

Cincinnati Reds Press Clippings January 31, 2019

THIS DAY IN REDS HISTORY

1971-Former player, Jake Beckley, is elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum by the Veterans Committee

1977- Amos Rusie is elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum by the Veterans Committee

1980-Joe Morgan signs a free agent contract with the Astros, after spending eight seasons with the Reds. During his time in Cincinnati, Morgan was named to eight All-Star Games, received five Gold Glove Awards as well as back-to-back Most Valuable Player Awards

MLB.COM

**Puig takes in Cincy, visits Urban Youth Academy
Reds' new outfielder happy to land with hitting coach Ward
By Mark Sheldon MLB.com @m_sheldon
Jan. 30th, 2019**

CINCINNATI -- New Reds outfielder Yasiel Puig wasn't going to let subzero temperatures keep him from warming up to his new city. The Cuba native and Los Angeles resident was busy Wednesday getting to know his surroundings.

"It's not that cold. It's all mental, you know," Puig said. "If you put it in your [mind], it's going to be cold, bro. People say this is the most cold in all of history, but I'll be fine. It's not going to be like that during the season."

Puig, who was acquired in a seven-player trade with the Dodgers in December, was in Cincinnati to look for a place to live and stopped for a tour of Great American Ball Park. He met CEO Bob Castellini and much of the front office, and the 28-year-old even made phone calls to sell season tickets to fans and went to City Hall to meet Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley.

The day was capped by a visit to the P&G MLB Urban Youth Academy to speak to kids and answer their questions. Puig initially had mixed emotions after he was traded along with Matt Kemp, Alex Wood and Kyle Farmer for Homer Bailey and two prospects.

"I'm happy and not happy," Puig said. "I'm in the middle both ways because of six years with the Dodgers, I loved the city. I loved the team. I loved my fans. That's who I'm going to miss the most. But coming to a new city, a new team, I know this city is about baseball, the Big Red Machine. I hope we can be something like that, a little bit closer to that."

The Reds have not been to the playoffs since 2013 and have endured four straight 90-plus-loss seasons. Puig is hopeful that he and the team can end that drought.

"That's what everybody in the city is looking for now. We don't want to finish in September," Puig said. "We want to go into October. I've been with one team, the Los Angeles Dodgers, for six years and six years straight, I've been in the playoffs. I hope this is not the year I'm going to be out in October. I've come here to bring this team to the playoffs again. I will do the best I can, and my teammates will do the best they can, too."

He batted .267/.327/.494 with 23 home runs and 63 RBIs last season and slugged 108 homers over six seasons in Los Angeles. Puig said he didn't expect to seek clearing the fences even more in a cozier home ballpark and that he wants to hit line drives to all fields.

One of the familiar faces Puig will have in Cincinnati is Turner Ward, who was hired away from the Dodgers to be the hitting coach. Puig was thrilled that he gets to continue working with Ward.

"We are like a family. I talk to him a lot," Puig said. "He's helped me a lot to be a better person, a better baseball player. He's family. We talk every time. His wife loves me. All his sons and his daughter and his whole family, we talk and we have good days when we're together in Los Angeles. When we fly to different cities, we go shopping together. We eat together. This is a good relationship with Turner."

Defensively, Puig has spent most of his time in right field, where he has one of the best throwing arms in baseball. However, the Reds have a need in center field, and Puig does have some experience there. He would be open to playing center field again.

"I'm going to be prepared for my manager and my team if they need me in center field, right field," he said. "No matter what, I want to be in the lineup every day and do the best I can to help my team to win."

Puig plans on keeping his outgoing personality with his new club. That includes licking his bat when he feels the need to spark some hits.

"There's something good and I miss it, I lick my bat, or I try to talk to my bat like, 'Hey, if you can give me something good right in this moment.' He listens to me -- I believe so -- and the next pitch, I hit a home run or I [help] my team winning. That's a reason I do lick the bat, but I don't like it."

Puig has frequently been caught on camera teasing and kissing Ward in the dugout after big hits. Will that also continue?

