



# Padres Press Clips

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# Padres notes: It was important to teammates that A.J. Ellis start Saturday

[Kevin Acee and Jeff Sanders](#)

[A.J. Ellis](#) didn't want a charity start.

He didn't need one. He's playing his 11<sup>th</sup> major league season, comfortable in who he is and what his role has been all season and also what that role has become in the last month since Francisco Mejia was promoted to the majors.

So Ellis declined a couple weeks ago when [Padres](#) manager Andy Green offered him the chance to get behind the plate one more time in the season's final weekend.

Then last week, [Austin Hedges](#) pulled Ellis aside and told his mentor and friend he wanted to see him catch one more time.

"How much that guy means to me, it meant the world to me that he wanted to watch me play," Ellis said Saturday. "... I walked into Andy's office and said, 'If the offer is still there, I'll play Saturday.' "

So there the 37-year-old was in Saturday's lineup against the Diamondbacks, playing catcher for the first time since Sept. 2.

Ellis, who signed with the Padres in [spring training](#), is the oldest catcher in the majors. He is enjoying the best offensive season of his career while playing as much as he had since 2014 with the Dodgers. His .281 batting average and .389 on-base percentage (in 178 plate appearances) are the best marks on the team.

Ellis immediately took on a leadership role when he arrived in Peoria, Ariz., and has all through the season before virtually every game been the most intense and hurried player in the clubhouse.

Even as he has made just eight plate appearances since his last start, Ellis has caught an abundance of bullpen sessions and continued to actively participate in daily pregame meetings between pitchers and catchers.

“Words can’t describe what he’s done for me personally and what I know he’s done for the team,” Hedges said. “Everybody appreciates everything he does. ... The work he’s done the last month knowing he’s not going to play, it says everything about his character – the teammate he is, the person he is. I want to watch him play. I like having him on my team. He needed to make one more start. What he’s earned, what he deserves, he should be on the baseball field.”

Hedges and Mejia have been splitting starts since Mejia made his first one on Sept. 6. Hedges will start Sunday’s season finale.

“Everybody wants to see A.J. play one last baseball game today,” Green said. “I don’t want to make too much of it, but he’s had a really, really good career.”

While Green’s words indicated a finality, Ellis has indicated he would like to play another season. If it happens, Hedges wants it to be in San Diego.

“I’ve had a lot of really good relationships with my fellow catchers, but I didn’t think one was possible like this,” Hedges said. “This is by far as good as it gets. ... I don’t want to see him go. I’m going to fight my ass off to see that he comes back. I don’t know how possible it is. But I’m not going to go down without a fight.”

## **Jankowski, established**

There are a lot of questions regarding the Padres outfield next season. Travis Jankowski is not one of those questions.

“He’s shown he fills a real important niche role for us where you’ve got a guy who can flat out run off the bench, can flat out defend the field and when you get a righty on the mound he can give you really competitive strong at-bats, he can get on base consistently,” Green said. “That’s a winning baseball player. ... We definitely value that.”

He has started just seven of the Padres 23 games this month, but despite leaving for two days to be present for the birth of his son has played in 16 games, primarily as a defensive replacement working in place of Franmil Reyes in right field.

Jankowski's .335 on-base percentage is tops among Padres with more than 270 plate appearances. His 24 stolen bases (in 30 attempts) lead the team and rank 15<sup>th</sup> in the majors. According to Statcast, Jankowski is tied for first in the majors with a 93 percent catch percentage among those who have at least 150 opportunities.

"I finally feel like I'm showcasing my talents," said Jankowski, who played in just 27 games last season due to a foot injury. "I had spurts of it in 2016; 2017 was a wash. This year I've been able to show the organization I can help teams win. It feels great. I'm happy with how I'm doing. I'm not content."

Jankowski said he thinks he can get his on-base percentage up to .350, among other improvements he would like to implement for '19.

Where [Hunter Renfroe](#) and Reyes hit home runs at a pace of once every 15.8 and 16.6 at-bats, respectively, Jankowski's speed is the reason he has reached base so much this season. His 17 infield singles are second on the team to [Freddy Galvis](#)' 18 (in 260 more plate appearances)

"That's one of the improvements I made this year – not striking out quite as much, putting the ball in play. ... I have a much better chance than most guys. Speed is my game."

## **Renfroe back in lineup**

Some 12 hours after a 15-inning walk-off win, one made possible by Renfroe's pinch-hit homer in the 12<sup>th</sup> inning Friday night, Padres manager Andy Green re-inserted Renfroe back into the starting lineup.

Renfroe had been scratched with a head and chest cold when he belted the first pitch he saw off the lid of the Shin noodle soup cup in the second deck in left field.

“I don’t know about much (better today),” Green said. “He sounds worse. He still doesn’t look good, but he says he feels better so that’s good enough for us. He could have saved us all a couple hours if he was starting yesterday and gotten us out of here sooner. Glad to have him back in the lineup today.”

The home run was Renfroe’s third pinch-hit blast of the season and the first off a popular batting practice target.

“We always joke about it,” Renfroe said early Saturday morning. “If you hit the ramen noodle cup you win ramen noodles for life – a hundred dollars worth.”

## **Another first**

Galvis’ first walk-off hit as a Padre gave another teammate his first. Right-hander Colten Brewer, the eighth reliever used in Friday’s win, struck out two and walked two over two scoreless innings and celebrated his first win on the field – and in a beer shower in the clubhouse after the game – when Javy Guerra slid safely across home plate.

Signed to a big-league deal in the offseason, the 25-year-old rookie made his major league debut in April, returned in July and then missed 31 games with a strained left oblique. He allowed two earned runs in his first 6 2/3 innings when he coughed up four runs without recording an out in Los Angeles over the weekend. Friday’s two-inning stint in extra innings was his first appearance since that setback.

