



Padres Press Clips

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Mejia's smashing first start lifts Padres past Reds

[Kevin Acee](#)

Perhaps it will take a little time for Francisco Mejia to get used to being behind the plate catching [Padres](#) pitchers and catching up after playing so much at other positions in the minor leagues.

“(The [Cleveland Indians](#)) took a year of his development away,” Padres manager Andy Green said Thursday night. “They put him in the outfield, put him at third base. So he’s going to be developing up here.”

In the meantime, the Padres could get used to what Mejia does at the plate.

In his first start for his new team, the 22-year-old rookie hit his first two career home runs to get the Padres on their way to a 6-2 victory over the [Reds](#) on Thursday at Great American Ball Park.

“In those at-bats I felt really good,” Mejia said through an interpreter. “I was excited, emotional. ... I feel like every time I show up I’m looking for a good pitch I know I can hit, make good contact on and drive.”

Batting from the left side against right-handed [Luis Castillo](#), Mejia made good contact on a 96 mph fastball down and away and a 97 mph fastball down and in.

The minor leagues’ top catching prospect, acquired in a July 19 trade that sent Adam Cimber and Brad Hand to the Indians, gave the Padres a 1-0 lead in the third inning and a 5-0 lead in the fourth.

He became the first Padres player ever to homer in the first two at-bats of his first start. Having struck out in a pinch-hit appearance in his Padres debut Tuesday, Mejia joined Seth Smith (March 30-April 1, 2014) as the only players with two homers in their first three Padres at-bats.

Mejia's third-inning shot traveled an estimated 395 feet, just clearing the 12-foot fence in left field.

In the fourth inning, [Hunter Renfroe](#) had already hit his 20th homer of the season, and [Eric Hosmer](#) and Wil Myers were on base when Mejia came to the plate. He pulled the first pitch from Castillo, which was at the knees and at least a couple inches inside off the plate, 387 feet and well up into the seats in right field.

“Two really good swings, loud contact both ways,” Green said. “(Castillo) tried to sneak a couple fastballs by him. He's proven really quickly he can hit a fastball.”

[Freddy Galvis](#) walked to start the seventh and scored the Padres' final run on Luis Urias' sacrifice fly.

Jose Peraza's three singles — two off starter Eric Lauer and one off Robert Stock — were the Reds' only three hits through six innings. Home runs by Scott Schebler and Mason Williams off Trey Wingenter in the seventh made it 6-2.

The Reds had threatened to make it a different game in the fourth inning, as Lauer followed Peraza's single with two walks to load the bases with no outs.

He then struck out [Phillip Ervin](#) and Schebler before Dustin Herrera lined a ball that leaked toward the left-field line and appeared destined to clear the bases before Renfroe ran it down with a leaping, somersaulting catch to end the inning.

“Play of the game,” Green said.

Lauer left after that, having taken 32 pitches to get through his final inning and 86 pitches in all in his second start back from the disabled list.

Jose Castillo, who pitched the sixth inning, got the victory to improve to 2-2. Luis Castillo fell to 8-12.

Mejia, who grounded out and struck out in his final two at-bats, was making his first major league start as a catcher. Among his 18 plate appearances for the Indians were four as a designated hitter earlier this season. He had caught four innings in the major leagues, all of them over three games last September.

Mejia and Austin Hedges will split starts the rest of this season before the Padres work out how they both might fit on the roster next season – or which of them could be traded.

Before Thursday's game, manager Andy Green said the Padres know it will take a while for Mejia to get up to speed calling games for a pitching staff that is new to him.

“He did a nice job behind the plate,” Green said after the game. “He’s literally getting a crash course on every reliever when they come in the game. He did a good job back there. ... He’s got really strong hands. He blocked the ball well. He’s got a cannon for an arm.”

For the first night, the big bat was enough.

Padres notes: Mejia's dish debut; Perdomo's role

[Kevin Acee](#)

Francisco Mejia will be the [Padres](#) starting catcher Thursday night, and he wasn't hiding his excitement.

"It's a really big moment," he said a few hours before the game was scheduled to start. "I didn't always know I was going to be here. ... I'm really excited."