"I need to hit first," Puig replied. "If I don't hit, I'm not going to kiss Turner Ward."

Mark Sheldon has covered the Reds for MLB.com since 2006, and previously covered the Twins from 2001-05. Follow him on Twitter @m_sheldon and Facebook and listen to his podcast.

**Reds sign lefty Krol to Minor League deal
Perez added as assistant bullpen/advance scouting coach
By Mark Sheldon MLB.com @m_sheldon
Jan. 30th, 2019**

CINCINNATI -- The Reds made a move to supplement their bullpen Wednesday by signing left-handed reliever Ian Krol to a Minor League contract. Krol will be in big league camp as a non-roster invitee.

Krol, 27, a lefty situational specialist, spent most of last season in Triple-A with the Angels and Mets organizations. In 43 appearances, he posted a 2.72 ERA and a 1.58 WHIP. He made one big league appearance with Los Angeles on May 27 vs. the Yankees and worked two scoreless innings.

Over parts of six Major League seasons with the Nationals, Tigers, Braves and Angels, Krol is 8-6 with a 4.50 ERA in 225 games.

Cincinnati had two left-handers, Amir Garrett and Wandy Peralta, in its bullpen for most of last season, with Cody Reed being called up later in the year. But after a hot start, Garrett struggled in the second half, and Peralta also had trouble being effective after his breakout 2017. It prompted the club to send him back to Triple-A to work on his pitches.

The Reds also named Cristian Perez as their assistant bullpen/advance scouting coach. Since April, Perez had been working in the Commissioner's office as a fellow in the league economics and operations department. He focused on international first-year player acquisitions and Asian transfers.

Perez is the 11th coach to be named to new manager David Bell's staff this offseason.

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10 dark-horse MVP candidates for 2019
By Will Leitch MLB.com @williamfleitch
Jan. 30th, 2019

We understand if it is difficult to think about baseball right now. It's so cold. They are literally setting train tracks on fire in Chicago to stay warm right now; forgive Cubs fans for not dreaming of homers onto Waveland Avenue at this precise second.

That said, there is a baseball season that's going to start in less than two months. And nothing is going to turn out the way we think it will. It's easy to pick out the stars we know will dominate -- Mike Trout, Mookie Betts, Aaron Judge, to name a few. But not many were predicting Christian Yelich in 2018 (well, Richard Justice was).

Today, as we plow through the snow and chill and imagine a world of grass and dirt and warning tracks, we look at 10 potential sleeper MVP candidates -- players who, if everything lands right, could be looking at some hardware next winter.

Yasiel Puig, OF, Reds

The Reds, after four straight 90-plus-loss seasons, are stocking up this offseason, attempting to compete in baseball's most brutal division. There was no more high-profile addition than Puig; there might not be a more high-profile anything than Puig. The idea of a hitter with Puig's massive power, particularly his opposite-field power, playing at Great American Ball Park is enticing, and remember, too, this is Puig's free-agent walk year. If he has a big year and the Reds make a playoff push, he'll have a strong narrative behind him.

CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

Cincinnati Reds outfielder Yasiel Puig happy after trade, focused on helping club to playoffs
Bobby Nightengale, Cincinnati Enquirer
Published 7:32 p.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019 | Updated 8:26 p.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019

Arriving in Cincinnati for the first time since December's seven-player trade, Yasiel Puig wasn't worried about the cold. He was too excited about all the possibilities with his new team.

Wearing a No. 66 jersey over a maroon-colored long-sleeve shirt and jeans, Puig packed his schedule after a 5 a.m. flight from Los Angeles. He looked at houses. He went to Great American Ball Park to meet members of the front office, tour the weight room, check out the retro jerseys for the organization's 150th season and he even called fans about buying season tickets.

Puig visited City Hall and met Mayor John Cranley. He spoke to the media, talked to kids at the Reds' Urban Youth Academy, made a TV appearance on MLB Network and was a guest on the team's weekly WLW radio show.

Somebody told him that his picture was already up on a billboard, and really, that was one of the few things he didn't get to experience Wednesday. Wait, why did he visit Wednesday?