“A 15-inning win, you’re never going to forget that,” Brewer said Saturday afternoon. “To get the win on top of that ... at first all I thought about was wanting to be out there with the guys and then possibly getting a little shower on, too.”

# Padres' Jacob Nix shaky in final start of rookie season

**Jeff Sanders**

Unless his unusually candid rookie opted to open up, [Padres](#) manager Andy Green said he preferred to keep Jacob Nix's offseason to-do list in-house.

Saturday's start, his last of 2018, provided a few clues about the 22-year-old rookie's exit interview.

Nix served up a sixth home run in his last four starts in the fourth inning against the [Diamondbacks](#), sending the Padres on their way to a 5-4 loss. He threw 26 pitches in a two-run second. He did not punch out anyone.

"A lot of things," Nix said of the corrective measures on his radar after finishing his first summer in the majors with a 7.02 ERA. "Breaking pitches especially. I'm going to put a big focus on that and just mechanically feeling sound. I think that's a big one. I've been battling a few things. That's part of the game, though."

As much promise as Nix (2-5) delivered when he needed only 79 pitches to come within two outs of a shutout in his fourth big league start, the next five have served as a reminder that the former third-rounder had only 16 starts above A-ball when he was pushed to San Diego in August.

With four runs allowed on five hits, three walks and two wild pitches Saturday, Nix has a 10.07 ERA over his last 22 1/3 innings. That stretch includes 30 hits allowed – including six homers – eight walks and only 14 strikeouts.

"It's been quick," Green said of Nix's rise to the majors. "... There were some expectations for some lumps along the way. His success is predicated on his ability to bounce back from his tough spots. We wouldn't have brought him here if we didn't think he couldn't bounce back."

Of course, Nix will need to surge forward if he's to secure a future in the organization.

Of the rookies who received long looks this year, Joey Lucchesi and Eric Lauer have the inside track in the battle for rotation spots. Clayton Richard will be in the last year of his deal, Matt Strahm figures to be given every opportunity to stretch himself out as a starter and several prospects from a deep farm system – from Logan Allen to Cal Quantrill to Chris Paddack to Michel Baez – could begin knocking on the door as Nix returns for his second big league camp.

“We have a ton of guys and a lot of talent and I recognize that,” Nix said. “I'm not coming into [spring training](#) expecting to have a spot in this locker room. I know I have to earn it.”

Saturday's start was tripped up after a crisp, seven-pitch first.

But even with two runs allowed in a 26-pitch second – one on an RBI single and another via a wild pitch – Nix remained in decent shape until walking [Daniel Descalso](#) to lead off the fourth and leaving a 2-2, 92 mph fastball to rookie Ildemaro Vargas over the heart of the plate.

The ensuing swing left the Padres looking up at a 4-0 hole. The three walks he allowed were a career-high through his nine-start audition for 2019.

“I'm happy I got to be here,” Nix said. “I'm not exactly happy with the results. This isn't how I was drawing up my last game in my head, but it doesn't always happen how you imagine. I'm ready to get to work in the offseason and try to turn my weaknesses into strengths and get back out here.”

A fifth run scored in the sixth when Trey Wingenter walked Jon Jay on four pitches, pushing an inherited runner from Strahm (1 2/3 IP, 1 H, 2 BB) across the plate.

Wingenter finished with 1 1/3 scoreless innings and Kazuhisa Makita followed with two shutout frames.

[Eric Hosmer](#)'s 18<sup>th</sup> homer – his third hit of the game – cut the Padres' deficit to 5-4 in the eighth inning before Arizona's Yoshihisa Hirano recorded the final three outs to send the Padres to their 96<sup>th</sup> loss, their most since 2008 (99).

Manuel Margot tripled in two runs in a three-run third charged to Diamondbacks right-hander Zack Godley (6 IP, 3 ER). A third run scored that inning on shortstop Javy Guerra's single to right for his first career RBI.



# Padres closer Kirby Yates to rep MLB in Japan series

**Jeff Sanders**

The 2018 campaign took **Kirby Yates** to Mexico for the first time. His time as a reliever in the AL East afforded him a handful of trips to Toronto's Rogers Centre. Outside of the regular stops on a major league schedule and treks to his native Hawaii, those locales represent the extent of Yates' travels.

His passport will add an additional stamp this offseason: Japan.

Yates has accepted an invitation to represent Major League Baseball in November in a six-game exhibition series against a team of all-stars from Japan's Nippon Professional Baseball.

Marlins skipper **Don Mattingly** will manage the team. Others announced as participants include Brewers MVP candidate **Christian Yelich**, Braves rookie **Ronald Acuna Jr.**, the Phillies' **Rhys Hoskins** and **Carlos Santana**, the Cardinals' **Yadier Molina**, the Reds' **Eugenio Suarez** and the Dodgers' **Chris Taylor**.

"I feel like just being invited is something I can't really turn down," Yates said Saturday. "It's an opportunity you don't know if you'll ever get it or ever will get it again. I'm very excited and very humbled to be chosen."

Given his first half, there legitimate talk that Yates was a viable candidate to represent the Padres as in the All-Star Game in Washington D.C. over closer **Brad Hand**. With his friend traded to the Indians, Yates has continued to excel in the ninth inning, converting 12 of his 13 save opportunities while posting a 2.03 ERA, 89 strikeouts and an 0.90 WHIP over a career-high 62 innings.

That workload was one consideration when the players' union presented Yates with the invitation. The other is that he and his wife, **Ashlee**, have two young children – a

daughter, **Oaklee**, born last year and a son, **Kove**, born in August – meaning the Padres’ new closer would have to make the three-city tour to Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagoya alone.

