group of youngsters at the lower levels of the organization will fill out the rotation mix.

The Padres believe that combination of arms -- and perhaps a future free agent or two -- will vault them into annual contention. Perhaps for good reason. Five of the 42 best pitchers on MLB Pipeline's Top 100 Prospects list reside in San Diego.

General manager A.J. Preller has spoken often about his desire to build "waves of talent" within his farm system, where one group of prospects complements the next. His long-term plan for the starting rotation is exhibit A.

That leaves plenty of questions to be asked about the current rotation mix, however. The Padres opted not to bring back [Jhoulys Chacin](#), who was eyeing a multiyear deal. They added a trio of free agents -- [Tyson Ross](#), [Chris Young](#) and [Jordan Lyles](#) -- to one-year or Minor League deals. All three will enter camp on the outside of the roster looking in.

The only long-term addition was [Bryan Mitchell](#), who arrived along with [Chase Headley](#) in December. Mitchell, who owns a 4.94 ERA in 48 career appearances, was never given consistent opportunity in New York. Now, he's out of options, meaning the Padres are probably committed to throwing him into the rotation and seeing how he fares.

"[He's] a guy, 26 years old, four years of control -- we compared that to the free-agent market, and he was probably more intriguing in terms of the upside and how he fit," Preller said earlier this offseason.

Mitchell joins [Clayton Richard](#) as the two prohibitive rotation favorites. After that, Lamet and Perdomo have the upper hand, given their youth. Both have obvious room for growth. But they'll get a chance to stake their claim to a long-term rotation place this year.

As for the offseason additions -- [Colin Rea](#), [Robbie Erlin](#) and [Matt Strahm](#) don't exactly qualify. But none of the three pitched for the Padres in 2017 due to injury. All are expected back for Spring Training, throwing some variables into the picture.

"It's a fun group of starters," said Padres manager Andy Green. "No one's sitting here and saying we have [Clayton Kershaw](#) sitting at the top of the rotation, but every single name ... has a legit possibility of pitching at the upper half of our rotation if we can get the most out of them."

Sure, the Padres gambled a bit by passing on any major pitching additions. In doing so, it's clear they have one eye on the future.

As for the present? They're looking to piece together a five-man group out of 10 candidates -- each of whom has plenty to prove.

Rotation favorites: Richard, Mitchell

Fighting for a spot: Perdomo, Lamet, Rea, Erlin

Work to do: Strahm, Lyles, Ross, Young

Top-30 prospects: No. 1 MacKenzie Gore, No. 2 Cal Quantrill, No. 5 Adrian Morejon, No. 6 Anderson Espinoza, No. 7 Michel Baez, No. 8 Eric Lauer, No. 9 Joey Lucchesi, No. 13 Logan Allen, No. 14 Jacob Nix, No. 19 Mason Thompson, No. 27 Chris Paddack, No. 28 Reggie Lawson

# Padres ink righty Wilhelmsen to Minors deal

By AJ Cassavell MLB.com @AJCassavell

Feb. 6th, 2018

SAN DIEGO -- The Padres added another piece to their bullpen mix Tuesday afternoon, inking former Mariners closer [Tom Wilhelmsen](#) to a Minor League deal.

The 34-year-old Wilhelmsen posted a 4.44 ERA in 27 appearances with the Diamondbacks last season. He spent most of 2012 and '13 as the closer for Seattle, and has racked up 68 career saves over seven big league seasons.

Wilhelmsen will receive an invite to Major League camp, joining a crowded group of relievers fighting for the final two or three bullpen places.

[Brad Hand](#), [Kirby Yates](#), [Craig Stammen](#) and [Kazuhisa Makita](#) all have their tickets punched for the Opening Day roster. The Padres will likely use another bullpen spot for a long reliever/spot-starter type of pitcher; [Jordan Lyles](#) and [Matt Strahm](#) are options.

That leaves two or three places available. Wilhelmsen will compete with [Carter Capps](#), [Colten Brewer](#), [Phil Maton](#) and [Buddy Baumann](#), among others.

Wilhelmsen owns a career 3.53 ERA and 1.27 WHIP during his time with three different clubs, the Mariners, Rangers and D-backs.

Contract with El Paso extended

On Tuesday, the Padres announced they have extended their player-development contract with the El Paso Chihuahuas through the 2020 season.