"Because somebody told me it's going to be cold right here and I want to feel the cold weather, but it's not that cold," said Puig, noting that he wasn't wearing a jacket and his only winter gear was a Reds winter hat. "It's all mental, you know. If you put it in your (mind), it's going to be cold, bro."

Puig said it was important to see everything in person. He talks daily with hitting coach Turner Ward, his former hitting coach with the Dodgers, and he's in a group text message thread with 10-15 teammates.

Looking at a snow-covered field at Great American Ball Park, Puig said he's a little excited – he emphasized "little" – about how much damage he could do next season. He knows people are expecting a lot of home runs.

"I can't come here looking to hit homers, you know," he said. "I'm coming here to play my game and try to hit a line drive or put the ball in play. (If) the ball is out of the park, it's better for me, but when you start looking for big home runs or hitting far away, things aren't going as good as you expect."

When Puig learned of the Dodgers trade – which sent himself, outfielder Matt Kemp, left-hander Alex Wood and utility player Kyle Farmer to the Reds – he had mixed emotions. He enjoyed his time with the Dodgers but he's embracing all the changes.

Reuniting with Ward, he admitted, was one of the reasons he was so excited.

"He's been a good friend to my family and that's a reason I'm happy to be here," Puig said of Ward. "He's going to help me a lot for this year. I'm going to do the best that I can to help this team to win."

Puig said he didn't prefer playing right field or center field next season, only "I want to be in the lineup every day." He promised that his personality would stay the same. That includes the tongue wagging and bat licking, some of the things that made him one of the sport's most popular players.

"I was born like that," Puig said. "No matter where I play, no matter what's the city, I'm the same guy everywhere."

Puig said he didn't really know any of his new teammates besides a few conversations on the base paths. But he hopes Hall of Famer Tony Perez goes to Spring Training. They met about five years ago and they've continued to chat each year.

"He's my Cuban guy," Puig said. "I hope we can bring him to Spring Training to help me out to get to his point. He's one of the best players and in the Hall of Fame. I love him."

"He helped me a lot with the way to play baseball. I'm so happy to be here in Cincinnati now. I hope to see him soon."

The Reds had a 6-1 record against the Dodgers last season, and Puig nodded when he was asked if he saw the team's potential. He admits it will be a tough division, but it's clear he has a lot of confidence in himself and his teammates.

"We want to do something better this year, practice and build a good relationship with all the players and the coaches and the locker room to get to the playoffs," Puig said. "That's what everybody in the city is looking for now. We don't want to finish in September. We want to go into October."

"I've come here to bring this team to the playoffs again. I will do the best I can and my teammates will do the best they can, too."

Could the holdup on J.T. Realmuto deal for the Cincinnati Reds be a contract extension?

John Fay, Cincinnati Enquirer

Published 3:39 p.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019 | Updated 6:13 p.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019

While the prospects are reportedly the holdup on the Reds getting a deal for J.T. Realmuto done, there may be another glitch.

The Miami Herald reported that at least one team asked for permission to speak to Realmuto's agent about a multiyear deal. The Marlins refused.

Realmuto will make \$5.9 million this season. He's arbitration-eligible for the third time in 2020 (he'll make north of \$10 million) and becomes a free agent in 2021.

The Reds have Tucker Barnhart signed for \$2.9 million for this year, for \$3.9 million for 2020 and \$4.1 million for 2021. The club holds a \$7.5 million option for 2022.

The Reds are clearly in the go-for-it mode for this season. But cost certainty is important for teams with payrolls in the Reds range.

Remember, the Reds would not have made the Sonny Gray trade with the New York Yankees if he had not agreed to a three-year extension.

It is impossible to say if the Reds are insisting on the same thing with Realmuto. He is an upgrade, especially offensively over Barnhart. Realmuto hit .277 with 21 home runs and 77 RBI in 477 at-bats. Barnhart hit .248 with 10 home runs and 48 RBI in 382 at-bats.

Barnhart won a Gold Glove in 2017. He was not as good defensively in '18. He ranked 10th defensively, according to fangraphs.com. Realmuto ranked seventh.