His wife agreed, Yates said, that it was an opportunity that didn’t come around often. After all, Yates had been waived twice before becoming all-star material in San Diego.

“It's weird to think that the position I was in a couple years ago to now getting this invite,” Yates said. “It's very exciting. At some point I think I will step back and understand that I did accomplish some things this year that are pretty good.”

# Pondering what progress portends after another poor Padres season

[Kevin Acee](#)

[Craig Stammen](#) is 34 years old, and his contract runs just through 2019.

When the dean/dad of the [Padres](#) bullpen thinks about what he believes is a promising future for his young teammates, he hopes to continue to make enough of an impact that at least his legacy will get soaked in a champagne shower.

“What’s encouraged me looking back on my career is older players investing in me ... little nuances, teaching me how to pitch, passing on what they knew,” Stammen said. “That’s what I’ve done, just sharing everything I know. What has spilled out, hopefully some of it sticks to where if they win the [World Series](#) and I’m not here, I can at least tip my cap and be like, ‘Hey, I know those guys, and I know the work they put in to get to that point.’

“But in the back of my mind, I’m like, I have got to stay good enough to stay on this team when they are good enough. That’s my goal — to lead these guys to a point where they’re successful *and* be a part of it.”

He knows, “If we had to look at it being realistic, it’s probably less realistic.”

That makes sense.

The Padres were 65-95 heading into Saturday’s second-to-last game of the season. Should they win their final two games, they will still finish tied for the ninth-worst record in the franchise’s 50-year history.

But there was a time not long ago, when not only a dearth of victories but a lack of evident progress didn’t allow for much real optimism.

Now, after a summer of individual improvement from a number of Padres playing their first, second or third major league seasons, Stammen is among those experiencing optimism that is both cautious and unbridled.

“A few months ago if you would have asked me I’d be like, ‘Oh, we have a long way to go,’ ” he said. “But these last few months, people have improved significantly, and it’s easy to see. Sometimes you can’t see, but it’s been evident. ... These guys have improved over the whole second half of the season. That’s not a short sample.”

All around the clubhouse, a realistic approach has begun to meld with an accelerated timeline.

“One hundred percent,” catcher [Austin Hedges](#) said. “You’ve got a guy like Franmil Reyes doing what he’s doing, a guy like [Hunter Renfroe](#) who is turning into the star we all know he’s capable of being. We’ve got all these young pitchers coming in who are showing what they’re capable of still with more to come. I think with the progress people have made, especially lately, it gives us hope next year should be really good.”

Part of that hope is in what might be done between Sunday’s season finale and the next time they all get together in Arizona for [spring training](#).

“If we have the exact same team, we’ll be good,” Hedges said. “But if we can add a couple pieces that could really help, then even more so. Because obviously it’s not a finished product where we have what we need, but it’s damn close.”

Whether the personnel department ultimately comes to the same conclusion and deems significant improvement doable over the winter will be the shaping force in what is expected to be a dramatic offseason of roster shaping.

In order to figure out what to get, the Padres have to be as certain as they can be about what they have — and don’t have.

## **For starters ...**

The Padres were simply too often in a hole created by their starting pitching.

Clearly, an offense that ranked at or near the bottom of the major leagues in most significant categories did not have the juice to overcome deficits. But those deficits were far too frequent.

The Padres have been outscored 292-191 in the first three innings of games this season. They have trailed after three innings in 73 (of 160) games this season and won just 13 of those. When they lead after three innings, they are 33-16.

This was the first thing Green said when asked what has to happen in order for the Padres to have a different kind of season than any in the past eight years:

“We need consistent starting pitching.”

That’s where it gets a little tricky regarding 2019.

The Padres’ minor league system seems bursting with possible top-of-the-rotation arms. But only two of their top seven starting pitcher prospects will be older than 21 by the end of spring training. Chris Paddock (who will be 23 in January) is expected to challenge for a rotation spot early in the season. At best, it would seem the end of next year before right-hander Michel Baez (who turns 23 in February) and left-hander Adrian Morejon (who turns 20 in February) make their major league debuts, and 2020 is far more likely.

With that in mind, the Padres must decide what they would be willing to give up for an established veteran to augment a rotation that next season figures to be even younger than this year and limited in the collective innings it can amass.

Joey Lucchesi (4.14 ERA in 25 starts) and Eric Lauer, who came off the disabled list in August and posted a 1.08 ERA and limited opponents to a .174 batting average in his final five starts, are virtual locks for spots.

Logan Allen and Cal Quantrill will be given every opportunity to make the rotation out of spring. Also in the mix — dependent on offseason maneuvers — could be rookies Jacob Nix and Brett Kennedy plus [Robbie Erlin](#), Bryan Mitchell, [Luis Perdomo](#), Clayton Richard and Matt Strahm.

As intriguing as Strahm and Paddack are, both would be on innings limits in '19, as Strahm continues to build endurance after 2017 knee surgery and Paddack comes back from 2016 Tommy John surgery.

All those restraints are why the Padres are deliberating what Green called “creative” [ways to patch together games](#) in 2019.

## Oh, what a relief

The Padres would seem built for purposefully exercising some pitching patchwork.

Their bullpen is deep, diverse and talented — and, as a bonus, they have every one of their arms under team control, most for many years.

Erstwhile starters Erlin and Perdomo seem headed for “swing” roles, where they can pitch varying lengths at varying points in games.

The math seems limitless. The Padres could do everything from just planning on starters to last five innings to going with “bullpen games” a couple times a week.