El Paso is coming off three consecutive division titles, including a Pacific Coast League championship in 2016. It has been the location for the Padres' Triple-A affiliate since '13.

"We are extremely proud to continue our partnership with El Paso," Padres general manager A.J. Preller said in a statement. "El Paso provides our top prospects with not only best-in-class facilities but also a truly passionate fan base."

# 5 Padres Make Fangraphs' Top 100 Prospect List

Fernando Tatis Jr. earns №5 overall spot

*By Justin Lafferty*

As more and [more top prospect lists](#) start to roll in, it's evident that the Padres have a wealth of talent in the minor leagues.

FanGraphs released its [top 100 prospect ranking](#) Tuesday, with 19-year-old shortstop **Fernando Tatis Jr.** at the №5 overall spot.

FanGraphs compiles their prospect rankings a little differently from other sites. They have players grouped by their Future Value grades, based on a 20–80 scouting scale.

Only one prospect, pitcher/outfielder **Shohei Ohtani** of the Los Angeles Angels, earned a grade of 70. Tatis Jr. was given a Future Value grade of 65, along with highly touted prospects such as Atlanta outfielder **Ronald Acuña** and Toronto infielder **Vladimir Guerrero Jr.**

Here's how FanGraphs ranked Padres prospects, along with their FV grade:

5. Tatis Jr. (65)

28. **Luis Urías** (55)

33. **MacKenzie Gore** (55)

41. **Michel Baez** (55)

62. **Anderson Espinoza** (50)

FanGraphs explained why Tatis Jr., who was acquired via trade with the Chicago White Sox, was rated so highly:

“He was sent to full-season Fort Wayne as an 18-year-old in 2017 and hit .280/.390/.520 with 20 homers and steals and, perhaps most impressively for his age, a 14.5% walk rate. He also flashes occasional acrobatic brilliance at shortstop, though scouts are not unanimous about his long-term prospects there because of the size of Tatis’s frame.”

The site is especially bullish on Tatis Jr.’s raw power. It gives him a present grade of 60 and a future grade of 70. In a [chat](#), FanGraphs’ Eric Longenhagen predicted that Tatis Jr. could be the top overall prospect next year.

FanGraphs also loves Uriás’ hit tool, grading him a 50 now, with 65 potential:

“Urias’s strikeout rate doubled in 2017 and was still so low that it would have ranked him in the top 15 among qualified MLB hitters. He has sublime feel for contact, adjusting the barrel to where it needs to be, when it needs to be there. His track record of excellent hitting suggests it’s going to continue.”

Espinoza, who last year FanGraphs rated as the Padres’ top prospect (Nº10 overall), checks in at Nº62 on this year’s list. The [talented right-handed pitcher](#) turns 20 this season, but he will miss significant time this year while recovering from Tommy John surgery. FanGraphs believes in Espinoza’s fastball, curveball and changeup—all of which received future grades of 60.

**Cal Quantrill, Logan Allen, Joey Lucchesi and Adrian Morejon** were all listed as other prospects in consideration.



# Fantasy baseball preview: Wil Myers can't do it all for Padres

Steve Gardner, USA TODAY Sports Published 8:03 a.m. ET Feb. 7, 2018 | Updated 10:51 a.m. ET Feb. 7, 2018

The one-year statistical blip that resulted in Petco Park tilting slightly hitter-friendly in 2016 reversed course precipitously last season, so Petco back is in its traditional spot near the bottom in aiding offenses.

Barring a major free-agent signing (Eric Hosmer has been a hot rumor), the Padres' MLB-worst offense will likely struggle again this season.

## 2017 at a glance

**Record:** 71-91 (4th in NL West)

**Hitting:** 30th (3.73 R/G)

**Pitching:** 22nd (4.67 ERA)

**Park Factor, scoring:** 29th (0.828)

**Park factor, HR:** 29th (0.781)

## Arrivals

3B Chase Headley

SS Freddy Galvis

SP Tyson Ross

Headley, 33, returns to the scene of his career peak -- when he hit .286 with 31 home runs and 115 RBI as a Padre in 2012. He's never hit more than 14 homers or driven in more than 64 runs in any other season.