The Reds, of course, don't talk about trades, but I can only see them making the deal for Realmuto if they can get an extension, include Barnhart in the deal and not give up Nick Senzel or Taylor Trammell.

Jon Heyman of Fancred tweeted that Jonathan India, last year's No. 5 pick overall, has the Marlins interested. Heyman also reported that the Reds and Marlins "were apart on prospects."

If the Reds do trade Barnhart, it would be another departure from business as usual under the Castellini ownership. They've been reluctant to trade homegrown, popular, productive players until they are on the brink of free agency.

But, as we've seen this offseason, the Reds are doing things differently.

THE ATHLETIC

You've got a friend in Puig: New Reds star makes lasting first impression

By C. Trent Rosecrans

Jan 30, 2019

CINCINNATI – Yasiel Puig, decked in his No. 66 Reds jersey and a Reds stocking cap, stood in front of a group of 45 12-year-olds at the Reds' P&G Urban Youth Academy on Wednesday and took questions.

"What are you looking forward to seeing in Cincinnati?" one girl asked him.

"To be here with you," he said.

The other softball players – half the crowd were girls – swooned in unison, "awwwwwwwwwww."

He'd won them over, just being here on the coldest day of the year, but even more so the way he engaged with the kids.

He took questions for 15 minutes or so from the baseball and softball players. He talked about leaving Cuba, the weather (Wednesday's high was 5 degrees), playing other sports and, this being Cincinnati, was asked if he'd tried Skyline chili yet.

"Not yet," he said. "Maybe you can take me?"

The Reds have already announced he'll get his own bobblehead this season and on I-75 just north of downtown Cincinnati, there's a billboard welcoming him to town.

“Somebody told me that, but I’ve been looking at all the highways and I haven’t seen the billboard,” Puig said. “I want to see it. I want to take a photo. I want to see that and I want to say thank you to all the fans in Cincinnati.”

Puig hasn’t played a game in a Reds uniform, but his willingness to be here is already winning hearts in Reds country. He’s smiled on Instagram with a Reds hat atop his head ever since the trade. He’s been a visitor to the Queen City before, but he’s embracing the city and being welcomed in the process.

“I want to come back here and see all of you,” he told the kids. “I’m going to be here six months – maybe more, who knows?”

The kids ate it up. The media too.

Puig is the biggest, most recognizable symbol of the new Reds, the improved team put together this offseason with aggressive moves. Puig may not be the most important piece – that likely lands on right-hander Sonny Gray, who signed an extension before his trade from the Yankees – but he’s the most recognizable.

And the smile on his face on Wednesday was befitting of the optimism that’s being felt at Great American Ball Park.

“I spent six years with the Dodgers, I love the team, I love the city, I love the fans,” he said. “But coming to a new city, new team, I know this city is about baseball, the Big Red Machine and hopefully we can be something like that, a little bit closer to that those guys who brought World Series titles to this city and many playoff appearances. We want to do something better this year.”

Puig said he participates in a text chain with 10-15 of his new teammates as they talk daily about what they need to do once spring starts to have the type of the season they all want to have.

The Reds have not only added Puig and fellow outfielder Matt Kemp from the Dodgers, but starter Alex Wood as well. Wood will be joined in the new-look rotation by Tanner Roark and Gray. And this week has been dominated by trade chatter that the Reds are engaged in talks with the Marlins for All-Star catcher J.T. Realmuto.

That’s exciting to Puig, who is known throughout the baseball world for his outgoing personality as much as his talents on the field. That, he said, isn’t going to change just because he’s in Cincinnati and not Los Angeles.

“I’ve been like that, no matter where I’ve played, no matter the city, I’m the same guy everywhere,” he said. “I do this stuff in Cuba and I come to the United States and I sign with the Dodgers and I still do it. My tongue and the crazy things I do in the field, it’s not because Los Angeles is a bigger city or a bigger market, it’s not about that, I do that kind of stuff because it’s coming from my body.”