Whatever they figure out, the Padres head into the offseason with the bullpen as perhaps the most established — or at least tangibly promising — facet of their team.

In the second half — after Brad Hand and Adam Cimber were traded during the All-Star break — the Padres’ bullpen ranked third in ERA (3.38) and batting average against (.220) and fourth in WHIP (1.16). All were improvements over the bullpen’s first-half numbers.

## Lumber slumber

Strictly assessing the stats, the Padres still can’t hit.

For the fifth straight season, their on-base percentage (.297) ranks at the bottom of the major leagues, and with two games remaining was two points lower than last season. They are hitting .235, which is vying for worst in the majors for what would also be a fifth straight season.

That is, however, far from an indictment there wasn't improvement.

In particular, three young players made significant progress, making adjustment after adjustment to sustain offensive output that suggests staying power.

Since the start of July, Hedges hit .261/.306/.502. The average ranked sixth and the slugging percentage No. 2 among catchers with at least 200 plate appearances in that span.

And since the beginning of August, the Padres' corner outfielders have been as productive as any pair in the majors. Hunter Renfroe's 18 homers the final two months are tied for second most in the majors, while rookie Franmil Reyes hit .322/.388/.557, all of which rank in the top 20 over the season's final two months among those with at least 150 plate appearances.

"You can look at team stats all the time and go, 'The team didn't have a good year,' " said hitting coach Matt Stairs, who is completing his first season with the Padres. "But if three guys in the middle of your lineup that made adjustments (are improved), that's a great thing to build off."

## Missing links

As often happens this time of year in the clubhouse of teams that won't be busy in October, [Eric Hosmer](#) and [Wil Myers](#) were ruminating last week on the ups and downs of the 2018 season.

"Obviously," Myers said. "Me and him have to play better together. But it's been really fun to see these guys pick it up and learn how to hit and put together good at-bat after good at-bat."

Indeed.

But it cannot be glossed over that the converse takeaway from the emerging trio is that of the disappearing duo.

Hedges, Renfroe and Reyes were supposed to be complementary pieces.

Asked about what encouraging signs he has seen from his offense, Green slipped in the name of the team's two marquee players in a way that was more sanguine than substantive.

"We've definitely seen some things in the last couple months that would lend themselves to success in the future," the manager said. "Franmil's adjustments in the batter's box, Hunter's adjustments in the batter's box, the belief and expectation that Hos will be an anchor in the middle of the order. Wil has looked really good down the stretch. Austin's changes have been outstanding in the batter's box. These are offensive guys. We're excited about that growth and believe we're going to build on those things."

Except Hosmer is hitting .249/.317/.391 and has struck out a career-high 141 times. He is tied for the team lead with 67 RBIs and 31 doubles but is batting a career-low .250 with runners in scoring position.

Hosmer has been everything the Padres hoped in terms of his effectiveness as a leader. While that shouldn't be undervalued, it is not even close to the entirety of why they committed at least \$105 million over five years (and possibly as much as \$144 million over eight years) when they signed the 28-year-old first baseman in February.

Green this week expressed a sentiment congruent with the thinking/hoping of many in the organization.

"There are lots of guys in the first year of a contract that haven't had the type of year they wanted to have in a new environment," Green said. "You hear the drive inside his voice and the talk about what he wants to do going into next year, and there is a lot of confidence we're going to see who we believe Eric Hosmer to be."

Myers has hit fairly steadily the past couple weeks to lift his season line to .254/.318/.450. He has stolen 13 bases in 14 attempts and has 25 doubles and 11 home runs in a mere 307 at-bats.

The issue with Myers this season, more than anything, appears to be the starts and stops resultant from an inability to stay healthy and his being moved first to the outfield in the spring and then to third base at the end of the summer. The Padres



have acknowledged that and, while it depends somewhat on the moves they make with their outfielders and possible acquisition of a third baseman, the hope is they can give Myers a more stable 2019.

So the belief in Myers' numbers when healthy (a 162-game average of .254/.328/.400 with 25 homers and 20 stolen bases) and Hosmer's career line (still .279/.339/.432) give the Padres cause for at least professed optimism.

"They're a huge part of what we do," Green said. "There is a ton of belief they will be anchors in the middle of the order that hold us down and we build around."

There is actually a third member of the letdown gang.

The Padres expected [Manuel Margot](#) to grab hold of the lead-off spot this season and instead ended up shielding him from that role.

There really is no facet of the game with which the ultra-talented center fielder, who turned 24 on Friday, did not struggle at some point this season. That includes defense and base running, the latter of which was a constant issue.

The Padres have now essentially spelled out '19 as Margot's do-or-go season, and he will need to improve his plate discipline above all else. Margot had a 2½-month period from mid-May to early August wherein, over 57 games, he hit .301 with a .359 OBP, and yet he still sits at .241/.289 for the season.

"Not everybody moves as fast as you'd like," Green said. "But sometimes you get huge rebounds after tough years, and we're going to believe in those things, too."

## **More than hope?**

The Padres, entering Saturday's second-to-last game of the season, possessed the second-worst record in the [National League](#) and the sixth-worst record in the majors.

Unlike some of the other bottom dwellers, however, the Padres have hope that springs from a fountain of youth — not just in their highly rated farm system but in

the young players who have contributed in an increasingly impressive manner on their major league roster.

None of the Padres' 11 players with at least 250 plate appearances are older than 28 and the average age of those players is 23.9. Every other team had at least one player with at least 250 plate appearances older than 28. Only the Chicago White Sox, who have the majors' third-worst record and whose 11 players with 250 or more plate appearances averaged 24.1 years old, came close to matching the Padres' youth.