Mejia, acquired in a July 19 trade that sent relievers Adam Cimber and [Brad Hand](#) to the Indians, was considered the top catching prospect in the minor leagues. He is rated as the Padres' No. 3 prospect and the [No.21 prospect in all of baseball](#) by MLB.com.

He has caught four innings in the major leagues, at the end of three games last September. He started one game at designated hitter for the Indians this July.

Now he is calling a game for a new team.

"For catchers, it's harder than anybody else," manager Andy Green said. "You're thinking about a whole lot of guys on your club. It's not just yourself. And then you're think more about guys on the other side. (Second baseman) Luis Urias comes up, we tell him where to stand and let him play instinctually. There is just a lot more impact you have on the game behind the plate than anywhere else. It's understandable he's going to take a little time to get his footing."

Eri Lauer is the starting pitcher for the Padres. Mejia, who struck out in a pinch-hit appearance Tuesday in his Padres debut, caught Lauer's rehab start last month for Triple-A El Paso.

"I understand how he wants to pitch, what he does and how he wants to go after hitters," Mejia said.

Even so, he has a lot of other pitchers to learn. If there is a pitching change planned between innings, pitching coach [Darren Balsley](#) will brief Mejia. If it is a mid-inning change, Green will remind him of the incoming reliever's strengths. In certain situations, they might signal a pitch in to help Mejia.

"The only way he's going to get his feet under him," Green said, "is if you hand him the keys and say, 'Go drive the car.'"

Mejia and incumbent [Austin Hedges](#), considered among the best defensive catchers in the game, are expected to split time over the season's final 20 games.

It might be quite a contrast this month, as Hedges is revered by the pitching staff for his knowledge, pitch-calling and handling of pitches.

"Frankie could be just like that too," Green said. "We just haven't had the opportunity to get to know him and see how he relates to staff and gets to know the guys. ... He'll find his way. It's just going to take a little bit of time.

"He's got a lot of pitcher to learn. This isn't like a kid we called up from the system who had an opportunity to catch all our relievers in [spring training](#). There will be a little bit of a learning curve. But he's a smart guy. He'll get it."

Perdomo's role

Luis Perdomo was activated off the disabled list Monday primarily to serve as a long reliever.

There appears a high probability that he will pitch this weekend, as rain is in the forecast all three days. Perdomo would be the first option if a starting pitcher, especially one of the three rookies scheduled to start, had to sit for more than a half-hour or so during a delay.

Essentially, Perdomo is here to fill in when needed and faces a challenge even being able to prove his worth. The 25-year-old right-hander has been a starter since midway through the 2016 season. He was demoted to Triple-A after posting a 8.36 ERA in his

first four starts. Promoted in early July, he had a 7.71 ERA before going on the DL with a shoulder strain at the end of July.

“It’s one of those situations you take advantage of the outing you get and then you might see more opportunities after that, more leverage-oriented situations,” Green said. “We have a lot of arms down there we really like. For him to start to supplant some of those bullpen arms, he’s going to have to get some opportunity in a long relief role and catapult himself into a situation where he faces big hitters in big situations after that.”

Tragedy close

A moment of silence is scheduled before tonight’s game to honor the victims of a shooting in downtown Cincinnati Thursday morning.

The incident occurred around 9:30 a.m. EDT at a bank building located about a block away from the team’s hotel and less than a mile from Great American Ballpark.

Three people were killed and two others injured by the gunman, who was also killed.

Most members of the Padres traveling party were asleep or just waking up and didn’t learn of the incident until they started receiving texts from family and friends. They later received a text from the team’s travel coordinator to not leave the hotel and then another one giving them the all clear.

Padres mailbag: Renfroe and/or Reyes; Hedges and/or Mejia; torn on Galvis?

[Kevin Acee](#)

The [Padres](#) will have to dodge forecast rainstorms over the next four days in order to get in their series against the [Reds](#), the team with the third-worst record (59-81) in the [National League](#).

The Padres have the NL's worst mark (55-86).

But by no means has this team been without intriguing storylines. It's almost been one thing after the other.

Even this final month comes with interesting possibilities, and the offseason is expected to be full of movement.

Let's discuss.

Is Asuaje's love of video games considered a problem by the team in regards to his development as a player?

It might be if he were part of the future.

I don't know for sure if it has been addressed. I don't think so, because that's not seen as the reason Asuaje hasn't been able to prove himself as a major league player.