Puig noted he’d always played in smaller markets before coming to the United States. Cuba is a nation of just 11.5 million, and his home province of Cienfuegos has a little more than 400,000 people. The capital city of the province, also called Cienfuegos, has just 150,000 people – and he’s from a small town outside the main city called Elpidio Gómez, known for its sugar mill. He played for the Cienfuegos Elefantes, a team that a local tour guide recently said is named after the elephant because only the elephants have a long enough memory to remember when the team was good.

Cincinnati is the latest stop and he’s embraced it, starting with his whirlwind trip on Wednesday. He took a red-eye flight from Los Angeles to Cincinnati, closed on a house he bought, went to Great American Ball Park to meet with team officials and then to the Urban Youth Academy and then to a local radio station to be a guest on the team’s Hot Stove radio show. His Instagram Stories feed showed him getting to the rental car center, a pre-dawn drive-by Paul Brown Stadium, showing off the team’s 15 different 150th-anniversary uniforms, hawking tickets, showing off Great American Ball Park and finally eating sushi. He even met with Cincinnati’s mayor (John Cranley, not Sean Casey).

He was scheduled to fly back to Los Angeles on Thursday and then report to Goodyear, Arizona, next month.

“It’s something new for me, it’s a new team, a new city. I’m happy to be here,” he said. “I came to this country to play baseball and no matter what team I’m with, I’m going to do the best I can to help my team get to the playoffs.”

DAYTON DAILY NEWS

Puig looks to keep playoff streak alive with Reds: ‘I don’t want to be finished in September’

Outfielder acquired in trade from Dodgers has reached the postseason in six straight seasons

Jan. 31, 2019

By Mark Schmetzer, Contributing Writer

CINCINNATI — Like the baseball version of a polar vortex, one of the newest Cincinnati Reds blew through town Wednesday.

Outfielder Yasiel Puig left temperatures of 40 or 50 degrees in Los Angeles to fly to Cincinnati. Puig’s whirlwind visit that included a tour of Great American Ball Park, a stop at a local pub across the street from the ballpark, meeting Cincinnati mayor John Cranley, a visit to the P&G MLB Cincinnati Reds Urban Youth Academy in the city’s Roselawn neighborhood and being interviewed on the Reds “Hot Stove League” radio show – all captured by social media.

He accomplished all of that while dealing with single-digit temperatures and a below-zero wind-chill factor – uncommon for a Cuba native who’s lived in Los Angeles for at least the past six years.

“It’s not that cold,” the 28-year-old Puig insisted, showing off his outfit – home jersey bearing uniform No. 66 over a long-sleeved maroon pullover shirt, black pants, maroon gym shoes and a red-and-gray Reds stocking cap atop his bearded face. “People say it’s cold, but it’ll be fine. It’s not going to be like that during the season. That’s the point.”

Puig met with local media at the Youth Academy before answering questions from boys and girls who interrupted workouts to chat with the 6-foot-2, 240-pound outfielder, who was acquired on Dec. 21 from the Los Angeles Dodgers with outfielder Matt Kemp, left-handed pitcher Alex Wood and \$7 million in cash for right-handed pitcher Homer Bailey and two minor-league players. Wednesday’s visit to Cincinnati was Puig’s first since the deal.

“I was happy and not happy,” he said about the deal. “I spent six years in Los Angeles. I loved the city. I loved the Dodgers, but this is a new city. I know this city is all about baseball. This is an amazing city.”

Making the deal sweeter for Puig was being reunited with Reds hitting coach Turner Ward, who filled the same role for Puig’s final three seasons with Los Angeles. Perhaps not coincidentally, Puig’s two best seasons were the last two — .263 and career highs of 28 home runs and 74 runs batted in over 152 games in 2017 and .267 with 23 homers and 63 RBIs over 125 games last season.

It’s no wonder Puig spent as much time over the past couple of seasons kissing Ward on the cheek in the dugout after home runs as he did kissing his bat at the plate. Social media footage of both is easy to find.

“One of the reasons I’m so happy to be here is I’m with Turner Ward again,” Puig said. “We talk every day.

“To kiss Turner Ward, I need to hit,” he added. “If I don’t hit, I don’t kiss Turner Ward.”

