



# Padres Press Clips

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# How the Padres — and the rest of the NL West — might stack up in 2019

By Dustin Palmateer Nov 19, 2018

Consider for a moment the fate of three teams from the most recent season, the Atlanta Braves, the Cleveland Indians and the Tampa Bay Rays. The trio all finished hovering around the 90-win mark, yet the Braves and Indians cruised to division titles while the Rays finished a distant third in the America League East, 18 games behind the eventual world champion Red Sox (and 10 behind the second-place Yankees).

It's no secret that the strength of a division can have an outsized effect on each team that plays in it. Since divisional foes play each other 19 times and automatic playoff berths are handed out to the six winners, baseball can play out a lot like real estate. It can all come down to location.

The Rays won 90 games despite having to play the Red Sox and Yankees a combined total of 38 times, but they still finished outside of the playoff picture. The Indians, on the other hand, had something of a disappointing season, winning just 91 games after tallying 102 in 2017. Either way, their division crown was never in danger, as 60 percent of the teams in the AL Central — the Tigers, White Sox and Royals — were either tanking or just downright awful (or both). The Braves made their playoff run a year or two earlier than expected, buoyed by breakout seasons from youngsters like Ronald Acuña and Ozzie Albies, but they were a sub-.500 team against non-NL East opponents.

What about the NL West?

At first glance, the division appears in good health. The Dodgers nearly missed out on a sixth consecutive NL West title in 2018, but they remain a perennial power, well-stocked with good young players and plenty of promising prospects. The Rockies, led by a young rotation, have seemingly figured out one of life's great riddles: how to pitch in Coors Field. Even the Diamondbacks looked like possible division upsets until a September swoon; they still have stars like Paul Goldschmidt and Zack Greinke around and performing well.

Here's a look at the early [Steamer projected standings](#) for 2019 compared to this year's results:

While the initial prognosis has the Dodgers improving by three wins, note the 13-win gap between L.A. and second-place Colorado. As it stands now — before the annual shake-up of the offseason — Steamer is all but throwing up its algorithmic hands about everyone except Los Angeles. It has the Rockies dropping by nine wins, the D-Backs sticking around .500, and the Giants jumping four wins but remaining near the West's cellar. Meanwhile, the Padres are tabbed for an 11-win improvement, behind only strong regression candidates in Kansas City and Baltimore.

If there are cracks in the division, they might be revealed by looking closer at each team

## Los Angeles Dodgers

While the Dodgers may be as well positioned for sustainable success as just about any team in the league, it was [revealed recently](#) that they may have plans to try and stay under the luxury cap for the next four seasons. After paying roughly \$150 million in taxes over the last half-decade, the Dodgers worked to finagle their payroll under the luxury tax threshold in 2018. A self-imposed spending limit going

forward *could* damper L.A.'s long-term forecast some, at least leaving them vulnerable to a down season or two.

The Dodgers are overflowing with young, controllable players and front office smarts, but they do have plenty of dough tied up in injury-prone pitchers. L.A. recently agreed to a contract extension with Clayton Kershaw, a deal generally regarded as a win for both sides. But Kershaw hasn't reached 200 innings since 2015 and persistent back problems could force a long DL trip or further erode his once dazzling — and still darned good — repertoire. Further, with Hyun-Jin Ryu accepting a qualifying offer, the Dodgers are on the hook for another \$56 million between Ryu, Rich Hill and Kenley Jansen, a trio of pitchers who have shown some combination of declining performance and health of late.

On the position player side, the Dodgers will get a boost from the return of shortstop Corey Seager, who can immediately take over for Manny Machado and provide similar production for a fraction of the cost. Outside of Seager, there's a host of versatile players, like Cody Bellinger and Chris Taylor, who help make L.A.'s offense one of the most platoon-friendly in baseball.