Rookies made 19.5 percent of the Padres' plate appearances this season, the fourth-highest ratio in the majors. The 36.5 percent of their innings that were pitched by rookies ranks third. (The Marlins, who have the NL's worst record, are the only other team ranked in the top five in both categories.)

Will potential become something more, sooner than later?

Green's typical carefully candid assessment of his expectations for 2019:

"I want to see us taking big steps forward and expecting to compete to win baseball games more consistently than we have."

But ...

"There's no doubt, just watch the Dodgers when we play against them, they're well ahead of us right now," he said. "If that is the bar we've got to clear, that's a lot of ground to cover in an offseason with a few maneuvers. But we're hungry to cover that ground and catch up to them and be able to compete with them."

Stammen will continue to pitch, help mold and watch the clock.

"When character and talent mix with a little bit of experience, something crazy is going to happen," Stammen said. "It's coming."

# Column | If Padres can find any takers, now is the time to trade Wil Myers

[Nick Canepa](#)

*Sez Me ...*

[Wil Myers](#) can't help but be out of position. He has no position to be out of.

He should find a new one soon, one suited to his skill set — in another major league city. Preferably one with a designated hitter.

Myers, a major, expensive contributor to one of the most putrid seasons in [Padres](#) history, has to be traded.

The MLB regular season (regular as in bad as usual for the Padres) ends today and, before long, General Manager A.J. Preller should find a nice, soft spot for Myers to land.

Because we like Wil, let's hope that will be a team where he won't have to play defense.

As we all know, when Myers, not without talent, is uncomfortable afield, his offense suffers. Problem is, there is nowhere on the field where he's comfortable.

Simply, there haven't been nearly enough Wil Moments.

He wasn't supposed to be an experiment. He was supposed to be a terrific player and was paid accordingly. Instead he became the short-lived "face of the franchise." I've always questioned his concentration level. And he is not an iron man.

He was [Rookie of the Year](#) as an outfielder in Tampa. But not feeling at home there, he was moved to first base, where he was OK, but not exactly Vic Power.

So Preller went out and signed [Eric Hosmer](#) for large amounts of cash, and Hosmer, being a [Gold Glove](#) first baseman, got the job there, with Myers again shoved into the outfield (except the Padres have cornered the world on corner outfielders).

Hosmer hasn't exactly been a ray of hope, either. Is Eric a victim of Petcoitis? Bah. They do play 81 games in road parks, where he also has killed infield gophers.

So then what did they do? They moved Wil to third base, where he plays like a guy trying to figure out his GPS.

They can't keep a liability at third. And win. Can't. Granted, it may be hard to trade him for decent value. His salary balloons to \$20 million in 2020-22. Might have to take less or eat some money.

Preller has dice the size of split-level homes to roll here. His farm system is stacked. Who does he keep and let go?

Hunter Renfroe, he of the uncommon cold, has figured it out big-time at the plate and is good enough in left field to remain there. They can't trade that bat. Franmil Reyes in right field is not Clemente, but the huge man carries a big stick. Can't see him going anywhere. Too dangerous.

Manny Margot in center is a problem. He's been a disappointment on several fronts, including baseball IQ. How long is Manny's rope?

Potential stinks.

They need a third baseman, unless they keep [Freddy Galvis](#) at short for a while and move Shortstop of the Future Fernando Tatis Jr. to third. Injured Luis Urias looks like the guy at second. And catcher, where I figure Austin Hedges and Francisco Mejia won't be able to co-exist.

Yeah, when I look into my crystal ball, it's hard to find Wil Myers. No corners to hide in a ball. ...

The Padres didn't tank — or they don't know how to do that, either. ...

Has a San Diego mayor had a street named after him before taking office? **Trevor Hoffman** could be the first. ...

Fewer than 20 players will bat .300 this year. There will be more than 40,300 strikeouts. The Shift. Ruining baseball. ...

The Judases cannot shed their conservative robes. Why is it impossible to hire a head coach willing to take a chance? And one who realizes special teams matter? And one who can tell time — or get help telling time? ...

**Sean McVay**, the [NFL](#)'s brightest young mind, has a clock management specialist (**Jedd Fisch**) on his staff to help him in crucial moments on game day. I thought he was smart. He's smarter than I

thought. ...

If the Judases were involved in the first drive on D Day, every English woman now would sound like **Marlene Dietrich**, every British man like **Henry Kissinger**. ...

If you're looking for an expensive lightning rod, put **Clay Matthews** on your roof. ...

I thought the [Bills](#) would go 0-16. ...

And Jax loses 9-6 to the Titans? The NFL really isn't very good. ...

When genuflecting stands up to be counted: Since signing **Colin Kaepernick**, Nike has added \$6 billion to its market value. ...

**Jerry Jones** sees similarities between the [Cowboys](#) and Rams offenses. In four words: De-lus-ion-al. Unless he meant Oklahoma State. ...

The [Patriots](#) have been counted out before, but I can count. If Belichick does a loaves-and-fishes thing with this mess, the Pope has to consider canonization. ...

But ... Vegas wiseguys aren't convinced. Pats a 7-point fave over Miami. Always fascinating, The Guys. ...

Our new Alliance of American Football team will be called the Fleet. So it must be fast. ...

Love the Fleet's logo, though. Very World War II. Team should come out to **Richard Rodgers'** "Victory at Sea." Seriously. ...

**Khalil Mack** has 18 QB pressures. The Raiders have 23. ...

Aztecs' athletic budget takes a hit when it's forced to supply football players with Polarized glasses for their day game in Boise. ...

'Bama didn't cover. Stinks. ...

Stink O' The Week Sezment: Baseball players pulling out cheat sheets. Bush. ...

