



Padres Press Clips

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Stairs is latest Padres hitting coach to be fired

Kevin Acee

The Padres didn't think Matt Stairs did a bad job.

They just wanted more, and they think they know where to find it.

So for the ninth time in 12 years, they have parted ways with their hitting coach.

And they jettisoned Stairs with very much the same explanation they gave when they let go of his predecessor a little more than a year ago.

"Matt is a very good hitting guy with tons of experience," Padres General Manager A.J. Preller said Tuesday. "We thought he did a good job. We feel like a different voice, a little different message is something we could use."

When the Padres fired Alan Zinter in September 2017, manager Andy Green said, "It just came down to the belief, the conviction that I had, that if we were going to get to where we need to go, a different voice was going to be necessary in that seat."

Infield coach Josh Johnson was also notified by the Padres that he will not be retained.

The Padres, who are keeping assistant hitting coach Johnny Washington, plan to fill both staff vacancies from within.

The leading candidate to join Washington in 2019 in trying to get the Padres out of the major league's offensive basement is Triple-A hitting coach Morgan Burkhart.

The baseball operations department is conducting meetings this week, assessing the 2018 season and planning an offseason course. Preller declined to confirm candidates, but Burkhart certainly fits the description of the direction indicated by the GM.

“We will look at guys internally, who have come up with a few of these players and had some success,” Preller said.

Virtually every Padres player who has spent time in Triple-A El Paso raves unabashedly about Burkhart’s work with their mechanics and approach.

The Padres brought in Stairs after he spent 2017 in Philadelphia, where he was credited with helping the Phillies raise virtually all of their team offensive numbers.

Where there was significant improvement by some key Padres players — primarily Hunter Renfroe, Franmil Reyes and Austin Hedges — widespread improvement proved elusive. The team, in fact, regressed in many areas.

While plate discipline was one of Stairs’ main focuses, the Padres actually chased pitches outside the strike zone at a higher rate in 2018 — from 30.9 percent in 2017 to 31.9 percent in ’18, both of which ranked 10th highest in the majors.

Those within the organization always acknowledged the difficulty of Stairs’ task, as he was working largely with young players who had advanced through the Padres’ system before consistent tenets of selectivity were a priority.

Stairs, who played for San Diego in 2010, was the ninth person to serve as Padres hitting coach since Petco Park opened in 2004. Dave Magadan was the first of those, lasting from 2003 to the middle of the ’06 season. He was followed by Merv Rettenmund (’06-07) Wally Joyner (’07-08), Jim Lefebvre (’08-09), Randy Ready (’09-11), Phil Plantier (’12-14), [Mark Kotsay](#) (’15) and Zinter (’16-17). Additionally, Alonzo Powell was an assistant under Plantier and Kotsay. And Washington, hitting coach at Double-A San Antonio in 2016 before joining the Padres staff as first base coach in 2017, was the assistant hitting coach under Stairs.

The Padres have performed at or near the bottom of the majors in key categories for the last several seasons.

In 2018, they were 12th among the 15 [National League](#) clubs in batting average (.235) and home runs (162), 13th in slugging percentage (.380) and runs scored (.617), and last in on-base percentage (.297) and strikeouts (1,523).

It was the fifth straight year they finished last in the majors in on-base percentage.

“You can look at team stats all the time and go, ‘The team didn’t have a good year,’ ” Stairs said in mid-September. “But if three guys in the middle of your lineup that made adjustments (are improved), that’s a great thing to build off. ... I’ll probably break down team numbers but more individual and see where they made an adjustment and how we have to go into the offseason improving.”

He also said he and Washington looked forward to getting a relative jump-start on their second season together.

“We know what we’re going into next year,” Stairs said. “Depending on this off-season, whatever they’re planning on doing, we know what we need to do.”

The Padres felt a change was part of that offseason plan.

Padres part ways with coaches Stairs, Johnson

By Daniel Kramer MLB.com [@DKramer](#)

Oct. 9th, 2018

The Padres' well-chronicled struggles to put runners on the basepaths prompted the front office to steer in a direction that it hopes will lead to improved hitting, particularly with a lineup they believe will have far more potential in 2019. On Tuesday, MLB.com learned that hitting coach Matt Stairs and infielders coach Josh Johnson will not return next season after the club wasn't able to take the improved strides it had hoped for.

Stairs and Johnson were each only with the club for one season, which continues a trend of turnover. Stairs, who played with the Padres in 2010 and was the Phillies' hitting coach in '17, was the club's ninth hitting coach in the last 15 seasons.

The club, which has not confirmed the decisions, is still finalizing its staff, but it's believed that the front office will look internally to replace Stairs. Assistant hitting coach Johnny Washington and Triple-A hitting coach Morgan Burkhardt are candidates.