Barring an unlikely reunion, the Dodgers will have to replace catcher Yasmani Grandal, however. While Grandal's performance collapsed under the bright lights of the postseason, he's spent the last four seasons in Los Angeles as one of the best two-way catchers in the game. In that span, he [posted a wRC+](#) bettered only by Gary Sanchez and Buster Posey at the plate and proved to be one of the best strike stealers behind it. According to Baseball Prospectus' WARP — the only WAR model that includes pitch-framing contributions — Grandal's been worth a staggering 20.9 wins since joining the Dodgers.

We're searching for cracks, of course, and perhaps doing so with a microscope. The Dodgers should be good in 2019 and beyond, but even then, they're only one team in a division of five.

## Colorado Rockies

Please remain seated for one of baseball's best-kept secrets: [According to wRC+](#), the Rockies have *never* had an above-average offense. Masked by the hitter-friendly confines of Coors Field, Colorado's offense was stealthily a weak point again in 2018. While the Rockies got above-average production out of Nolan Arenado, Trevor Story and Charlie Blackmon, their lineup lacked the expected depth of a 90-plus game winner. Overall, their 87 wRC+ ranked 25th in the majors, ahead of a group of five teams that finished a combined 158.5 games out of first place, respectively.

With the offense worse than average, the Rockies have come to rely on pitching and defense in recent years. Staff anchors Kyle Freeland and German Márquez were worth eight wins combined, according to BP, and they're both in their mid-20s. If there's an area where Rockies pitching might regress next season, however, it's in the health department. Colorado's rotation was one of just three to include four pitchers who made at least 30 starts in 2018, matching Houston and Philadelphia. Only the Astros got more outings out of their top four starters. Any loss of innings from the likes of Freeland or Márquez could relegate the Rockies to familiar territory: having to pitch in Coors without enough good hurlers.

To make matters more tenuous, the Rockies project to lose their best reliever, Adam Ottavino, to free agency, and they owe a disappointing quartet of relief arms — Wade Davis, Bryan Shaw, Jake McGee and Mike Dunn — a total of \$42 million in 2019. A slow start next season or the right offer this winter could prompt the Rockies to deal Arenado — entering a fourth and final year of arbitration — and surrender to a potential rebuild.

## Arizona Diamondbacks

According to BP, Arizona had a total of seven players worth at least two wins in 2018. Five of them are 30 or older and one under that milestone, Patrick Corbin, is headed for a big pay increase in free agency.

Two of the others, A.J. Pollock and Daniel Descalso, will join Corbin on the free market. That leaves Ketel Marte, David Peralta, Greinke and Goldschmidt (lefty Robbie Ray, who missed the two-win mark by a fraction, deserves mention, too).

Despite an aging core and the anticipated losses to free agency, the Diamondbacks aren't without talent. Goldschmidt and Greinke have been the division's best one-two punch over the last three years, and Ray's a force when healthy. But Goldschmidt, 31, is heading into his last season under team control, and Greinke, 35, lost another [full tick off his fastball](#) despite stellar results. Not surprisingly, there are rumors that the Diamondbacks are considering tearing it down this offseason. It's not their only path back to the playoffs, but dealing both Goldschmidt and Greinke, among others, would give them a jump start on rebuilding a farm system that lacks impact talent.

## San Francisco Giants

Baseball's past is littered with players at all positions who performed at a high level early in their careers who declined rapidly in their 30s when baseball skills tend to break down. The catchers stick out, though, perhaps because they play such a demanding position. The degradation of skills is almost expected.

One recent example of an all-world catcher abruptly losing much of his mojo is Jonathan Lucroy. Another *could* be Buster Posey. Consider a comparison in [BP's Framing Runs](#), which measures a catcher's ability to frame pitches:

Posey's drop-off in this category hasn't been quite as sharp as Lucroy's; the latter, who was rated as arguably the best framer of the pitch-tracking era during his 20s, posted a league-*worst* mark by age 31. Posey never quite reached Lucroy's heights nor has he dropped below average yet. Still, when combined with the worst offensive numbers of his career and time missed to season-ending hip surgery, Posey's 30s are starting off on the wrong foot.