What's the Padres plans at catcher with Hedges/Mejia? Do the Padres have any plans to take a look at Aztecs alum Ty France at 3B?

Andy Green says the split will be 50-50.

There was consideration to bring up a few guys like Ty France. I'm led to believe guys already on the 40-man roster are the only ones who will be called up. Look forward to seeing him in big-league camp after a .267/.355/.464 season in which he hit 30 doubles and 22 homers between Double-A and Triple-A.

Renfroe or Reyes? Who has more trade value and which is more likely to stay?

This is such a tough one.

I think the most likely scenario is a trade involving Reyes.

Both have shown their value and given confidence that what they're doing is sustainable. But Renfroe more so, and Reyes's defense — while improved — is a liability.

He can be primarily a designated hitter in the [American League](#).

Does the team think Wil can stick at 3B after what they've seen so far? Is the plan to keep him there next year or turn him into a more Ben Zobrist utility type approach?

It appears far more likely that they will move him around. He could play two positions in a game. Heck, he could play five positions in five days. (He probably won't, but he could.) This seems to be the anticipation.

Who is the Padres most likely trade candidate come this winter offseason?

I think it is Franmil Reyes.

But it could literally be pretty much anyone except [Eric Hosmer](#).

They expect to be very active. They got a lot of waiver response. No trades were done but A.J. Preller was able to see how other teams valued his players. Those discussions in August will serve as the springboard for trade conversations in November.

Good point.

Mostly, I think there is a wide respect for his attempt to communicate and be consistent and honest. Several players have marveled how smart he is.

That's a little easier for me to share than little nitpicky things guys might say from time to time. Not because I'm afraid to do so but because I'm responsible. As you note, every team has players that dislike certain things about their manager. Sort of like pretty much every business has bosses that certain people dislike. That doesn't mean they fully dislike him/her or, even if they do hate him/her, they can't get results.

I wrote the other day that [some players have rolled their eyes/raised their eyebrows at some of his methods](#). I had seen and heard that for months. But I've been doing this long enough to know it happens. I asked my questions (and will continue to do so) to make sure my read on the situation is accurate. I wasn't going to write any of it, at the risk of blowing anything out of proportion — until Wil Myers opened that door.

What I can say is there is a sort of consensus that Green is figuring out how to manage every player. Sometimes being the smartest guy in the room takes some dumbing down.

Any indications they'll try to get a legit #1 starting pitcher in the off season?

The cost is likely too high, too soon for a true No.1. But I do think they'll bring in at least one veteran to round out the kids. I don't know what level that pitcher will be, and it might be fluid.

One thing to keep in mind is I believe the expectations for 2019 are fairly high. Not "counting on the playoffs" high, but higher than we might have anticipated a few months ago. They have seen not only what is coming but what they have, and from players on up they expect the results to be much better in 2019.

With that in mind, still knowing they are a couple years away from being what they think they can be, it will certainly be interesting to see what they do this offseason.

What's your take on a position for Francisco Mejia?

Will Tatis Jr be a Super 2?

What's your grade for Andy Green handling pitchers?

I think they'll have to move Mejia around – or just move him. Or move Hedges. They are content having both and figuring out a way to get them both in games, but they will entertain offers. For sure.

I don't know about Urias. I think they waited long enough that he won't be. But it varies from year to year. Even teams don't know the exact timetable until it all the factors get squared away.

How would we know how to grade Green on his handling of pitchers? The amount of time he has had to consider saving a young arm and/or been faced with a starter stinking it up and/or had an overworked bullpen that needed to be reinforced with Colten Brewer or Kazuhisa Makita ...

Are the Padres as torn over what to do about Freddy Galvis as [#PadresTwitter](#) is?

I wouldn't term it "torn." But yes.

Actually, I think they want to keep him. They greatly value what he does on the field and off. It will depend on a few factors.

What will the market be for him? It is difficult to imagine them being compelled to try to compete with the offer of a team that wants him to be their everyday shortstop for three-plus years.

Also, if he stays, he has to be willing to accept a utility role, playing different positions and not playing every day.

Seems like Hedges and the team have really good chemistry right now. How do you see Mejía/Hedges working out?

Hedges has really worked hard to become a leader and, perhaps as importantly, a communicator.