Playing in hitter-friendly Great American Ball Park could make every Puig at bat a possible Kiss Cam showing, but the right-handed batter isn’t planning to alter his approach.

“I’m a little excited, but I can’t come here looking to hit home runs,” he said. “I’m just going to play my game and try to hit line drives. If they go out of the park, better for me.”

Perhaps the most intriguing question is where Puig and Kemp, who are primarily corner outfielders, fit into a lineup that already includes holdover corner outfielders Scott Schebler – also a former Dodger – and Jesse Winker while a potential everyday center fielder has yet to be identified after the Reds let Billy Hamilton go on Nov. 30

“I just want to play every day,” he said. “Whether it’s center fielder or right field doesn’t matter. I just want to be in the lineup every day.”

What he’s clear about is wanting to maintain his streak of postseason appearances. He’s currently 6-for-6 – six seasons, six playoffs.

“I don’t want to be finished in September,” he said.

Cincinnati Reds sign left-handed reliever

Jan 30, 2019

By John Boyle, Staff Writer

The Cincinnati Reds on Wednesday signed left-handed relief pitcher Ian Krol to a minor league contract and invited him to Major League spring training camp.

Krol, 27, has appeared in 225 games — all in relief — over six seasons for four different teams (Nationals, Tigers, Braves, Angels). Krol owns an 8-6 career mark with a 4.50 ERA. He’s allowed 206 hits in 190 innings. He has one career save.

Krol’s best season came in 2016 with the Braves when he went 2-0 with a 3.18 ERA in 63 games.

Last season Krol made just one appearance in the majors with the Angels. He spent the rest of the season — 43 games — at Triple-A. He was 3-0 with a 2.72 ERA.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Puig leaves LA, warms to wintery new home with Reds

By JOE KAY

Jan. 30, 2019

CINCINNATI (AP) — Yasiel Puig boarded a jet in Los Angeles, flew all night and arrived in his new home just before sunrise. The temperature was still falling toward zero, and the wind chill was enough to cause frostbite in a few minutes.

That first blast of cold as he left the plane was another reminder: You’re not in LA anymore, Yasiel.

The former Dodgers outfielder who was part of a seven-player deal with Cincinnati in December decided to explore his new town Wednesday. He did just about every Cincinnati thing that a visitor could do on a below-freezing day.

Puig looked for a place to live, visited Great American Ball Park, and spent time with children at the Reds’ baseball academy. He went to City Hall and met the mayor. One of the local chili parlors tweeted hello.

During his visit to the new clubhouse, Puig got a Reds home jersey with No. 66 and his name on the back. Also, a red-and-gray stocking cap that sure came in handy under the conditions, though he insisted that 20-below wind chill wasn’t intimidating.

“It’s not that cold,” he said in a tone that had less conviction than his words. “It’s all in your head. I’ll be fine. It’s not going to be like that in the season.”

Reds fans are hoping Puig and a cadre of newcomers can make this season one worth following, finally.

After four straight rebuilding seasons with at least 94 losses — and significant attendance drops — the Reds have overhauled their rotation and lineup in a series of trades giving them an entirely different look for at least one year. The Reds got Puig, left-handed starter Alex Wood and outfielder Matt Kemp from the Dodgers in December. Puig and Kemp are free agents after this season, so Cincinnati could be just a one-year stand for them.

For Puig, it's a chance to solidify his free agent resume in a smaller ballpark and a much smaller city that's been waiting for a reason to be excited.

LA to Cincy? Dodger Dogs for three-way chili? How's that going to work?

"I've been playing in a small city, a small country, almost all my life," said Puig, who grew up in Cuba.

He hasn't yet met most of his new teammates — that will happen in a few weeks in Goodyear, Arizona — but he's part of a text chain with 10-15 players who stay in touch daily. The most familiar person on the team is batting coach Turner Ward, who left the Dodgers after last season to join manager David Bell's staff.

Ward helped Puig significantly in LA, and the outfielder showed his appreciation by planting a kiss on his cheek after a home run. Puig also developed a habit of licking his bat when he feels he needs good luck. He plans to continue the smooching and showing his personality in his new town.