The kicker here is that the Giants have bigger problems than their catcher's pitch-framing skills. They're just old, all around, with no quick fix to turn things around. Former stars like Evan Longoria and Hunter Pence (a free agent) aren't the players they once were. Even Madison Bumgarner is no sure thing, having failed to hit 150 innings in each of the past two seasons while recording easily the worst DRA of his career in 2018. While the farm system has improved some of late, recent draft picks like Heliot Ramos are years away.

As [Eno Sarris recently suggested](#), a rebuild is almost a necessary pathway at this point, even after the promising hiring of Farhan Zaidi as president of baseball operations. A rebuild doesn't always equate to an all-out tank, of course, especially for a team in San Francisco's tax bracket. The Giants have enough financial capital to reconfigure their roster and return as contenders without resorting to the extremes of 50-some win seasons and a half-empty AT&T Park. In the short term, however, things could get ugly.

Outside of the Dodgers, the rest of San Diego's competition in the NL West could be on the downturn. While the projections, with current rosters, have the Rockies, D-Backs and Giants near .500, each team could decide they'd rather lose now and win later, especially if the Dodgers (and a playoff berth) appear out of range.

We tend to focus a lot of analysis on individual teams, sometimes avoiding the context surrounding them. Going into this past season, the big questions for the Braves revolved around how quickly youngsters like Acuña and Albies could perform at a high level, or whether Johan Camargo could handle third base or Mike Foltynewicz could emerge as a staff ace. The answers to most of the internal questions about the team were resoundingly positive, but what pushed the Braves into the playoff picture was the lackluster performance from teams around them. The Nationals and Phillies spun their wheels; the Mets turned

Jacob deGrom's dominance into a narrative about offensive futility and the Marlins activated tank-mode, selling off outfielders Giancarlo Stanton, Christian Yelich and Marcel Ozuna.

Before worrying about the rest of the division, San Diego must take care of its own problems first, shoring up holes and clearing out logjams, recalibrating the sensors toward winning. But the Padres are moving in the right direction, nearing the end of a multi-year rebuild, while parts of their division may be headed in the opposite direction. If the Padres are to follow a path similar to Atlanta's in 2019, it might just be the NL West that lays down the red carpet.

# Five former Padres on 2019 Hall of Fame ballot

**Jeff Sanders**

Trevor Watch, finally, is a thing of the past.

The next Padre worth of Hall of Fame talk?

To be determined ([but at least Fernando Tatis Jr. has a healthy thumb](#)).

One-time [Padres Jason Bay](#), Jon Garland and Miguel Tejada are among the first-timers on the 2019 ballot, while Fred McGriff (10<sup>th</sup>) and Gary Sheffield (fifth) are back for another try.

For McGriff, who hit 84 of his 493 homers in three seasons in San Diego, it is his final year of eligibility. He received 23.2 percent of the vote last year and would have to jump all the way to 75 percent for induction. McGriff topped out at 23.9 percent on his third ballot.

Sheffield appeared 11.1 percent of last year's vote.

Notables who'll earn significant Hall chatter if not outright induction include Yankees closer [Mariano Rivera](#), the late Roy Halladay, Rockies great [Todd Helton](#) (who was originally drafted by the Padres but did not sign), [Andy Pettitte](#), [Lance Berkman](#) and Roy Oswalt.