On the kicker watch list: Alabama's **Joseph Bulovas**. ...

I tried to get emotional during **Tiger's** win. I'm lying. ...

**Phil** taking Ryder heat. But there is no Tiger in team. ...

**Hambone Williams** is on our basketball Mount Rushmore. And, my, he was a character. RIP. ...

I just went back and looked at one my final high school calendar entries: "Out of Jade East cologne. Prom night. Buy cousin a corsage." ...

After watching the goings-on in Washington this past week, I'm more convinced than ever. The old days. They were good. ...

# Nix wraps rookie season with loss to D-backs

By Katie Woo

SAN DIEGO -- The Padres' abundance of young, talented arms began to arrive in San Diego in the last few months of the season as the team began to experiment on the possibilities of the rotation come 2019.

[Jacob Nix](#) was the last starter to break into the big leagues for the Padres this year, making his debut Aug. 10 when he hurled six innings of shutout ball vs. the Phillies. His last start of the season, however, echoed how he's performed since that day, as the D-backs tagged him early and held on for a 5-4 victory Saturday night at Petco Park.

"It's a rougher way for him to end the season," manager Andy Green said. "There's a lot of work out in front of him to do to be right in the mix for our guys heading into Spring Training. He can do it, but this probably wasn't the way he wanted to end the season."

Nix, 22, has struggled from start to start with inconsistency in his two months with the club, and while he's shown flashes of being effective, he's also yielded signs of concern that he may not be fully ready for the Majors. After an emphatic debut, he wasn't able to get out of the first inning in his second career start, but bounced back two outings later with an 8 1/3-inning, one-run affair vs. Seattle. He's been a wild card for the Padres, although Green says it'd be fair to refer to his struggles as a rookie just trying to find his groove.

"There was a short history of outings in the Minor Leagues and he got up here really, really quickly," Green said. "He's learning on the job and he has a lot of lessons to take with him in the offseason."

The inconsistencies were evident Saturday once more for Nix, who opened the game with a seven-pitch first inning, but struggled to locate his curveball the rest of the outing. He was able to induce soft contact using his fastball and slider, but wasn't able to avoid [Ildemaro Vargas'](#) two-run blast in the fourth inning that put the D-backs up 4-0.

"The changeup I made a point to not hang any, so I was really, really focused on keeping it down, and they were too down," Nix said. "I have to find the happy medium."

Nix recorded four innings of work and was tagged for four runs on five hits and three walks in his final start, finishing 2018 with a 2-5 record and 7.02 ERA over nine games. With San Diego stacked with young talent, specifically pitchers, Nix knows he'll have to work for a spot on the roster over the offseason. He'll focus on bettering his breaking pitches, along with toning up his mechanics.

"Overall, I'm happy I got to be here. I'm not happy with the overall results," he said. "We have a ton of guys and a lot of talent. I recognize that, I'm not coming into Spring Training expecting to have a spot in this locker room. I know I have to earn it."

"He'll have an opportunity coming into the spring to prove himself," Green added. "He's taken some steps forward, but where he goes is based on how hard he works this offseason."

### **MOMENTS THAT MATTERED**

After the D-backs jumped out to a 4-0 lead, the Padres threatened to thwart that lead with a rally of their own. [Hunter Renfroe](#) walked and [Cory Spangenberg](#) followed up with a single to set the table for [Manuel Margot](#), who lined one into the right-center gap for a two-run triple. [Javy Guerra](#) got in on the action one batter later, pulling a hard single to right field to score Margot for his first career RBI.

"Loved Javy Guerra's at-bats," Green said. "He had some really good at-bats today with that RBI single and he worked a nice walk."

That would be all the Padres could muster offensively until the eighth inning, when [Eric Hosmer](#) crushed a 2-2 offering from [Brad Ziegler](#) to left field for an opposite-field solo homer. The blast was Hosmer's 18th big fly on the year, but it wasn't enough to overtake the D-backs.

### **SOUND SMART**

Hosmer is having a down year, but he's putting up a pretty hot September. Hosmer has reached base safely in 24 of his last 27 games, boasting a .357 on-base percentage with 13 walks. He's hit safely in all nine of games at Petco Park against the D-backs this year, batting .400 (14-for-35) with two doubles and two home runs.

### **UP NEXT**

[Joey Lucchesi](#) will toe the mound for the Padres' final game of 2018 on Sunday. He was the first pitcher from the 2016 Draft to make his debut and he's stitched together quite an impressionable rookie campaign. He'll hope to flash some resilience after his worst start of the year -- seven runs in 3 2/3 frames against the Dodgers -- to end the Padres' season on a high note. He'll face off against [Robbie Ray](#), with first pitch scheduled for 12:10 p.m. PT.



# Lauer happy to be part of Padres' 'new wave'

By Katie Woo

SAN DIEGO -- [Eric Lauer](#) may be just 23 years old, but he knows what he's capable of doing. As he wrapped up his rookie season Friday night, he also knows he's capable of playing a huge role in the Padres' cultural shift over the next few years.

San Diego has touted one of the best farm systems in the Majors for the last few seasons -- they are currently listed as [the best system according to MLB Pipeline](#) -- and the 2018 season has introduced a few of those prospects to the big leagues.

Lauer is one of those guys. After following teammate [Joey Lucchesi](#) -- who was the first pitcher from the 2016 Draft to make it to the Majors -- by making his big league debut April 24, Lauer has stitched together an encouraging rookie campaign and put himself closer to being a piece of the puzzle of the Padres' 2019 starting rotation.