He [talked about his work toward that in the spring](#), and I have really noticed it.

It wouldn't be fair for any of us to speculate about how Mejia steps into something like that role. He's so young (21) and just arrived. But your question is a good one — and one that I am really interested in following.

Kevin, The Padres made Franmil Reyes available in the Rule V draft last year. What was the reasoning for that? What significant differences do they see now, excluding performance, to make him a better ballplayer that was missing his previous MiLB seasons?

Their calculated risk certainly seems to have paid off. (And can you imagine if he were doing this for another team right now?)

He has changed a lot about his swing, step and approach.

The way he tells it, though, patience and not trying to hit homers have opened up a new world to him. He is clearly a smart kid. That's one of the amazing things about his improvement. He's 22.

Why is every season a wait and be patient approach? When will it pay off?

It's a good question — in a vacuum.

In no way should any fan be satisfied or not ask questions and hold management accountable.

However, this is simply different than past regimes. I think that's pretty obvious if people take even a few minutes to examine the situation.

The investment in youth portends a long-term strategy that simply was not something previous ownership was into.

Has this group made mistakes? Oh my goodness, yes. But worse than making mistakes is not learning from them and trying to remedy them. This group has done that.

They may never win a championship. They may never make the playoffs. At that point, everyone can be super mad at them.

Now? Patience is all we got.

many of us consider you to be a hack who has traded any objective analysis for team access, and an extension of the padres PR team. thoughts?

I won't get into defending myself, because your contention is absurd and the "many" you refer to is actually a lazy and vicious few. (Many of the fine and funny people on #PadresTwitter have made sure to alert me to this fact.)

What is confusing is that I know you know how to read. Plus, as a lawyer, I would think you'd know the dangers of assuming.

Minors El Paso, San Antonio in 0-2 holes

Jeff Sanders

Again, Triple-A El Paso came up short.

The Chihuahuas scored three times in the bottom of the ninth but is still in an 0-2 hole in their [Pacific Coast League](#) playoffs after dropping a [7-5 decision to visiting Fresno](#) on Thursday night at Southwest University Park.

Ty France went 4-for-5 with three RBIs and **Brett Nicholas** drove in two runs on two hits, including a two-run double in the ninth inning.

Carlos Asuaje went 1-for-3 with a double, two walks and a run scored.

Left-hander **Logan Allen** took the loss, allowing three runs on 10 hits and a walk in 4 1/3 innings in the start. He struck out four.

Right-hander **Colten Brewer** allowed two runs in one-third of an inning.

Right-hander **Cal Quantrill** (3-1, 3.48) will start Friday's Game 3 at Fresno against right-hander **Rogelio Armenteros**.

Missions down 0-2

Right-hander **Emmanuel Ramirez** struck out seven but allowed four runs on eight hits and a walk in six innings in Double-A San Antonio's [5-1 loss](#) at Corpus Christi.

Right-hander **Trevor Megill** allowed a run in two innings. C **Austin Allen** singled and hit a ninth-inning homer to avoid the shutout. The Missions are down 0-2 in the series. Right-hander **Jesse Scholtens** (7-4, 3.00) will start Game 3 against Corpus Christi right-hander Forrest Whitley (0-2, 3.76).

An honor in the AZL

Second baseman **Lee Solomon**, a 25th-round pick this year out of Lipscomb University, hit .364 with three homers and 11 RBIs in 13 games in August as the rookie-level Arizona League's player of the month.

The 22-year-old Solomon finished his pro debut with a .298/.365/.517 batting line, seven homers, 30 RBIs and six steals in 41 games.

Mejia hits 1st 2 MLB HRs in 1st SD start for win

Renfroe hits 20th clout, while Lauer strikes out eight Reds

By A.J. Cassavell

Long before [Francisco Mejia](#) was traded, the Padres' front office had already zeroed in on the 22-year-old backstop. They loved his bat, and they felt he could star behind the plate, too. But the game's top catching prospect wouldn't come cheap.

In late July, they struck a deal, with relievers [Brad Hand](#) and [Adam Cimber](#) going to Cleveland. San Diego had its man. And one start into Mejia's Padres tenure, it's easy to see why the club was so enamored with him in the first place.