"I was born like that," he said. "No matter where I play, no matter what's the city, I do that."

The Reds' offseason makeover involves more than Puig and a new coaching staff. They also traded with the Nationals for starter Tanner Roark and with the Yankees for starter Sonny Gray, giving him an additional three years on his contract that added \$30.5 million in guaranteed money from 2020-22.

It's unclear how far they can rise in the tough NL Central, where they've been at the bottom for years. Puig's arrival gives them a fresh face that fans already know from afar.

Puig has already had one memorable moment in Cincinnati. During a Dodgers visit in 2014, he went to the zoo and got a snake draped over his shoulders, leaving him with a look of dread that made for a memorable photo. Puig plans to visit the zoo again.

"But the snake thing — that's not going to happen for myself," he said.

MURFREESBORO DAILY NEWS JOURNAL (MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE)

Sonny Gray healthy, excited about new start with Cincinnati Reds

Cecil Joyce, Murfreesboro Daily News Journal

Published Jan. 30, 2019

We're only a month in and it's already been an interesting 2019 for former Smyrna High star athlete Sonny Gray.

The former Bulldog and Vanderbilt baseball standout was recently traded from the New York Yankees to the Cincinnati Reds.

Last weekend he was inducted into the Smyrna athletic Hall of Fame, one of 19 in the inaugural class.

With pitchers and catchers reporting to the Reds on Feb. 12, it's safe to say Gray is excited to see what the rest of 2019 holds.

"It's exciting ... we have a talented group (in Cincinnati)," said Gray, who spent the last season and a half with the Yankees after spending 4.5 seasons with the Oakland A's. "There's a lot of turnover and a lot of new faces. It will be fun to get to work and get to know everybody."

Gray was a no-brainer to join the exclusive inaugural Hall of Fame class at Smyrna. Not only is he arguably one of the best baseball players to have played there, but he also quarterbacked the Bulldog football team to state championships in 2006 and 2007.

The 2007 Daily News Journal Athlete of the Year has both No. 2 jerseys retired at the school.

"It was cool to come back to where a lot of memories were made and a big part of your life happened," said Gray. "You don't know what it feels like until you get here and do it."

Gray frequently returns to the Nashville area and his hometown of Smyrna during the offseason, including training at Vanderbilt.

He will now be within driving distance for local fans to see him play in Cincinnati.

Gray went 11-9 with a 4.90 ERA (30 games, 23 starts) with the Yankees last season and was 15-16 overall with the club.

He burst onto the scene with the A's in 2013 and was one of baseball's top pitchers for the first three seasons, combining to go 33-20 with an ERA below 3.00 in that span. His 14-7 mark with a 2.73 ERA (31 starts) in 2015 made him an American League All-Star.

He has had some arm issues in the past, but said he's ready to go for 2019.

"I'm healthy ... feeling good," said Gray, who is 59-52 with a 3.66 ERA for his career. "I'm excited to get ready and see what can happen."

Cincinnati brought in three starting pitchers via trades during the offseason, including former Washington National Tanner Roark and former Los Angeles Dodger Alex Wood.

"It's fun being part of it (Reds revamped rotation), coming in and trying to do this thing," Gray said, "trying to win a lot of games in Cincinnati. Everyone is excited."

TRANSACTIONS

01/30/19

Cincinnati Reds signed free agent LHP Ian Krol to a minor league contract and invited him to spring training.

San Francisco Giants sent CF Mike Gerber outright to Sacramento River Cats.

Boston Red Sox signed free agent RHP Jenrry Mejia to a minor league contract.

Minnesota Twins signed free agent LHP Martin Perez.

Minnesota Twins designated RHP Chase De Jong for assignment.

Pittsburgh Pirates signed free agent RHP Brandon Maurer to a minor league contract and invited him to spring training.

Pittsburgh Pirates signed free agent LF JB Shuck to a minor league contract and invited him to spring training.

Pittsburgh Pirates signed free agent RHP Vicente Campos to a minor league contract.