Lauer's success wasn't immediate. He was rocked in his Major League debut and was tagged for seven runs (six earned) with four walks over three innings. Since then, however, he's constructed a more admirable reputation. Even after missing a month with shoulder discomfort, Lauer still notched 112 big league innings over 23 starts. He finished the year with a 4.34 ERA and 100 strikeouts, and his rookie campaign has earned him both high praise and high hopes heading into next season, when the Padres are hopeful he'll be able to add on to his promising initial season.

"It shows that I've made improvements," Lauer said. "I've really worked on trying to cement myself here and make sure I'm in the rotation for next year. I think I've definitely shown that there's moments that I can and will be efficient at this level."

Lauer could've hardly ended the last month of his first season any better. After working 6 1/3 innings of one-run (which was unearned) ball against the D-backs on Friday, Lauer finished September with a 1.33 ERA over his final four starts.

"I don't want to say it puts a cherry on top, because it wasn't great all the way through, but it's a step in the right direction," he said. "It definitely helps me feel better heading into the offseason."

Nobody is a lock for the Padres' rotation next spring, but Lauer and Lucchesi hold the highest odds. Lucchesi will start the final game of the 2018 season Sunday, but he and Lauer have already combined to become the first Padres rookies to each reach the 100-strikeout mark since Bob Shirley and Bob Owchinko did so in 1977. The friendly competition between the two has fueled Lauer throughout the season and he expects it to continue heading into the spring.

"We've been close since we got drafted," Lauer said. "We came up together, we live together -- it's nice to have that other guy to bounce off of without judgement or anything. We help each other out and we push each other. It's fun to watch him go out there and shove, and then I try to outdo him and he tries to outdo me. It's that friendly competition that you kind of need in a starting pitching staff."

Lauer knows that he is a key player in the Padres' self-proclaimed "Hot Talent Lava" of the seasons to come and knows that even though the 2018 season as a whole was ultimately disappointing, the change of the culture in San Diego is coming. He's happy to be one of the leaders of that change.

"It's that new wave of guys coming up. It's like a glimpse into the future of what the Padres can be," he said.

"You can feel the culture change coming along. It's just the beginning. We have a lot of young prospects and a lot of special guys. We just need to get to the point where we're meshing and gelling as a team, and then we're going to be really good."

### **Worth nothing**

After spending the majority of the season as the Padres' backup catcher, [A.J. Ellis](#) has seen his role on the team reduced to a pinch-hitter. As San Diego gives No. 3 overall prospect [Francisco Mejia](#) time behind the plate, along with ensuring [Austin Hedges](#) gets regular time as well, Ellis hasn't seen much action.

The 11-year veteran got the start Saturday, with manager Andy Green leaving it as a testament to the impact he made in the clubhouse.

"You couldn't ask somebody to handle better what he's handled this last month," Green said. "Not many people handle that well. His maturity has been evident to all. He's constantly -- in Austin Hedges' case particularly -- had a strong impact. I think everybody wants to see A.J. play one more baseball game."

Entering Saturday, Ellis had appeared in 64 games this season, slashing .281/.389/.356. He's caught 43 of those games, logging a .997 fielding percentage.

# ‘He’s been one of the biggest role models of my life’: Padres reward A.J. Ellis for his behind-the-scenes impact on team

By Dennis Lin

Austin Hedges was hitting .173 when the catcher departed an April 30 game in San Francisco because of elbow tendinitis. He endured almost eight weeks on the disabled list before returning to active membership with the Padres.

Since then, he has hit .254, homered a dozen times and reasserted his presence on a roster with few long-term guarantees. He has continued to acquire knowledge of game planning, scouting reports and the inexact science of handling pitchers and human beings. He has gained a sense of perspective and rediscovered a fuller enjoyment of life in professional baseball.

A.J. Ellis, Hedges said, has been vital on all fronts.

“He helped remind me of who I am as a person, that my title is not ‘baseball player,’” Hedges, 26, said. “I have way more titles that are more important to me, as a son, a friend, a teammate. He’d send me Bible verses that would really hit home with me, that helped him get through similar things. Just those little things, he was always there with positive reinforcement to help me get back, and once I was, it just never stopped.

“He’s been one of the biggest role models of my life.”

On Saturday, the eve of their season finale, the Padres rewarded Ellis for his behind-the-scenes diligence. The catcher, who had been relegated from backup to occasional pinch-hitter, received his first start behind the plate since Sept. 2 — and possibly the final start of his career.

Ellis, 37, went 0-for-4 and caught all nine innings of a 5-4 loss to the Arizona Diamondbacks. Barring another pinch-hit cameo, he will finish his 11th season with a .273 average and a .380 on-base percentage in 182 plate appearances. Then he will spend an offseason in Wisconsin with his wife and three children.

“My real job starts now,” Ellis said. “Baseball’s my hobby; being a dad’s my job. So I’m looking forward to getting home and doing that.”

And will the offseason end next spring, when pitchers and catchers report? Or, will it extend beyond that and into a post-playing future?

“I don’t know,” Ellis said. “We’ve seen in the last couple years kind of how these things work themselves out.”

In February, Ellis landed in the Padres’ camp as a minor-league signee with a clear understanding of his role. He was to be a reserve and mentor on one of the league’s youngest teams. He brought the experience of a decade in the majors, during which he became Clayton Kershaw’s personal catcher, an expert game-caller and a veteran who learned to thrive around limited playing time.

He meshed immediately with Hedges, one of the game’s top defensive backstops. The Padres this month called up Francisco Mejía, opting for an equal timeshare between the prospect and Hedges. In the long term, there may not be room for both on the roster, much less a third catcher in his late 30s.

And yet, regardless of the future, Ellis’ influence will be remembered.