The Padres had hoped Stairs would oversee a significant offensive step this season, particularly after the club made a splash in free agency to sign first baseman [Eric Hosmer](#) to an eight-year, \$144 million deal to fortify a lineup that included former All-Star [Wil Myers](#), outfielders [Hunter Renfroe](#), [Manuel Margot](#) and [Franmil Reyes](#) and catcher [Austin Hedges](#), who by most accounts underachieved.

San Diego finished last in on-base percentage (.297) for the fifth straight season, and the club finished third worst in slugging percentage (.380) and batting average (.235) while striking out 1,523 times, which trailed only the White Sox 1,594 tally.

Hosmer went on to have arguably the worst year of his career, hitting .253/.322/.398 with 18 homers and just 69 RBIs while primarily hitting out of run-producing spots in the lineup, second through cleanup. Hosmer had a -0.1 [fWAR](#) and 95 [wRC+](#), which were both significant declines from the 4.1 and 135 figures, respectively, that he posted as an All-Star in his final year with the Royals.

Hosmer has been a consistent power threat throughout his career, but the well-reported ground-ball issues that he possessed in Kansas City continued with him, perhaps at a more glaring rate, in San Diego. Hosmer, who sports a long, left-handed swing, in September became more open to creating more lift, an adjustment he had been wary of before. Hosmer's -1.2 degree average launch angle and 61.0 percent ground ball rate ranked worst and second-worst among 228 hitters with at least 250 balls in play.

Renfroe showed signs of improvement, but he didn't take the leap that the club had hoped for, matching his 2017 home run total with 26 while slashing .248/.302/.504 over 117 games. Myers

was plagued by three trips to the disabled list, and he finished with a line of .253/.318/.446. Margot struggled so much hitting where the club planned him at leadoff, with a .183/.210/.307 line that he was moved down to the seven- and eight-holes as the season went on.

30 AFL sleeper prospects -- 1 from each team

By Jonathan Mayo and Jim Callis and Mike

Rosenbaum MLB.com [@JonathanMayo](#) and [@JimCallisMLB](#) and [@GoldenSombrero](#)

Oct. 9th, 2018

The [Arizona Fall League](#) is [loaded with top prospects](#), including 15 players from MLB Pipeline's [Top 100 Prospects list](#). However, those aren't the only prospects that will be taking the field on Tuesday when the season begins in Arizona.

The top prospects may be the big draw, but there will also be some hidden gems on the field. With that in mind, here are 30 sleeper prospects -- one from each organization -- to keep an eye on during the Fall League season.

AL East

Blue Jays: Zach Jackson, RHP

Jackson, Toronto's third-round pick from 2016, was highly effective in his first Double-A campaign as he posted a 2.47 ERA while holding hitters to a .142 clip over 43 games. The 23-year-old right-hander's plus curveball is his best weapon, and it helped him to amass 75 strikeouts in 62 innings (10.9 K/9). However, Jackson will need to make major gains with his control after issuing 54 total walks (7.8 BB/9).

Orioles: Jay Flaa, RHP

A sixth-round pick in 2015 out of North Dakota State University, Flaa moved up to Double-A Bowie this year and turned in his best pro season, posting a 2.77 ERA and 0.97 WHIP while holding hitters to a paltry .155 clip over 65 innings (41 games). The 26-year-old right-hander pitches with fringy velocity, operating with an 88-92 mph fastball, but he's effective at mixing in both a curveball and split-changeup and consistently creates good angle to the plate.

Rays: Joe McCarthy, OF ([Rays No. 17](#))

McCarthy's season was truncated by a back injury that cost him nearly three months, but he returned to the field fully healthy in August and helped lead Triple-A Durham to its second straight in the Governors' Cup. The 24-year-old outfielder has long shown an advanced bat and elite on-base skills, and many evaluators expect McCarthy to eventually tap into his above-average raw power from the left side of the plate.

Red Sox: Josh Ockimey, 1B ([Red Sox No. 10](#))

One of three slugging corner-infield prospects Boston sent to the Mesa Solar Sox, Ockimey isn't as famous as Michael Chavis or Bobby Dalbec and can't play third base like they can. The bat speed, strength and loft in his left-handed swing have produced 52 homers in three full Minor League seasons, and he also draws a healthy amount of walks.

Yankees: Matt Wivinis, RHP

Wivinis logged a 5.56 ERA in four seasons of college between Kansas State and Eastern Illinois sandwiched around Tommy John surgery, and he began his career in the independent Frontier

League after going undrafted as a senior in 2016. Signed that fall by the Yankees, he had compiled a 1.87 ERA with 123 strikeouts in 86 2/3 innings in two Minor League seasons while reaching Double-A. He works with a pair of high-spin breaking balls he'll throw in any count, and his curveball and slider help his low-90s fastball play up.

AL Central

Indians: Dalbert Siri, RHP

Signed out of the Dominican Republic in November 2014, Siri tallied a career-high 15 saves while posting a 2.45 ERA and .182 BAA out of the bullpen for Class A Advanced Lynchburg. The 23-year-old righty has power stuff in the form of a mid-90s fastball and sharp slider, and together they helped him rack up 71 strikeouts in 47 2/3 innings.