Mejia homered in his each of his first two plate appearances on Thursday in a 6-2 San Diego victory in Cincinnati. He became the first Padres hitter in franchise history to go deep in the first two at-bats of his first start with San Diego.

"It was emotional," said Mejia, who was promoted Tuesday and struck out in a pinch-hit at-bat that night in Arizona. "Every time I go to the plate, I'm just looking for a good pitch that I can drive."

He got two of them on Thursday night.

Mejia smashed a 96-mph fastball over the left-center-field wall in the third, giving San Diego an early lead. Then he showed off his elite bat speed, golfing a three-run homer to right field in the fourth. It put the Padres on top, 5-0, after [Hunter Renfroe](#) had gone deep earlier in the frame.

"Obviously, [it was] impressive," Padres manager Andy Green said of Mejia. "Good swings, loud contact both ways. They tried to get two fastballs by him."

Not since [Yasmani Grandal](#) -- another switch-hitting catcher -- had a Padres rookie hit the first two homers of his career in his first start with the team. Grandal did so on June 30, 2012, against Colorado.

Mejia recorded 18 plate appearances with the Indians before he was dealt, but he hadn't homered. He became the first player since [Cody Bellinger](#) in April 2017 to launch the first two home runs of his career in consecutive at-bats.

Not to be lost in the shuffle, Mejia caught an excellent game behind the plate, as well. He'd only worked with rookie left-hander [Eric Lauer](#) once (on Lauer's rehab assignment with Triple-A El Paso on Aug. 24). But Lauer pitched four scoreless frames.

With eight strikeouts and three walks, Lauer ran his pitch count a bit high and was removed after 86 pitches. [Robert Stock](#), [Jose Castillo](#), [Craig Stammen](#) and [Kirby Yates](#) all worked

scoreless relief innings, though [Trey Wingenter](#) surrendered two solo home runs in the seventh.

"Across the board, great game," Green said of Mejia. "He's still developing as a catcher. He's got really good hands."

TIMESHARE BEHIND THE DISH

The Padres haven't been shy about addressing their conundrum behind the plate. They already have [Austin Hedges](#), who's 26 and widely regarded as one of the best defensive catchers in the game.

San Diego contends there's room for both, and for the remainder of the season, Mejia and Hedges will split time relatively evenly. Green even hinted that Hedges might start the second game of the series on Friday night.

"I feel good about it," Mejia said. "I've heard only positive stuff, that we're going to be in a rotation, and they've explained all of that to me."

Mejia could see some time in the outfield, as well, though that's unlikely to happen this season. For now, it's the proverbial "good problem to have" -- especially on nights like Thursday.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

[Travis Jankowski](#) swiped his 22nd bag of the season in the fifth inning with a steal that survived a lengthy replay review. Jankowski ran on Reds starter [Luis Castillo](#)'s 1-0 swinging strike to [Luis Urias](#). Reds catcher [Tucker Barnhart](#)'s throw to second was slightly high -- second baseman [Dilson Herrera](#) had to reach up to grab it, and couldn't get his hand down for the tag quick enough as Jankowski slid safely. The Reds challenged, and the call stood after review.

MOMENT THAT MATTERED

Renfroe's robbery: The Reds threatened to work their way back into the game against Lauer in the fourth, but Renfroe had other ideas. Lauer loaded the bases with no outs, but he whiffed [Phillip Ervin](#) and [Scott Schebler](#), bringing Herrera to the plate.

Herrera smashed a liner to left field, but Renfroe broke quickly toward the corner. As the baseball arrived, he made an sprawling dive and a snow-cone catch in an all-or-nothing situation.

"The play of the game for me," Green said. "That's three runs right there in the fourth inning. He's settled in really nicely in left field."

SOUND SMART

Mejia's homers came against fastballs from Castillo that were clocked at 96.3 and 97.4 mph, respectively. Mejia became only the third player in the Majors this season to hit multiple home runs in a game off pitches thrown 96 mph or harder. (The Rockies' [Ian Desmond](#) and Yankees' [Brett Gardner](#)

were the others to do so.) Mejia's second home run marked the fastest pitch that a Padres hitter has homered against this season.

UP NEXT

[Brett Kennedy](#) is coming off his best start in the Majors, during which he blanked the Rockies over six innings last week. The rookie right-hander is competing for a long-term spot in the Padres' rotation, and he still has plenty to prove after posting a 5.76 ERA in his first five big league starts. Kennedy starts on Friday at 3:40 p.m. PT against Reds right-hander [Anthony DeSclafani](#).