Galvis' numbers fell slightly last year in Philadelphia, but he's at least an offensive upgrade for the Padres at short. He played all 162 games in 2017, hitting .255 with 12 homers and 14 steals.

Ross is a low-cost gamble after signing a minor-league deal in December. He won a combined 23 games for the Padres in 2014-15 before missing almost all of 2017 with thoracic outlet syndrome.

## Players to watch

1B Wil Myers

RP Brad Hand

Myers is the one player in the Padres lineup pitchers want to avoid. He set a career-high with 30 home runs last season and continued to be a threat on the bases with 20 steals. However, his counting stats take a hit (as they did last year) due to a poor supporting cast.

After taking over as closer late last season, Hand agreed to a three-year extension that will keep him in San Diego through at least 2020. He racked up 21 saves and was one of four relievers to strike out over 100 batters.

### **Sleepers**

OF Manuel Margot  
SP Dinelson Lamet

As a rookie, Margot had his baptism by fire being installed as the opening day center fielder. He has good speed and some power, giving him 20-20 potential as he matures. He's the best leadoff man the Padres have, so those extra at-bats will help his counting stats.

Lamet, 25, racked up strikeouts in the minors (an average of 10.1 K/9 over four seasons) and even improved on that in 21 MLB starts (10.9 K/9). Command is still an issue, but there's room for growth.

### **Bullpen**

**Closer:** Brad Hand  
**Next:** Kirby Yates

Converting save chances isn't likely to be the main issue for Hand -- it will be getting those opportunities in the first place. Padres relievers gave up 101 home runs last season, the most in the majors.

If you're looking for a deep sleeper in the bullpen, Carter Capps returned from thoracic outlet syndrome at the end of last season and could work his way into a setup role if he's fully healthy.

### **Position battles**

The Padres could get full-time at-bats out of OF Jose Pirela or 3B/OF Cory Spangenberg -- or they could use one or both to fill in at different spots, depending on need. Several talented prospects could work their way up to the majors and force the issue.

As for the starting rotation, at least three of the five spots should be up for grabs this spring.

### **Prospects**

3B Fernando Tatis Jr.  
2B Luis Urias

Tatis just turned 19 in January, but the son of the former big-leaguer is already on the fast track to the majors. He hit .281/.390/.520 at Low-A Fort Wayne (Ind.) before moving up to Class AA at the end of the year.

Urias, 20, has an outstanding command of the strike zone, posting elite on-base percentages in the minors. He was impressive in this year's Arizona Fall League, posting a .315/.443/.481 slash line and showing some unexpected pop in the Fall Stars Game.

The Padres also have a pair of high-ceiling pitching prospects in Cal Quantrill and Mackenzie Gore who could be ready for the rotation in 2019.

#### **Projected batting order**

1. CF Manuel Margot
2. 2B Cory Spangenberg
3. 1B Wil Myers
4. 3B Chase Headley
5. LF Jose Pirela
6. RF Hunter Renfroe
7. SS Freddy Galvis
8. C Austin Hedges

#### **Projected rotation**

1. RHP Dinelson Lamet
2. LHP Clayton Richard
3. RHP Luis Perdomo
4. RHP Bryan Mitchell/Tyson Ross/Colin Rea
5. LHP Robbie Erlin/Matt Strahm

# Rosenthal: At some point, MLB and its players need to understand the sport must evolve

BY KEN ROSENTHAL

For all the uproar from players and hardcore fans over commissioner Rob Manfred's pace-of-play proposals, it strikes me that we're not even having the right conversation.

The effect of a pitch clock likely will be minimal. A reduction in mound visits will lead to even greater sign stealing—a development baseball should combat by allowing pitchers and catchers to communicate through headsets, an innovation not in the sport's current plans.

As much as the players dawdle on the field, the bigger issue with pace of play stems from the clubs. The rise of analytics—driven by owners accustomed to relying on data and general managers well-versed in the sport's new algorithms—has led to smarter but more boring baseball.

The players did not create a style of play in which a record 33.5 percent of all plate appearances last season ended in a walk, strikeout or home run, the action-sucking three true outcomes. No, the players merely adapted to the preferences of 21st-century front offices—pitchers who produce high strikeout rates, hitters who get on base and mash homers.