Royals: [Meibrys Vilorio](#), C

After they traded Sal Butera in late August and [Salvador Perez](#) sprained his left thumb, the Royals gave Vilorio a surprise promotion from high Class A to the big leagues. The 2016 MVP and batting champ (.376) in the Rookie-level Pioneer League, he hasn't posted huge offensive numbers in full-season ball but makes line-drive contact and acquits himself well behind the plate.

Tigers: John Schreiber, RHP

Relievers taken in the 15th round (in 2016) who sign for \$6,000 aren't expected to do much in pro ball. But the side-arming right-hander had a 0.54 ERA and .147 BAA in the Midwest League in 2017, then double-jumped to Double-A and posted a 2.48 ERA and .224 BAA with 18 saves in 2018. In his career, he has 153 K's and just 36 walks with a .195 BAA in 137 2/3 IP.

Twins: Griffin Jax, RHP

A product of the Air Force Academy, Jax's performance there in 2016 allowed him to rise to the third round of the Draft. He's had to balance his military responsibilities with his pitching, but is now representing the Air Force in the World Class Athlete Program, meaning he won't be called to active duty. He finished with a 3.70 ERA and 1.52 GO/AO rate in 87 2/3 FSL innings this season.

White Sox: Laz Rivera, SS ([White Sox No. 28](#))

Rivera bounced among three schools during his college career before signing for \$1,000 as a 28th-round senior out of NCAA Division II Tampa in 2017. He has batted .309/.365/.471 with 15 homers and 20 steals in 171 pro games, advancing to high Class A while displaying nice feel for the barrel, gap power and average tools as a runner and defender.

AL West

A's: Luis Barrera, OF

Barrera was signed by the A's back in 2012 out of the Dominican Republic, but it wasn't until this year that the now 22-year-old outfielder truly put it all together while reaching Double-A for the first time in his career. In 124 games across two levels, Barrera batted .297/.361/.426 with 40 extra-base hits and 23 steals. He's a left-handed hitter who makes a lot of contact and impacts the game on both sides of the ball with his plus speed.

Angels: David MacKinnon, 1B

A two-sport star in college who served as the goalie for Hartford's soccer team, MacKinnon has been an on-base machine in his year-plus of pro ball with a .437 OBP. He started slowly when he got bumped up to the California League this year, but turned it on late by hitting .363/.487/.626 in August which led to a .316/.443/.455 second half.

Astros: [Myles Straw](#), OF

Using an extreme opposite-field approach that yields plenty of singles to right field but little power, Straw won the 2016 Minor League batting title at .358 and has hit .302/.394/.376 in four Minor League seasons. He also offers well above-average speed, a strong arm and plus defense, and was added to the Astros postseason roster after he went 3-for-9 during a September callup.

Mariners: Wyatt Mills, RHP ([Mariners No. 9](#))

Mills, a third-round pick in 2017, scuffled following his August promotion to Double-A but dominated during his time in the hitter-friendly California League, going 6-0 with 11 saves over 35 appearances. He also registered a 1.91 ERA and 0.90 WHIP, and compiled a 49-to-9 strikeout-to-walk ratio in 42 1/3 innings. The 6-foot-3 side-armer's pairing of a low-90s fastball with a tight slider makes him highly effective against same-sided hitters.

Rangers: Demarcus Evans, RHP

Perhaps the most physically imposing player in the AFL, the 6-foot-5, 275-pound Evans had a spectacular year at low Class A Hickory, recording a 1.77 ERA, 103 strikeouts and a .147 opponent average in 56 innings. He has a high spin rate on his 94-96 mph fastball, making it seemingly explode at the plate, and backs it up with a curveball with good depth.

NL East**Braves: Ray Patrick-Didder, SS**

The Aruban born middle infielder has long tantalized with his plus athleticism and had a breakout season when he hit full season ball for the first time in 2016. He didn't keep that momentum going in 2017 and repeated the Florida State League this past season, but a light seemed to turn on when challenged with a move to Double-A. He's swiped 25 or more bases three years in a row.

Marlins: [Tommy Eveld](#), RHP

Acquired from Arizona for Brad Zeigler at this year's Trade Deadline, Eveld, 24, played football for three years at South Florida before making his college baseball debut as a redshirt sophomore in 2015. He reached Double-A for the first time this year as part of a breakout campaign in which he recorded 16 saves while pitching to a 1.07 ERA with 61 strikeouts in 50 1/3 innings (45 games). A 6-foot-5 righty, Eveld operates at 92-95 mph with a plus slider and above-average control.

Mets: Ali Sanchez, C ([NYM No. 25](#))

There's no question about Sanchez's defensive acumen, with a 47 percent caught stealing rate and raves from catching instructors and pitchers alike. The bat was more of a concern, especially after a .552 OPS in his first taste of full-season ball in 2017. There's still work to be done, but a .681 OPS in 2018 across two levels of A ball is a step in the right direction.