Ellis on mentoring young catchers: 'I'm excited'

By Jeff Wallner

CINCINNATI -- Padres catcher [A.J. Ellis](#) knows his playing time will be limited at best over the final three weeks of the regular season, as he has been asked by manager Andy Green to transition into a mentorship role for starter [Austin Hedges](#) and [prospect Francisco Mejia](#).

"I don't have control over it," the 37-year-old backstop said. "Every day, I get to wake up and come to a big league clubhouse. I'm excited, no matter what role I'm in. I'm excited to help the Padres as they transition and figure out who's going to be part of their future. I'll embrace that responsibility with a lot of pride."

Ellis, a veteran of 12 Major League seasons, assumes his new role while enjoying one of his best seasons at the plate, hitting a career-high .291 in 56 games entering Thursday night. His .389 on-base percentage is the second highest for all big league catchers with at least 50 games played. Ellis has thrown out seven attempted basestealers, his most since nabbing eight in 2015.

But despite those numbers, Ellis is the odd man out behind the 26-year-old Hedges and the 22-year-old Mejia, who made his first start behind the plate for the Padres on Thursday in Cincinnati.

San Diego signed Ellis to a one-year contract worth \$1.25 million in February. He spent the first 13 years of his professional career with the Dodgers, who took him in the 18th round of the 2003 Draft, before he was traded to the Phillies in August 2016. He spent last season with the Marlins.

"We've talked," Green said. "There's going to be minimal opportunity if this plays out the way we expect it to. His role is more of a mentor. I think all the guys on the team at this time realize he's the type of person who wants to help them and give them what he's learned in this game."

Ellis said he'll take a more organic approach to his mentorship role, harkening back to the players who helped him when he debuted for the Dodgers in 2008.

"You don't want to act like the hall monitor or the sheriff," Ellis said. "You just want to be available for guys. The players who had an impact on me when I walked into a Major League clubhouse for the first time -- guys like Casey Blake, and Jamey Carroll, and Brad Ausmus, and a little bit later Mark Ellis. The impact those guys had on me, if I can make a similar impact, I'm available."

While he has no control over his future beyond this season, Ellis said he has no immediate plans to retire, even though he's the oldest catcher currently in the Majors and has 662 games and 1,938 at-bats under his belt.

"The process is my favorite part of the game," Ellis said. "The process of getting ready to compete offensively and defensively and know that you've done your mental work, to have the edge in those moments, that's a rewarding day."

Jeff Wallner is a contributor to MLB.com based in Cincinnati.

Most pressing questions for Padres, NL West

By Matthew Leach

There's no need to manufacture drama or reasons to watch the National League West this year. It's been -- from top to bottom -- arguably baseball's most consistently watchable division over the past five months.

It may be down to a three-team race with 3 1/2 weeks remaining (though don't tell the Giants that), but there are things to keep an eye on with all five clubs. Here is one question to be answered down the stretch for each team.

D-backs

The question: What do they do in the late innings?

The D-backs thought they had one of baseball's best late-inning duos in [Brad Boxberger](#) and [Archie Bradley](#). In the first half, they may have been right. Lately, that's not so clear.

Both pitchers have had strange and similar second halves. Both have seen their strikeout rates go up some, their walk rates go up a bit and their home run rates stay more or less steady. They've both experienced massive jumps in BABIP, which should be encouraging, but patience is rarely a trait shown with late-inning relievers on contending teams.

If both get sorted out, as the numbers suggest they should, Arizona's late relief is strong. If not, Torey Lovullo will have to figure out some alternative options quickly.

Dodgers

The question: Whither [Kenley Jansen](#)?

The problem is that it's not entirely clear what exactly the right question even is regarding Jansen. Is his health the primary concern? Or is that in the past? And if that's the case, we still haven't entirely established how effective he'll be.

The Dodgers' lineup is deep and dangerous from both the left and right sides. Their rotation has front-line talent and plenty of depth. And in the middle innings, they have more quality options than you might think. But then there's the ninth, which should be the most cut-and-dried aspect of the whole club.