The effect of analytics on starting pitchers also is considerable. Starters do not want to throw increasingly fewer innings—fewer than  $5 \frac{2}{3}$  last season, a record low. But front offices preach against allowing starters to face hitters a third time through the order and promote matching up with one reliever after another in the late innings, slowing games to a crawl.

Manfred is not blind to the impact of analytics. His idea—with the introduction of a pitch clock, reduction in mound visits and other pace-of-play initiatives—is to take smaller steps first, then re-evaluate. Yet, even his smaller steps are eliciting howls of protest, most significantly by an intransigent players' union that opposed a pitch clock on general principle and grew vehement in its opposition due to an entirely unrelated issue—the slow-moving free-agent market.

As I've written previously, the players have only themselves to blame for signing off on a collective bargaining agreement that enabled the owners to clamp down on free agency—not so much on players such as Yu Darvish and Eric Hosmer, who will get deals close to or at market value, but on those like Logan Morrison and Jon Jay of the middle class, who are getting squeezed by the seeming preference of clubs for minimum-salaried rookies over established 30-somethings, skill and experience be damned.

The arguments of the clubs for greater efficiency are not wrong—the foolishness of awarding expensive contracts to declining players is well-documented. But the clubs, too, bear a responsibility for labor relations. Even if they are correct in every single free-agent valuation—highly doubtful—players perceive their overall approach to the market as overkill. And if total payrolls decline from a year ago, as Craig Edwards suggested in a recent article for Fangraphs, the players' fears will prove well-founded.

The bottom line: Tensions in a \$10 billion industry should not be this high, should not be coloring a serious and important discussion on how to improve the pace of play. But here we are.

Manfred is not some kind of imperious egomaniac who wants to put his stamp on the game. Quite the contrary, he is open-minded to any idea that might improve the product. His concerns about pace of play,

much as they incense traditionalists, are perfectly valid. The sport needs to increase its appeal to younger and casual fans, and remain appealing to its existing fans in a society with an increasingly short attention span. Part of a commissioner's job is to be a forward thinker.

The union does not dispute that pace of play is an issue worth addressing, but many, if not most players, loathe the pitch clock and, in particular, the accompanying ball-strike penalties. Manfred, meanwhile, sends something of a mixed message with time-of-game "triggers" in his pace-of-play proposals, further confusing matters.

"Pace of game is different than time of game," Manfred told reporters at the Grapefruit League media day last February. "Pace relates to dead time caused by batters stepping out, pitchers not working quickly, trips to the mound. A quicker pace in the game is good for fans both in the ballpark and watching our broadcasts.

"In contrast, time of game is dictated by a number of factors that we really can't control. A longer game may or may not be a concern, depending on how much action is in that game. That is why we have never set a goal in terms of time of game. What we want is a well-paced game with action regardless of the actual time of the game."

Well, Manfred's latest proposal certainly conflates the two, stating that an average game time of two hours, 55 minutes or more in 2018 will lead to an 18-second pitch clock with no runners on base starting May 1, 2019. In baseball's view, some type of pace-of-play measurement is necessary, and time of game is pretty much the only one available. Fair enough. But even then, the current game has structural flaws that a pitch clock will not correct, flaws that hint at deeper problems.

Clubs obviously are not going to stop using analytics, but baseball can adopt measures to counter the rise of the three true outcomes and increased use of relievers. Manfred has talked about raising the strike zone from just beneath the kneecap to the top of the kneecap with the idea of introducing more action. Cubs president of baseball operations Theo Epstein floated the idea of requiring relievers to face as many as three batters per appearance at the 2015 general managers' meetings.

Epstein's suggestion would lead to fewer pitching changes and likely spur offense, a tradeoff that might not reduce the average time of game, but should help the pace. Raising the strike zone might produce its own set of consequences, and baseball would need to proceed with caution, acknowledging the potential impact on the overall product. A pitch clock, even with ball-strike penalties, would have a less dramatic effect. But if Manfred cannot take smaller steps without a major pushback, how is he going to persuade players and hardcore fans to accept bigger ones?

At some point, both groups need to understand the sport must evolve. Other professional sports routinely implement significant rules changes with minimal controversy. Most of baseball's radical changes in recent decades—from the introduction of the wild card and expanded postseason to the home-plate collision and second-base slide rules—overcame initial resistance to achieve general acceptance. The pitch clock likely would follow the same pattern. I just don't think it will make much of a difference.