Phillies: Darick Hall, 1B

A 14th-round pick out of Dallas Baptist in the 2016 Draft, Hall opened some eyes by leading the organization in homers (29) and RBIs (101) in his first full season. He repeated the feat in 2018, reaching Double-A in the process. The left-handed power is legit, but he'll need to work on his overall approach (23.9 pct K rate; 5.4 pct BB rate in Double-A) to keep tapping into it consistently.

Nationals: Ben Braymer, LHP

Braymer, 24, was named Washington's co-Minor League pitcher of the year in 2018 after he led Nats farmhands with a 2.28 ERA while going 9-3 with two saves in 28 games (11 starts) between Class A Hagerstown and Class A Advanced Potomac. The left-hander racked up 118 strikeouts -- third-most in the system -- in 114.2 innings pitched, and opposing batters hit just .219 against him. The 6-foot-2 lefty creates good angle to the plate and attacks the zone with a three-pitch mix that's headlined by a solid-average curveball that at times flashes plus.

NL Central**Brewers: Mario Feliciano, C ([Brewers No. 23](#))**

One of the younger players in this year's event, Feliciano, 19, was sidelined for much of the season and will be making up for some of that lost time in the AFL. The No. 75 overall pick in the 2016 Draft struggled to produce when healthy, too, hitting .205 in 42 games with Class A Advanced Carolina, although he did show plenty of offensive potential last year during his full-season debut in the Midwest League.

Cardinals: [Lane Thomas](#), OF

Heading into the 2018 season, Thomas had hit 18 total home runs since the Blue Jays had drafted him in the fifth round of the 2014 Draft. This season, his first full one in the Cardinals organization, the outfielder led the system in home runs with 27 and RBIs with 88, while also stealing 17 bases. After reaching Triple-A, he's knocking on the big league door.

Cubs: Justin Steele, LHP ([Cubs No. 8](#))

Steele was just starting to come into his own when he blew out his elbow in August 2017, but he returned to the mound earlier than expected (11 months later) after Tommy John surgery. He can run his fastball up to 97 mph, also can dodge bats with his curveball and has made encouraging progress with his control and command.

Pirates: Blake Weiman, LHP

A move to the bullpen as a junior at Kansas proved to be a smart one for the left-hander taken by the Pirates in the eighth round of the 2017 Draft. In his first full season, Weiman pitched across three levels, reaching Double-A at the end of the season and finishing with a combined 2.49 ERA and 77/9 K/BB ratio in 67 innings. He reminds some in the organization of former Pirates lefty reliever [Tony Watson](#).

Reds: Ty Boyles, LHP

Boyles hadn't been able to take off as a starter since being taken out of the California high school ranks in the 11th round of the 2013 Draft, but a move to the bullpen this season might be a career-saver. After a 6.85 ERA and .326 batting average against in 10 starts in the FSL, the southpaw posted a 2.75 ERA and .223 BAA as a reliever in the second half.

NL West

D-backs: Bo Takahashi, RHP

The Brazilian-born right-hander signed back in December of 2013 and has slowly made his way up the organizational ladder. After a 2017 season that saw him finish with an ERA over 5.00 and not miss many bats, he reached Double-A at age 21 and struck out a combined 9.7 per nine innings while walking only 2.2/9.

Dodgers: Cody Thomas, OF

Thomas originally went to Oklahoma to play quarterback but had more success as an outfielder with the Sooners. He has totaled 39 homers in his two full pro seasons and his raw power ranks among the best in the Dodgers system, though he has to prove he can make consistent contact against quality pitching. He runs well for a 6-foot-4, 211-pounder and has solid arm strength.

Giants: Melvin Adon, RHP ([Giants No. 19](#))

Signed at the relatively ancient age of 21 out of the Dominican Republic in 2015, Adon has progressed slowly yet possesses one of the most electric arms in the Giants system. He sits at 95-98 mph when he starts and has reached as high as 102 mph in shorter stints. Projected as a reliever in the long run, he also has an upper-80s slider that features plenty of power.

Padres: Hudson Potts, 3B ([Padres No. 23](#))

Potts can get overlooked at times simply because he's one of many talented prospects in a loaded Padres system, but the 2016 first-rounder has a big arrow next to his name heading into the AFL after he slashed .260/.335/.455 with 19 homers and 35 doubles while reaching Double-A at age 19. Potts makes a lot of hard contact, with power that already plays to all fields, and he made considerable gains in his approach this year despite accruing more than 140 strikeouts for a second straight season.

Rockies: Justin Lawrence, RHP ([Rockies No. 17](#))

Lawrence barely played as a freshman pitcher/infielder at Jacksonville in 2014, but used his free time to experiment with lowering his arm slot and took off after transferring to Daytona State (Fla.) JC the next spring. He now works in the mid-90s with heavy sink and has posted a 2.42 ERA with 82 strikeouts in 70 2/3 innings between two Class A levels during the last two seasons.