Until and unless Jansen turns in a string of outings that show that he's both healthy and effective, the Dodgers will have to wonder.

Giants

The question: Can the kids play?

At their peak earlier this decade, the Giants masterfully combined the ability to stay competitive with the ability to cycle in talented young players. The past couple of years, neither of those has gone quite so well.

As this season approaches a close, they'll give a long look to two of their better prospects, outfielders Chris Shaw and [Austin Slater](#). Shaw, the Giants' [No. 4 prospect](#) per MLB Pipeline, has flashed power throughout the Minors and may have more upside, but he also comes with the risk of being strikeout-prone. Slater, meanwhile, has the better bat-to-ball and on-base skills, and he has held his own at the big league level for a while now.

The club must find out as much as it can as to whether these two promising youngsters can be contributors to a competitive 2019 team.

Padres

The question: What do they do with [Francisco Mejia](#)?

Mejia, [baseball's top catching prospect](#), makes his first Padres start on Thursday. He's known for his bat, while the Padres already have one of the game's most talented young defensive catchers, [Austin Hedges](#), to compete for playing time.

So San Diego must start figuring out where Mejia will play. He could well split time at catcher with Hedges or even emerge as the long- (and possibly short-) term starter, but he's also played third base and outfield in the Minors. If the bat plays, or if Hedges forces the issue, Mejia could see much of his time at other positions. We'll start getting some idea soon.

Rockies

The question: What will they get from [Nolan Arenado](#)?

As recently as a few weeks ago, Arenado may have been the leading candidate for the NL MVP Award. He could still take the trophy, but a recent slump can't be helping his chances. Arenado has two home runs since Aug. 6, a stretch over which he's slugging .385. He's driven in 12 runs in that span and scored 14, so it's not like he isn't contributing, but he's this team's most important player.

That's in large part because this Rockies team is not the offensive juggernaut of some past Colorado teams, and it needs Arenado playing like an MVP. A right shoulder problem cost him a little time early last month, and though Arenado has said the discomfort does not affect his swing, it's hard not to wonder a little bit.

Francisco Mejia homers twice, Padres beat Reds 6-2

Associated Press

CINCINNATI -- [Francisco Mejia](#) felt nervous in the early innings of his first game behind the plate for the Padres. All he needed was one swing to settle in.

Mejia hit a solo homer and a three-run shot during his first start as the team's up-and-coming catcher on Thursday night, leading San Diego to a 6-2 victory over the [Cincinnati Reds](#).

Mejia connected on his first two swings against [Luis Castillo](#) (8-12) for his first homers in the majors. The 22-year-old prized prospect was called up Tuesday as the Padres get him ready for a bigger role next season. He made quite a debut.

"Two really good swings, loud contact both ways," manager Andy Green said. "They tried to sneak a couple fastballs by him, and he's proven really quickly he can hit a fastball. He did a nice job behind the plate, too. He's literally getting a crash course on every reliever when they come into the game."

The Padres got Mejia from Cleveland in a July trade for relievers [Brad Hand](#) and [Adam Cimber](#) as the AL Central leaders tried to overhaul their struggling bullpen. Mejia hit seven homers at Triple-A after the deal, and the Padres called him up to start getting him ready for bigger things.

He's expected to catch roughly half the games the rest of the way, getting to know an unfamiliar pitching staff. In his first game, he didn't let the challenge of handling six new pitchers affect his offense.

"I think I've done a good job preparing myself," Mejia said through a translator. "I've learned how to divide and separate those two things."

Mejia hit fastballs of 96 and 97 mph on consecutive swings off Castillo, who already knew the catcher could hit.

"I faced him in spring training," Castillo said. "We live near each other in the Dominican and we practice together."

[Hunter Renfroe](#) also hit a solo homer off Castillo, who gave up three for the first time in his career.

Left-hander [Eric Lauer](#) made his second start since returning from a stint on the disabled list with a sore forearm that cost him 25 days. He threw five hitless innings during a 3-2, 13-inning win over Colorado on Aug. 30 in his return.

Lauer allowed two hits in four innings Thursday, matching his career high with eight strikeouts. He escaped a bases-loaded, no-out threat in the fourth with a pair of strikeouts and Renfroe's lunging grab.

"Renfroe's catch in left field was the play of the game," Green said. "That changed the complexion of everything."