The issues run deeper. The changes need to be more profound. And the responsibility falls on both sides, whenever they are ready to stop bickering. Sure, the players stall and dawdle and flat-out waste time, but the rise of analytics also contributed to the product suffering. Baseball is smarter but more boring. And a ticking clock alone will not stem the tide.

# MLB players have a long battle ahead. Who's in charge?

By BILL SHAIKIN

FEB 07, 2018 | 8:50 AM

The very mention of Scott Boras makes executives in the commissioner's office cringe. The vast majority of agents do their work quietly. Boras, on the other hand, is delighted to hijack the All-Star Game, general managers' meetings and winter meetings every year with colorful rhetoric guaranteed to generate media coverage. And the rollbacks and restrictions on draft bonuses are largely a response to Boras' skill in persuading owners to pay millions to top picks, even though those players could only negotiate with one team.

So, when Major League Baseball and the players' union issued dueling statements Tuesday about whom to blame for this winter's free-agent freeze — the union blamed the rising number of tanking teams, and league blamed agents misreading the market — Boras got under the league's skin yet again.

The MLB statement noted that "some of the best free agents" had received "substantial offers, some in nine figures." No players were named in the statement. It has been widely reported that Yu Darvish, Eric Hosmer and J.D. Martinez — the latter two are Boras clients — have such offers.

The collective bargaining agreement forbids the commissioner's office and the union from making "comments to the media about the value of an unsigned free agent, or about possible or contemplated terms for an unsigned free agent." In addition, Boras told FanRag Sports, the league essentially was publicly sharing contract offers with all 30 clubs, which could be a significant claim in a potential collusion grievance.

In response, Deputy Commissioner Dan Halem said: "If Mr. Boras spent as much time working on getting his players signed as he does issuing inflammatory and unsubstantiated statements to the press, perhaps the events of this off-season would be different."

Halem should not have taken the bait. The owners are winning this winter — so much winning! — and all of it under the terms of a collective bargaining agreement ratified by the players.

The players appear angry and confused. Agents have led the way in firing public shots at the owners. After a largely silent winter, union chief Tony Clark has followed the agents in speaking out.

On Tuesday, several players — including Dodgers All-Stars Justin Turner and Alex Wood and former Angels closer Huston Street — took to Twitter, primarily to argue that fans are cheated when so many teams do not sign free agents because they are not trying to win this season.

Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen has floated the possibility of a player strike. Agent Brodie Van Wagenen has floated the possibility of a player boycott of spring training, which Clark publicly shot down.

Here's the thing: The public pretty much views baseball labor strife as millionaires vs. billionaires, with little sympathy for either side. The players get the worst of it, because they are the faces of the game, and because their salaries — unlike owners' profits — are public.

The collective bargaining agreement has three years to run after this one. The analytics revolution has so changed how players are valued that the players might want earlier free agency — after four years, say, instead of six. They might want to strip tanking teams of draft picks. They might want to require a minimum payroll for major league teams.

All of those concepts would require significant negotiation, and owners would not grant concessions in those areas unless players granted concessions in others.

These are the questions players ought to ask now: What do the players want to change? What can they realistically hope to change? What is their best strategy for persuading the owners to change?

And one more: Is Clark the right person to lead them?

Clark secured what the players asked of him in the last round of collective bargaining — more creature comforts, more day games before long flights, more days off — but perhaps the players again need a labor lawyer leading the union, rather than a former player.

As Clark conducts his annual tour of spring training camps, players should listen closely to his proposed way forward. Maybe the players believe in him, and they beef up his staff. Maybe they don't, and they replace him.

Either way, there is not much time to waste. From here, statements and tweets seem like a waste and a diversion from the critical issues only the union can resolve for itself. As the saying goes, keep your eye on the ball.

## Players go on the offensive in MLB's brewing labor war

Mike Oz

Big League Stew Feb 6, 2018, 4:03 PM

There's a [labor war brewing in Major League Baseball](#) at the moment. A surprising amount of top free agents are still without jobs. The player's union is mad that teams aren't being more aggressive this offseason. The owners say that players and their agents should take the lucrative offers on the table.

And the whole thing culminated Tuesday in union head Tony Clark and MLB [issuing dueling statements skirting blame for the state of things](#). One thing is clear, though, baseball's economy is a mess.