Toolshed: 2018 AFL roster rankings

Scottsdale features balanced group; Surprise boasts Guerrero

By Sam Dykstra / MiLB.com | October 9, 2018 10:00 AM

And now back to your regularly scheduled prospect action.

Less than a month after the Minor League postseason ended with the Triple-A National Championship on Sept. 18, a season begins anew on Tuesday with the Arizona Fall League.

Running from Oct. 9-Nov. 17, this year's edition of the prospect finishing school features some of the game's most promising youngsters from all 30 farm systems spread out over six AFL clubs. Some players are looking to make up for lost time. Some are looking to build on strong 2018 campaigns. Others may be auditioning for 40-man roster spots or Rule 5 Draft selections ahead of their eligibility. Whatever the case, the AFL can be a wild experience, and this week's Toolshed is here to help tame it by ranking and breaking down this year's AFL rosters according to their strengths, weaknesses and potential wild cards.

1. [Scottsdale Scorpions](#)

Organizations: Astros, Giants, Mets, Phillies, Reds

Top 100 Prospects: [Forrest Whitley](#), [Peter Alonso](#), [Taylor Trammell](#), [Andres Gimenez](#)

Strength: Balance -- With so many players in need of playing time, AFL rosters are constantly in flux to the point that trying to predict a day's lineup is a fool's errand. But because of the depth of the Scorpions roster, it's possible that on any given day the club could boast the game's top pitching prospect (Whitley), the Bauman Home Run Award winner (Alonso), the All-Star Futures Game MVP (Trammell) and a shortstop who's already held his own at Double-A before turning 20 (Gimenez). Those resumes stand out, but the overall collection of talent has a chance to congeal in really fun ways. Players like Trammell and Gimenez provide plenty of speed and top-of-the-lineup intrigue. Alonso and [Darick Hall](#) provide thump. Whitley -- who has innings to make up -- should get relatively long looks as a starter. There will be days when none of these players will play for the Scorpions, but when they do, it'll be tough to find a more loaded lineup in Arizona. And Scottsdale's depth of top-notch talent would have been even more impressive had top Phillies prospect [Sixto Sanchez](#) not had to **bow out**.

Weakness: Catching corps -- There had to be a hole somewhere on the roster, and as things stand, it's behind the plate. At No. 25 in the Mets system, [Ali Sanchez](#) is the only ranked catcher in the bunch. He's joined by [Mark Kolozsvary](#) (Reds) and [Matt Winn](#) (Giants). All three are solid defensively, with the 21-year-old Sanchez standing out with a plus arm that threw out 41.9 percent of attempted basestealers at Class A Columbia and Class A Advanced St. Lucie this season. But don't expect any of the trio to bring much with the bat; none of them have a career Minor League OPS above .685.

Wild card: [J.B. Bukauskas](#) -- This was meant to be the 2017 15th overall pick's first full season. It was anything but. A back injury suffered in a car accident kept him out from late April to late June and limited him to 59 innings across five different affiliates. But after moving to Class A Advanced Buies Creek on Aug. 2, he posted a 1.32 ERA with 39 strikeouts in 34

innings across his final six regular-season starts, including one at Double-A Corpus Christi. He fanned seven and gave up one earned run on three hits and three walks over six innings in his lone Texas League playoff start. The 6-foot right-hander has a plus-plus fastball and impressive slider but gets dinged for a high-effort delivery that can result in control woes. But if he brings his results from the second half with him to the Fall League, the Scorpions will have another incredibly talented arm to slot next to Whitley.

2. Surprise Saguaros

Organizations: Blue Jays, Cardinals, Pirates, Rangers, Royals

Top 100 Prospects: [Vladimir Guerrero Jr.](#), [Nate Pearson](#), [Julio Pablo Martinez](#)

Strength: Vlad Jr. -- No reason to kid ourselves. If the game's top prospect is on the roster, then he's going to be the main focus. That's especially the case with someone of Guerrero's ilk. Last year, Ronald Acuña Jr. was in a similar spot. He was clearly the Minors' best talent but didn't receive a Major League callup, instead ending his 2017 in the AFL. He went on to become the Fall League MVP. Can Guerrero follow the same path? One thing's for sure: his bat will play. He flirted with hitting .400 for most of the season at Double-A New Hampshire and Triple-A Buffalo, and, coming off his 50 extra-base-hit campaign, the 19-year-old third baseman will provide plenty of pop. It would have been nice to see Guerrero in the Majors instead, because no other circuit is likely to provide the test he needs or deserves, but few will complain about getting more of The Next Big Thing throughout the autumn.