Here's a glance at the Hall of Fame ballot handed out to eligible Baseball Writers Association of America voters:

- [Rick Ankiel](#) (1st)
- **Jason Bay (1st)**
- Lance Berkman (1st)
- Barry Bonds (56.4 percent last year, 7th ballot)
- Roger Clemens (57.3, 7th)
- [Freddy Garcia](#) (1st)
- **Jon Garland (1st)**
- [Travis Hafner](#) (1st)
- Roy Halladay (1st)
- Todd Helton (1st)
- [Andruw Jones](#) (7.3 percent, 2nd)
- Jeff Kent (14.5 percent, 6th)
- [Ted Lilly](#) (1st)
- [Derek Lowe](#) (1st)
- Edgar Martinez (70.4 percent, 10th)
- **Fred McGriff (23.2, 10th)**
- Mike Mussina (63.5 percent, 6th)
- [Darren Oliver](#) (1st)
- Roy Oswalt (1st)
- Andy Pettitte (1st)

- Juan Pierre (1st)
- Placido Polanco (1st)
- Manny Ramirez (22 percent, 3rd)
- Mariano Rivera (1st)
- Scott Rolen (10.2 percent, 2nd)
- Curt Schilling (51.2 percent, 6th)
- Gary Sheffield (11.1 percent, 5th)
- Sammy Sosa (7.8 percent, 7th)
- **Miguel Tejada (1st)**
- Omar Vizquel (37.1, 2nd)
- Billy Wagner (11.1 percent, 4th)
- Larry Walker (34.1 percent, 9th)
- Vernon Wells (1st)
- Kevin Youkilis (1st)
- Michael Young (1st)

# Will it be Galvis or Tatis Jr. at Shortstop?

Or a caretaker until the Padres' top prospect is ready

*By Bill Center*

The Padres are working on two scenarios at shortstop for the 2019 season.

What's the plan if **Freddy Galvis** happens to re-sign with the Padres? What happens if he doesn't? Prized [No1 prospect](#) **Fernando Tatis Jr.** is a major component of both scenarios.

The 19-year-old Tatis, who is regarded as the [No2 prospect in all of the minor leagues by MLB Pipeline](#), had his 2018 season at Double-A San Antonio cut short last July by a hand injury that required surgery. But the 6-foot-3, 205-pound athlete has already hit two homers in his first week of winter ball in the Dominican Republic.

Tatis is certainly headed to the Major Leagues. When he arrives is the only question.

Given the fact that Tatis missed the last six weeks of the 2018 season and has a track record of slow starts in each step of the ladder in the minor leagues, it makes sense for the Padres to re-sign Galvis to a one-year contract. Who knows, Tatis might also launch his Major League career as a third baseman and break in slowly at the game's second-most difficult defensive position.

But what do the Padres do if Galvis signs elsewhere and Tatis needs more development time before launching his Major League career?

Well, the Padres acquired infielder **Greg Garcia** off waivers from the Cardinals for a reason. The El Cajon native can play second, third and short and has started Major League games at short. And **Luis Urías**, the Padres' second baseman of the future—if not now—can and has started at short in the minor leagues.

So they probably have better options if Galvis signs elsewhere than they did before Galvis joined the Padres last season. Galvis was easily the Padres' best shortstop in a decade.



The switch-hitting Galvis, who turned 29 on Nov. 14, started every game of the season, including 156 at shortstop. He was a finalist for the National League Gold Glove award at short and hit .248 with a .299 on-base percentage and a .380 slugging percentage for a .680 OPS. Galvis 31 doubles, five triples and 13 homers for 67 RBIs. He led the Padres in RBIs until passed by **Eric Hosmer** (69) and **Hunter Renfroe** (68) in the final weeks of the season.

The Padres are on record saying they want Galvis to return.

But that position might have softened with the presence of Garcia and Urías for immediate help plus the positive reports on Tatis.

Garcia, 29, is a career .248 hitter with a .356 on-base percentage. He has drawn 106 walks against 169 strikeouts in 860 plate appearances. The left-handed hitter has 32 doubles, two triples and 10 homers with 57 RBIs in his career with a .696 OPS. He has made 72 of his 269 career starts at shortstop.