Now, with just a week until spring training — and with [six of the top 10 free agents](#) still without jobs — some MLB players have started to speak out about matters on Twitter. The biggest star to fire off a tweet was Justin Turner of the [Los Angeles Dodgers](#), who said:

Turner's tweet seems to sum up some of the talking points among the players union: Fans deserve the best players in the game on the field and teams shouldn't tank. [Chris Iannetta](#) of the Rockies and [Alex Wood](#), also of the Dodgers, tweeted similar things:

The players' strategy here is trying to win over fans — which isn't a bad strategy when you consider the players who are the fans pay to see and whose jerseys they wear. One exception, though: Lots of fans tend to side with the billionaires over the millionaires in matters like this. It's why many of the fan responses to the above tweets included sentiments like these:

It's more complex than that, of course. Baseball's economic system is built in such a way that players sometimes make the least money when they're most productive. Players make the minimum their first few years in the league, then head to salary arbitration, where they generally make a more market-friendly salary, then after six years in the big leagues, they hit free agency.

Free agency, in many cases, over-corrects for the years when a young player is contributing a lot and making the minimum. What we're seeing this year in free agency is teams not wanting to give out longer-term contracts to those free agents who are now around 30 years old and expecting a payday.

The real answer might be that baseball's salary structure is antiquated and needs an overhaul — but that's not going to fix the free-agent freeze of 2018. We'll see if some tweets will.



# MLB and Union Chief Tony Clark Engaged in War of Words Over Continued Free Agent Freeze

By **DAN GARTLAND**  
February 06, 2018

MLB Players Association president Tony Clark and the league traded barbs Tuesday over the continued stagnation of the free agent market.

Clark issued a statement accusing teams of engaging in “a race to the bottom” and the league responded later with a statement essentially accusing players and their agents of being greedy.

“Pitchers and catchers will report to camps in Florida and Arizona in one week,” Clark said. “A record number of talented free agents remain unemployed in an industry where revenues and franchise values are at record highs.

“Spring training has always been associated with hope for a new season. This year a significant number of teams are engaged in a race to the bottom. This conduct is a fundamental breach of the trust between a team and its fans and threatens the very integrity of our game.”

MLB’s response argued that teams have always gone “through cyclical, multi-year strategies directed at winning.”

“It is common at this point in the calendar to have large numbers of free agents unsigned,” the league’s statement continued. “What is uncommon is to have some of the best free agents sitting unsigned even though they have substantial offers, some in nine figures. It is the responsibility of players’ agents to value their clients in a constantly changing free agent market based on factors such as positional demand, advanced analytics, and the impact of the new Basic Agreement. To lay the responsibility on the clubs for the failure of some agents to accurately assess the market is unfair, unwarranted, and inflammatory.”

A handful of veteran players also weighed in on the issue.

With spring training just around the corner, nearly all of the top free agents on the market don’t have jobs. That includes Yu Darvish, Jake Arrieta, J.D. Martinez, Eric Hosmer and many others. Todd Frazier, one of the top infield bats available this winter, settled for a deeply discounted two-year, \$17 million deal from the Mets on Monday.

MLB free agency has long been a way to compensate players for earning less than market value early in their careers. (Arrieta, for example, earned \$3.6 million in his Cy Young season.) That has meant paying players higher salaries in the twilight of their careers when they may be less valuable on the field. Front offices appear to have realized how inefficient that is but players still want to be reimbursed.

One prominent agent said last week that the lower values of contracts being handed out this winter “feels coordinated” and that general managers are frustrated their owner are not allowing them to spend more money. He warned that a bigger labor battle could be on the horizon.

## With fiery statements, MLB, union show labor peace may look quite ugly until 2021

[Bob Nightengale, USA TODAY Sports](#) Published 6:43 p.m. ET Feb. 6, 2018 | Updated 8:00 p.m. ET Feb. 6, 2018

Well, let's just say it's a good thing for all of baseball that the Collective Bargaining Agreement doesn't expire until 2021.

We've got four more seasons of labor peace.

But, oh, will it get ugly then.

Then again, it's awfully nasty now.

While pitchers and catchers don't report to spring training for another week, Major League Baseball Players Association executive director Tony Clark and MLB commissioner Rob Manfred were already out [throwing shade toward one another](#), with no catcher needed.