Weakness: Cardinals prospects -- AFL roster philosophy changes from system to system and year to year, so this isn't a huge mark against St. Louis, other than to say it's a down year for Cards prospects heading west by southwest. The highest-ranked player joining Surprise from the St. Louis farm is No. 27 prospect [Conner Greene](#), who shows upper-90s to triple-digit velocity out of the bullpen but walked 31 batters in 39 1/3 innings as a Triple-A reliever. The most intriguing storyline among Cardinals representatives might actually be on the bench; fresh off winning a Triple-A national title with Memphis, Stubby Clapp will manage the Saguaros. The veteran Minor League skipper's name has come up in rumors surrounding Major League openings, including the one in Toronto. Getting to work with Guerrero, Pearson, [Cavan Biggio](#) and others could earn the Ontario native a few points toward returning north of the border.

Wild card: C.D. Pelham -- The Rangers' No. 15 prospect has already picked up a few career highlights in 2018. Back in July, he represented Texas at the Futures Game. When rosters expanded in September, he got his first taste of the Major Leagues. Neither experience went great; Pelham didn't retire either of the two World batters he faced in the Futures Game and gave up six earned runs over 7 2/3 innings in his brief big league stay. But at each stop -- and at Class A Advanced Down East and Double-A Frisco before that -- he showed special velocity, hitting the upper-90s with ease and reaching as high as 99 on the gun in the Majors. That type of heat could make the 2015 33rd-round pick an AFL standout, but he'll need to continue to work on finding the strike zone with regularity.

3. Peoria Javelinas

Organizations: Braves, Brewers, Mariners, Padres, Rays

Top 100 Prospects: [Keston Hiura](#), [Cristian Pache](#)

Strength: Defense -- Since the beginning of the 2017 season, Pache has been known as perhaps the Minors' best defensive center fielder, and it's a pretty safe bet that more than a few opposing AFL hitters will be left frustrated by the amount of ground he'll cover for Peoria. But the potential for him to pair up with No. 13 Padres prospect **Buddy Reed** (he of the plus arm and plus-plus speed) in a corner is downright salivation-inducing. Good luck getting a ball to fall on the grass there. On the infield, Mariners first baseman **Evan White** heads to the Fall League fresh off winning a Minor League Gold Glove on Monday, Rays shortstop **Lucius Fox** remains a standout at a tough position and Padres third baseman **Hudson Potts** has more than enough arm for the hot corner. This strength may not show in AFL box scores beyond lower hit and run totals, but you can bet it'll show on the field.

Weakness: Top-tier starting pitching -- Those looking for future No. 1s or 2s in this year's Fall League are best suited going elsewhere. No. 12 Braves prospect **Kyle Muller** and No. 27 Mariners prospect **Anthony Misiewicz** are the only ranked starting pitchers among this bunch, and even of those two, Muller -- who posted a 3.03 ERA with 129 strikeouts in 139 2/3 innings across three levels with an above-average fastball and curveball coming from his 6-foot-6 frame -- is decidedly the more impressive name. There are always some pop-up arms on every Fall League roster, especially in relief, but they'll be tougher to find over long stretches with Peoria.

Wild card: Austin Allen -- The 24-year-old backstop has mashed at every full-season stop he's made going up the Padres chain since he was a fourth-round pick out of Florida Tech in 2015. This season was no different, as Allen hit .290/.351/.506 with 22 homers and 31 doubles in 119 games with Double-A San Antonio. No doubt he'll hit in the Fall League, too. The only thing keeping him from a higher profile is his defense. San Diego's No. 25 prospect has room to grow as a framer and thrower -- though he deserves credit for throwing a career-best 36 percent of attempted basestealers in 2018 -- and he'll get that chance here. With San Diego already trying to figure out how it'll handle a catching platoon between **Francisco Mejia** and **Austin Hedges**, Allen has a chance to either worm his way into that conversation or show off his game to the other 29 clubs.

4. **Glendale Desert Dogs**

Organizations: Dodgers, Indians, Orioles, White Sox, Yankees

Top 100 Prospects: **Keibert Ruiz**, **Luis Robert**, **Estevan Florial**

Strength: Outfield speed -- **Over in the Sept. 28 Toolshed**, we established that Robert put his speed to the best use among Top 100 Prospects this season, and that came while a pair of thumb injuries limited him to 50 games. It'll be fun to see what type of havoc the 21-year-old speedster can wreak as his 2018 sample expands. But beyond him, the Glendale outfield also boasts a 70-grade runner in Florial and two 60-graders in **Luis Alexander Basabe** and **Ryan McKenna**. As was the case with Peoria, that'll help defensively on the grass, but the Desert Dogs have a chance to be even more of a menace on the basepaths, given their roster construction.

Weakness: Power -- Lots of speed to burn, not much pop. Only one Glendale slugger hit more than 20 home runs or produced a slugging percentage above .500 during the 2018 regular season, and that was unranked Dodgers first baseman **Jared Walker**, who batted .255/.365/.545 with 25 home runs between Class A Great Lakes and Class A Advanced Rancho Cucamonga. How the 22-year-old, left-handed-hitting slugger will handle himself against AFL arms is yet to be seen. Robert and Basabe both have above-average power potential, but

Robert's thumbs and Florial's hamate injury kept them from truly tapping into that pop in 2018. The Desert Dogs might have to find other ways to manufacture runs.