[Jose Castillo](#) (2-2) retired the three batters he faced. [Scott Schebler](#) and [Mason Williams](#) homered off [Trey Wingerter](#) in the seventh.

REMEMBERING VICTIMS

The Reds held a moment of silence pregame for victims of a downtown shooting on Thursday morning. A gunman killed three people and wounded two others before he was fatally shot by police officers.

20-SOMETHINGS

Lauer made his 20th start, joining [Joey Lucchesi](#) at the mark. The last time the Padres had two rookies make 20 starts in a season was 1977. It's the fourth time overall.

NOT-SO-SPLENDID SPLINTERS

[Franmil Reyes](#) was so angry at himself for striking out on a low pitch in the fourth inning that he slammed his bat on the ground and broke it over his right thigh while heading back to the dugout.

MORE MEJIA NUMBERS

Mejia is the first Padres player to homer in the first two at-bats of his first start. He's the 13th catcher in Padres history to hit two or more homers in a game. The last was [Austin Hedges](#) last season at Philadelphia.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Reds: [Scooter Gennett](#) was out of the lineup with a tender thigh. He leads the NL in hitting at .320. ... LH reliever Amir Garret threw in the bullpen and could be activated next week. He's been on the DL since Aug. 29 with a bruised left foot.

UP NEXT

Padres: [Brett Kennedy](#) (1-2) makes his sixth career start and his first against the Reds. He threw six shutout innings on Aug. 31 for a 7-0 victory over Colorado, his first career win.

Reds: [Anthony DeSclafani](#) (7-4) makes his 17th start and third career appearance against the Padres, his first since 2016. He lasted only 3 2/3 innings last Sunday in St. Louis, giving up two runs and five hits while throwing 72 pitches.

#PadresOnDeck: C Francisco Mejía Leads Final Minor League Players of the Week List

By Bill Center

A week after barely losing out on the honor, catcher **Francisco Mejía** has been named the Padres On Deck Player of the Week for Triple-A El Paso to lead the Padres' minor league honor roll for the final week of the regular season.

Mejía, 22, is ranked the [Padres' No.3 prospect by MLB Pipeline](#) and was also named to the Pipeline's Minor League Team of the Week.

He is joined by pitcher **Chris Huffman**, outfielder **Edward Olivares** and infielders **Esteury Ruiz** and **Justin Paulsen**.

The Padres On Deck Players of the Week for Aug. 27 to Sept. 3:
Catcher Francisco Mejía (Triple-A El Paso)—Mejía finished the minor league season on a six-game hitting streak with three straight multi-hit games. He was 10-for-22 last week with two doubles, a triple, two homers, eight runs scored, seven RBIs and a walk for a slash line of .455/.478/.909/1.387. Mejía hit .328 in 31 games with El Paso since coming to the Padres.

Right-handed starting pitcher Chris Huffman (Double-A San Antonio)—The 25-year-old made two starts during the final week of the regular season, allowing one earned run on five hits and four walks with eight strikeouts in 12 innings for a 0.75 ERA and WHIP with a .132 opponents' batting average. He has a 2.22 ERA over his last 10 appearances.

Outfielder Edward Olivares (Advanced Single-A Lake Elsinore)—The 22-year-old Venezuelan, who is ranked the [Padres' No. 28 prospect](#), was 10-for-29 last week with three doubles, two home runs, two sacrifice flies, seven runs scored, nine RBIs, two walks and two stolen bases last week for a .345/.367/.655/1.022 slash line. He has hit .395 in his last 10 games.

Infielder Esteury Ruiz (Single-A Fort Wayne)—The versatile 19-year-old from the Dominican Republic was 10-for-27 (.370 BA) during the final week with two doubles, three walks, seven stolen bases, four runs scored and three RBIs. The [Padres' 17th-ranked prospect](#) had a .433 on-base percentage and a .414 slugging percentage. He finished the season with 49 steals.

First baseman Justin Paulsen (Short-Season Single-A Tri-City)—As the Padres' 39th-round pick in the 2017 Draft out of Missouri State, the 6-foot-1, 220-pound Paulsen was 10-for-25 over the final week with two doubles, two homers, six runs scored, nine RBIs and two walks with a stolen base for a slash line of .400/.444/.720/1.164.