Clark ripped into MLB owners earlier in the day blaming the slow free-agent market on owners not trying to win.

Manfred came blasting back ripping the players for being greedy, saying there already are unsigned players sitting on contract offers exceeding \$100 million. Yes, he was talking about Eric Hosmer, Yu Darvish and J.D. Martinez.

Remember all that goodwill and cooperation between the two sides that has kept labor peace since 1995? Those days have gone the way of bullpen cars.

Oh, and all the hope that Manfred had of reaching a settlement with the union to bring back those bullpen cars and more to speed up the game of baseball, it's only a pipe dream now.

The union has no interest in trying to reach an agreement on pace of play with more than 100 free agents still unsigned, leaving Manfred now to decide whether to unilaterally implement a pitch clock and limit mound visits by the start of spring-training games, or back off for another year, waiting for the hostilities to simmer.

The union is furious that owners aren't spending money in the free agent market like they once did, especially with revenues increasing to an all-time high, citing that not a single player has signed for more than center fielder Lorenzo Cain's five-year \$80 million contract with the Milwaukee Brewers.

Clark's comments piggy-back on [veteran agent Scott Boras' comments to USA TODAY Sports](#) last week when he said that there are 11 teams in baseball tanking in hopes of getting the top draft pick next summer.

[Manfred strongly disagreed with the notion](#) last week at the MLB owners' meetings, citing that teams simply are conducting business differently than in the past, pointing out the Chicago Cubs and Houston Astros underwent huge rebuilding projects, and have won the last two World Series titles.

Yet, after Clark issued his statement Tuesday morning, Manfred barely waited to lash back, calling Clark's statement "inflammatory" while spitting some fire of his own.

Manfred, of course, was talking about Hosmer having seven-year contract proposals worth at least \$140 million from the Kansas City Royals and San Diego Padres. There are several five-year

contract offers for Darvish. The Boston Red Sox have confirmed they have a five-year deal on the table for Martinez.

Yet, considering outfielder Jason Heyward received an eight-year, \$184 million deal two years ago from the Chicago Cubs, and first baseman Chris Davis a seven-year, \$161 million contract from the Baltimore Orioles, Boras believes that Hosmer deserves a larger contract.

David Price signed a seven-year, \$217 million contract two years ago with the Boston Red Sox while Zack Greinke got a six-year, \$206.5 million deal with the Arizona Diamondbacks. No one has come close to offering that type of deal to Darvish or Jake Arrieta, the top two starting pitchers on the market.

Martinez hit 45 homers in just 119 games last season for the Detroit Tigers and Diamondbacks, but the Red Sox are the only team to have offered a five-year contract more than \$100 million.

Third baseman Mike Moustakas broke the Royals' franchise record with 38 homers last season, but it's unknown if he even has a contract offer.

So now we're left with distrust, hostility, and a spring training where we could have a whole lot of nastiness.

The players, at least those who are signed, will arrive on time. They'll be asked about the slow free-agent market. Some will lash out. Some will stay quiet, not wanting to offend any of their current or future employees. And some, like Brandon Moss of the Oakland A's, may even blame peers and the union for agreeing to the labor deal that was finalized in December 2016.

We will have baseball just like we always have, only this time, there will be more stars than ever who'll be late arrivals. Spring training is too long, anyway, and hardly needed for six weeks.

Yet, the intrigue won't be on positional battles or watching to see who puts on the better batting practice show between Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton, but seeing who breaks first.

Will clubs step up and give players that extra year or find another \$20 million in their checking account, or will players bite their lips, swallow hard and take deals before someone beats them to it?

Maybe this will turn out to be just a blip on the free-agent landscape. A year from now, we may have everyone asking how it's possible that anyone can pay Bryce Harper and Manny Machado more than \$400 million, while Clayton Kershaw and Dallas Keuchel set records for pitchers.

Then again, maybe so many potential free agents get scared at what transpired this winter, they'll come to the ballpark with their own pen if management wants to discuss contract extensions.

It's a whole new world in baseball, back to the days when players and management showed more contempt than trust toward the other.

Perhaps, everything will be mended by opening day.

Or maybe, not until after the season waiting for the free-agent results of next winter.

It's a whole new ballgame.

And not pretty.