Wild card: Zack Burdi -- The No. 17 White Sox prospect had a mouth-watering profile -- even as a reliever -- coming out of Louisville in 2016, and Chicago picked him up with the 26th overall pick as a result. He missed a good chunk of 2017 and almost all of 2018 due to Tommy John surgery. The 23-year-old right-hander returned to the Minors for seven rehab appearances in the Rookie-level Arizona League and is healthy enough to pick up some more innings in the same state. When healthy, Burdi can hit triple-digits with ease and can also show a plus slider. That helped him strike out 33.8 percent of the Triple-A batters he faced in 2017, and it wouldn't be a surprise to see that number take a jump in the AFL against less seasoned hitters. Proving his health will be Burdi's top priority in the coming weeks, but if he can also show his stuff is fully back, he'll enter Spring Training trying to win a Major League bullpen spot.

5. Salt River Rafters

Organizations: D-backs, Marlins, Nationals, Rockies, Twins

Top 100 Prospects: [Jon Duplantier](#), [Carter Kieboom](#)

Strength: Shortstops -- The 6 spot is always going to be one of the toolsiest on the field, but that's especially the case for the Rafters. Of course Kieboom gets the headlines as MLB.com's No. 37 overall prospect, and he's earned that spotlight after hitting .280/.357/.444 with 16 homers at Class A Advanced Potomac and Double-A Harrisburg in the Nats system. But fellow Rafter and No. 3 D-backs prospect [Jazz Chisholm](#) is knocking on the Top 100 himself after breaking out for 25 homers, a .513 slugging percentage and 17 steals for Class A Kane County and Class A Advanced Visalia. Don't sleep on No. 26 Marlins prospect [Bryson Brigman](#), who hit .310 and stole 21 bases this season and will be looking to impress Miami after coming over from Seattle for [Cameron Maybin](#) on July 31. There should be a revolving door at short, and all three will keep the position interesting.

Weakness: Collection of talent -- When trying to figure out why Salt River is this far down, look to the five farm systems from which it's drawing its talent. Entering 2018, none of those five organizations landed higher than 13th in [MiLB.com's Farm System Rankings](#), and even after a full season of breakouts and graduations and stocks rising and falling, not much has changed in that department. The D-backs, Marlins, Nationals, Rockies and Twins combine for 10 Top 100 Prospects, but only two of those are headed to the Fall League. Sure, there are some other interesting names -- [Brent Rooker](#), [Daniel Johnson](#), [Daulton Varsho](#), [Jordan Yamamoto](#) among them -- but the star power isn't here compared to the AFL rosters above.

Wild card: Monte Harrison -- If this ranking came out a couple weeks back, Harrison would have added to the Rafters' Top 100 contingent. Instead, he's fallen a bit out of favor after leading the Minor Leagues with 215 strikeouts in 136 games with Double-A Jacksonville. The 23-year-old outfielder remains Miami's top prospect, however, because he still has plus speed, a plus-plus arm and some above-average power potential. If that package comes together, he'll have one of the loudest packages of tools in Arizona. But if Harrison continues to struggle to make contact against good arms, expect his stock to flounder further.

6. Mesa Solar Sox

Organizations: Angels, Athletics, Cubs, Red Sox, Tigers

Top 100 Prospects: **Michael Chavis**

Strength: Power -- Although there's only one Top 100 Prospect here, he plays nicely into Mesa's strength. Chavis was suspended 80 games after testing positive for a performance-enhancing substance before the 2018 season began, but after returning in July, he looked very much himself, hitting .298/.381/.538 with nine homers in 46 games across three affiliates. He's joined by fellow Red Sox prospects **Bobby Dalbec**, who finished fourth in the Minors with 32 homers and second with 70 extra-base hits this season, and **Josh Ockimey**, who clocked 20 long balls at the top two levels of the Boston system. Another Red Sox hitter in **Esteban Quiroz** (.547 slugging percentage) and A's prospect **Skye Bolt** (19 homers) add some more pop, but most of that will come from Chavis, Dalbec and Ockimey.

Weakness: Outfield -- **Daz Cameron** is the big name here, and there should be plenty of eyes on him after the Tigers center fielder finished the season at Triple-A Toledo at 21 years old. Detroit's No. 8 prospect could especially wow some with his above-average speed and good arm and range on the grass. Elsewhere, though, the cupboard's a bit barren. Bolt brings some interest as a 19-19 player, but the A's No. 30 prospect will turn 25 in January and only has half a season of Double-A ball under his belt. **D.J. Wilson**'s stock continues to drop as the Cubs' No. 16 prospect hit .219 with a .602 OPS at Class A Advanced Myrtle Beach this season. Other AFL outfield groups have significantly higher ceilings.