“I want him back. One hundred percent,” Hedges said. “I will fight as hard as I can to push to have him back. I would love for him and I to be able to catch together here for a few years. I don’t think he’s even close to done. When you hit .270 with a .400 on-base and do the things he does behind the plate and as a teammate, it’s invaluable. What he brings to the team, he has numbers that show it, but he also has a lot of things where there are no numbers to quantify what he does.”

So, it meant something to Hedges and his teammates to see Ellis back on the field Saturday. In the afternoon, all three of the club’s catchers convened with rookie starter Jacob Nix and pitching coach Darren Balsley for a pregame meeting, the same kind of meeting Ellis has daily attended even as his playing time has vanished. When the conference finished, the group returned to the clubhouse. Mejía, 15 years Ellis’ junior, playfully feinted as if he would jump on the veteran’s back.

“You couldn’t ask somebody to handle better what he’s handled this last month, which is ‘Hey, you played really well for this year, you went out and hit .290, had our highest on-base percentage. Your reward is not playing for a month.’ Not many people handle that well,” Padres manager Andy Green said before the game. “His maturity has been evident to all. I think in Austin

Hedges' case in particular, his impact has been strong and they have a really good relationship now.

“I think everybody wants to see A.J. play one last baseball game today, and I don't want to make too much of it, but he's had a really, really good career.”

Postgame, Ellis reflected on a season in which the Padres will end with, at most, 66 wins. He highlighted the progress of a number of teammates, and the satisfaction in watching it unfold. He smiled recalling that Wil Myers, 27, had referred to him as “Dad” and “Bro” in the same breath. “The ultimate compliment,” Ellis said. If the opportunity to return next year presents itself, he seemingly would be open to it.

“You want to be somewhere you can make an impact, somewhere you can help younger players grow and become better big-leaguers,” Ellis said. “And I really, really felt fortunate that I was given an opportunity to do that here.

“It's been fun this whole month watching Francisco and Austin take the reins at the catcher position and grow — Frankie kind of get his feet wet in his first career games behind the plate, and Austin just continue to mature into the All-Star-caliber catcher he's going to be. I'm more than willing to take a backseat watching those guys, and it did feel great when Andy gave me an opportunity to play today.

“It felt a little rusty, but at the same time it felt great to be back there. My body felt fresh.”

# Rookie Vargas hits 1st homer in Arizona's 5-4 win vs Padres

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO -- After a brutal collapse in September, the [Arizona Diamondbacks](#) were left with the consolation prize of finishing the season with a winning record.

Rookie [Ildemaro Vargas](#) hit his first home run, got his first stolen base and drove in three runs to lead the Diamondbacks to a 5-4 victory against the [San Diego Padres](#) on Saturday night.

The Diamondbacks, who reached the postseason in 2017, are 82-79 with one game to go. They led the NL West heading into September but then went into a tailspin that left them 8-18 this month.

"I think that is something," manager Torey Lovullo said. "When it's all said and done after the month that we had, it is really positive and a good way to finish."

Vargas hit an RBI single in the first inning and a two-run homer in the fourth, both off rookie [Jacob Nix](#) (2-5).

"I'm so happy," the 27-year-old Vargas said. "My teammates from Venezuela were so happy and they support me. I'm happy and they are happy."

Vargas was called up Sept. 3 from Triple-A Reno, where he was a mid-season and postseason All-Star. He made his big league debut last season, when he played in 12 games for Arizona.

Vargas' homer staked [Zack Godley](#) to a 4-0 lead and the Diamondbacks held on to give the right-hander his career-high 15th win.

"Anytime you are talking about career first it's an exciting time," Lovullo said. "I think the guys gave him the silent treatment but it is something that he will never forget. And it had a big impact on the game. The home run didn't surprise any of us because we have watched him play the past couple of years. It's a special time for him and he's one of those great stories."

San Diego dropped to 65-96, five more losses than last year with one game to go. Executive chairman Ron Fowler expected the rebuilding Padres to be better this year than their 71-91 finish last year, but they've lost more than 90 games for the third straight year and fourth time in eight seasons.

San Diego pulled within one run in the fourth on [Manuel Margot](#)'s two-run triple and a single by rookie [Javy Guerra](#), who got his first RBI.

San Diego's bullpen faltered in the sixth, when [Jon Jay](#) drew a bases-loaded walk off rookie [Trey Wingenter](#).

The Padres again pulled within one run when [Eric Hosmer](#) homered off [Brad Ziegler](#) in the eighth, his 18th.

Godley (15-11) allowed three runs and five hits in six innings, struck out five and walked two. [Yoshihisa Hirano](#) pitched the ninth for his third save.

Nix allowed four runs and five hits in four innings, walked three and had no strikeouts.

"Overall I'm happy I got to be here; I'm not exactly happy with the results," he said. "This isn't how I was drawing up my last game in my head but it doesn't always happen the way you imagine it. I'm ready to get to work in the offseason and try to turn my weaknesses into strengths and get back out there."

#### BRAD ZIEGLER

The 38-year-old Arizona reliever, who's in the last year of his contract, told Lovullo he'd like to pitch in more than half of the team's games. Saturday night's appearance was his 82nd.

"When the big man runs the floor, you've got to give him the ball," Lovullo said. "I'm going to dish that one to him and let him dunk it. He deserves that. He's had two managers who really relied on him and that's a credit to him."

#### UP NEXT

Diamondbacks: LHP [Robbie Ray](#) (6-2, 3.91) gets the start in the season finale. He's 3-0 with a 2.52 ERA in his last 10 starts.

Padres: Rookie LHP [Joey Lucchesi](#) (8-9, 4.14) looks to break through against Arizona after going 0-5 with a 6.85 ERA in five starts against the Diamondbacks.