Urías, 21, has made 110 minor league starts at shortstop, although all 12 of his Major League starts at the end of last season came at second base. The 5-foot-9, 185-pound Urías hit .208 with two homers in 53 at-bats before his debut with the Padres was cut short by a hamstring injury. Before being promoted to the Major League roster at the end of August, Urías was hitting .296 with a .398 on-base percentage and a .845 OPS.

And speaking of prospects, clear No. 1 prospect Tatis is far from the only shortstop in the Padres pipeline. The Padres deepest prospect position is shortstop.

The shortstop depth chart includes four players ranked on the [Padres' Top-30 list](#)—Tatis, **Xavier Edwards** (No. 18), **Gabriel Arias** (No. 20) and **Owen Miller** (No. 30). Arias was a member of the 2016 signing class. Edwards (38th overall) and Miller (84th) were members of the 2018 Draft class.

And the line goes beyond that with prospects like **Luis Almanzar**, **Jordy Barley**, **Allen Córdoba**, **Javy Guerra**, **Justin Lopez** and **Kelvin Melean**.

But at this moment, any other shortstop is a caretaker until Tatis arrives.

After hitting only .177 during his first month at San Antonio last April, Tatis hit .327 with 18 doubles, three triples, 13 homers and 33 RBIs over the next 64 games before he was injured sliding into second on a steal. He finished with a .286 average with a .355 on-base percentage, a .507 slugging percentage and a .862 OPS at San Antonio despite being five years younger than the average Texas League age.

Tatis, who was acquired from the Chicago White Sox on June 4, 2016, in a trade for starting pitcher **James Shields**, hit 16 home runs last season and has two in his first five games for Estrellas (.231) in the Dominican Republic Winter League.

Remember, Tatis will be only 20 on the Opening Day of the 2019 season. In 2017, he became the first 18-year-old in the history of the Single-A Midwest League to hit 20 homers and steal 20 bases while hitting .281. He also led that league with 75 walks and a .390 on-base percentage with a .910 OPS.

Edwards is the Padres' next-highest rated shortstop, although he has been a professional for 2 ½ months. The 19-year-old, switch-hitter was regarded the best prep lead-off hitter available in the 2018 draft. The 5-foot-10, 155-pounder from North Broward Prep in Florida launched his career with 21 games in the Arizona Rookie League where he hit .384 with a .471 on-base percentage and a .937 OPS. He finished with a .314 average, a .438 on-base percentage and a .799 OPS in 24 games with Short-Season Single-A Tri-City.

Arias, one of four shortstops signed by the Padres from the 2016 international class, is younger than Edwards at 18 and spent the entire season at Single-A Fort Wayne where he finished with a .240 batting average and a .302 on-base percentage. Arias is currently hitting .263 in his native Venezuela.

The 6-foot, 190-pound Miller, 22, was the Padres third-round pick in June out of Illinois State University. He hit .336 between Tri-City and Fort Wayne with a .386 on-base percentage, a .460 slugging percentage and a .846 OPS. He had 19 doubles, three triples, four homers in 75 games.

Guerra, 23, hit .223 with 13 homers and 55 RBIs in 122 games as the Padres main shortstop prospect at Triple-A El Paso in 2018. Tatis was the shortstop at Double-A and the prospect at Advanced Single-A Lake Elsinore was Córdoba—the 2017 Rule 5 pick whose 2018 debut was delayed until second half of the season due to a concussion suffered in an off-season car accident. Córdoba, 22, hit .208 in 45 games for the Storm.

Melean, 20 and Lopez, 18, are dividing time this off-season with Canberra in the Australian Baseball League. Melean opened 2018 with Lake Elsinore and was hitting .263 after 49 games when he accepted a return to Fort Wayne when Lopez suffered a season-ending injury. Lopez opened the season as the youngest player in the Midwest League at 17. He hit .224 with six homers in 68 games for the TinCaps when he was hurt.

Eighteen-year-olds Almanzar and Barley finished the 2018 season in the Arizona Rookie League.