Wild card: Nico Hoerner -- The 2018 24th overall pick is the only member of this year's Draft class to head to the Arizona Fall League. Hoerner was looking awfully exciting when he went 16-for-49 (.327) with six extra-base hits, six stolen bases and a 4/9 K/BB ratio through his first 14 games of pro ball. Unfortunately, that quick start came to an abrupt end when he suffered a strained left elbow ligament with Class A South Bend in mid-July. The Cubs have sent him to the AFL to make up for the lost time, and if he can pick up where he left off offensively -- after a full 56-game junior spring at Stanford -- then he'll likely put himself on an even faster track to Wrigleyville

Hitting coach Matt Stairs fired by Padres after just one season

SAN DIEGO (AP) — In an almost annual exercise, the [San Diego Padres](#) are searching for a new hitting coach after Matt Stairs was fired Tuesday following just one year on the job.

The rebuilding Padres continued to rank at or near the bottom of the majors in key offensive stats under Stairs.

His replacement will be the Padres' 10th hitting coach since Petco Park opened in 2004.

While saying that he felt Stairs did a good job with mostly younger players, general manager A.J. Preller said he and manager Andy Green decided that the team needed a different approach. The team is expected to promote someone from within the organization.

“We’re wanting a different message, a different voice,” Preller said. “We have some other guys in mind who have real upside. I’m pretty realistic that it was a younger roster, with developing players. From a performance standpoint we didn’t have tons of guys who improved. It’s not like the entire team overachieved. We did have some improvement, but at the end of the day, sitting down with Andy and talking about it, we thought maybe a different voice, a different connection point will hopefully lead to better performance.”

Stairs was hired last offseason to replace Alan Zinter, who was fired on Sept. 1, 2017. Green said then that the team needed “a different voice” to tutor the batters.

Possible replacements include assistant hitting coach Johnny Washington and Morgan Burkhardt, the hitting coach at Triple-A El Paso.

The Padres also fired infield coach Josh Johnson on Tuesday.

The Padres were last in the majors in on-base percentage at .297, tied for second-to-last with a .235 batting average and tied for third-to-last with a .380 slugging percentage. They had the second-most strikeouts, 1,523, or 9.4 per game.

Stairs spent the 2017 season as the hitting coach for the Philadelphia Phillies, his first professional coaching position. He played parts of 19 seasons in the major leagues with 12 different franchises, including the Padres in 2010.

The Padres expected to be better this year than their 71-91 finish in 2017 but were last in the NL West at 66-96.

San Diego Padres: 2018 minor league awards

Benjamin Chase

The San Diego Padres are now universally considered to have the top farm system in the game. Who were the top performers in that farm system in 2018?

As part of our continuing coverage at Call to the Pen of the minor leagues, we will be covering each organization's top players for 2018. The coverage will go in reverse order of record. Today, we will look at the [San Diego Padres](#).

We are going to review the system's leaders for each organization statistically, then choose one hitter and one pitcher to honor for every team. This will be primarily based on statistical performance, though some "age relative to level" could come into play, so a very impressive season from a 28-year-old in AA will rank below a nearly as impressive season from a 20-year-old at the same level.

After we review each organization's hitter and pitcher of the year, we will close out October with Call To The Pen's Minor League team of the year. That will lead into November starting our team top 10 prospect lists. In other words, there will be plenty of minor league content on the way at CTPP, so keep coming back for more each day this offseason!!

San Diego Padres minor leagues

When the San Diego Padres chose to go into a rebuild mode after the 2015 season, they went in with both feet, to say the least. The Padres tore down their team, bringing in a host of prospects and then went in heavy into the international market in a way unmatched by any team previous in the depth of international class on top of quality.

The team has been building onto that jump start ever since, and with the Atlanta Braves graduating a few players in 2018 to the major leagues, the Padres have now moved into the position as the top farm system in all of baseball as the 2018/2019 offseason begins.

Before we offer up awards on the season, let's take a look at the system's statistical leaders:

Organization Leaders (min. 150 PA, 50 IP)

BA: [Tucupita Marcano](#) .366

OBP: [Xavier Edwards](#) .453

SLG: [Franmil Reyes](#) .614

OPS: Franmil Reyes 1.042

R: [Ty France](#) 84

H: [Josh Naylor](#) 149

2B: [Luis Torrens](#) 36
3B: Edward Oliveras and [Agustin Ruiz](#) 10
HR: Ty France and [Austin Allen](#) 22
RBI: Ty France 96
SB: [Buddy Reed](#) 51
TB: Ty France 236

W: [Logan Allen](#) 14
G: [Rowan Wick](#) 49
GS: [Cal Quantrill](#) 28
IP: [Jerry Keel](#) and Logan Allen 148 2/3
SV: [Travis Radke](#) 16
K: Logan Allen 151
ERA: [Osvaldo Hernandez](#) 1.81
WHIP: [Chris Paddack](#) 0.82
K/9: [Dauris Valdez](#) 12.8
K/BB: Chris Paddack 15.00