



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips Monday, November 19, 2018

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30 ROY candidates for 2019 -- 1 for each team

Jim Callis, Jonathan Mayo & Mike Rosenbaum | MLB.com | November 19, 2018

Twins: Stephen Gonsalves, RHP

The left-hander didn't fare well during his first taste of the big leagues in 2018, but he had a fantastic year, mostly in Triple-A, finishing second in the system in ERA and fifth in strikeouts, while keeping hitters to a combined .184 BAA. Gonsalves' upside might be limited, but he's ready to be a mid-rotation starter.

Decision time: Which prospects get 40-man spots?

Jonathan Mayo | MLB.com | November 19, 2018

It's decision time for all 30 Major League organizations.

By Tuesday, all teams will have decided who deserves a spot on their 40-man rosters. Those Minor Leaguers who are eligible but not put on the roster will be exposed to be taken by the other 29 teams in the Rule 5 Draft, which will take place at the Winter Meetings in Las Vegas, on Thursday, Dec. 13.

Players first signed at age 18 must be added to 40-man rosters within five seasons or they become eligible to be drafted by other organizations through the Rule 5 process. Players signed at 19 years or older have to be protected within four seasons. Clubs pay \$100,000 to select a player in the Major League phase of the Rule 5 Draft. If that player doesn't stay on the 25-man roster for the full season, he must be offered back to his former team for \$50,000.

For this year, that means an international or high school Draft pick signed in 2014 -- assuming he was 18 or younger as of June 5 of that year -- has to be protected. A college player taken in the 2015 Draft is in the same position.

Minnesota Twins (5)

- 4. Nick Gordon, SS
- 13. LaMonte Wade, OF
- 15. Luis Arraez, 2B
- 16. Lewin Diaz, RF
- 22. Tyler Jay, LHP

Next year's top free agents -- 1 for each team

Will Leitch | MLB.com | November 19, 2018

Free-agent season is just getting started, and one of the challenges of assessing free agents sometimes can be separating what they did in the last year of their most recent contract and what they can expect to do in the future. There's not a ton of evidence that players are healthier or better in

their contract year than they are the rest of their career, but teams can't help but bid sometimes on what they saw most recently.

So, today, we look at the most prominent pending free agent for next year, the guys who will be playing for their next contract in 2019.

Twins: Kyle Gibson

He was sneakily the Twins' best pitcher this year. If he can do that again, he could be another Kyle Lohse.

Twins announce Baldelli's coaching staff

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | November 19, 2018

Johnson (pitching), Hefner (bullpen), Diaz (third base), Watkins (first base) join team

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Twins officially added four coaches to manager Rocco Baldelli's staff on Friday, as they hired Wes Johnson (pitching coach), Jeremy Hefner (bullpen coach), Tony Diaz (third-base coach) and Tommy Watkins (first-base coach).

The moves came after the Twins decided not to bring back pitching coach Garvin Alston, bullpen coach Eddie Guardado, third-base coach Gene Glynn and first-base coach Jeff Smith. Major League coach Jeff Pickler was also not retained, but Minnesota hasn't hired a replacement yet. The Twins retained hitting coach James Rowson, assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez and bench coach Derek Shelton.

Hefner, 32, was the Twins' advanced scout the past two years. He was with the club for all 162 games and used video and analytics to help pitchers. He pitched for the Mets from 2012-13.

Like Hefner, Watkins is being promoted from within the organization. He has been in Minnesota's farm system since 2009, serving as manager of Double-A Chattanooga in '17 and Class A Advanced Fort Myers in '18. Watkins also played with the Twins in '07.

Diaz, 41, was a long-time first-base coach for the Rockies. He gives the Twins a second bilingual coach, joining Hernandez, and is known for his work with infielders.

Johnson, 41, is the only one of the group without professional coaching experience. Most recently, he was the pitching coach for the University of Arkansas during its run to the College World Series championship against Oregon State this season.

Prior to his time at Arkansas, Johnson served as pitching coach for Mississippi State University, Dallas Baptist University and Central Arkansas University. He's known as a forward-thinking, analytical coach who uses technology such as Trackman to help his pitchers find a consistent release point and unlock greater velocity.

According to his Arkansas bio, Johnson has helped develop more than 40 pitchers who were drafted or signed professional contracts over the past 11 years, including Dakota Hudson, the No. 34 overall Draft pick in 2016, and Blaine Knight, the No. 87 overall pick in the '18 Draft. Johnson, a Sherwood, Ark., native, graduated from the University of Arkansas-Monticello in 1994.

'Czar of velocity.' Twins to name Arkansas' Johnson pitching coach

Phil Miller | Star Tribune | November 19, 2018

The Twins' new pitching coach has, like the manager he'll work under, no experience at the major league level. But Wes Johnson, the University of Arkansas pitching coach who according to an MLB source has accepted an offer to become a key member of Rocco Baldelli's staff, has plenty of experience at drawing talent — and miles per hour — out of the pitchers he's worked with.

One recent profile, in fact, labeled him “the czar of velocity.”

Johnson, who in 2019 will become the only MLB pitching coach who jumped directly from college baseball to the major leagues, uses nontraditional techniques to develop pitchers. He previously worked at Dallas Baptist, which had 14 pitchers drafted during Johnson's four seasons; Mississippi State, which had six pitchers drafted after his 2016 season; and Arkansas, where 10 pitchers were drafted over his two seasons.

Jeremy Hefner, a former Mets pitcher who spent the past two seasons in the Twins clubhouse turning scouting reports into pitching blueprints for the pitching staff each day, will wear a uniform next season. A Twins source confirmed that Hefner will join Baldelli's staff as the bullpen coach.

The ascension of Johnson and Hefner adds to the Twins' commitment to data-based strategies, but the analytics in play are considerably more complex than simply divining from video what pitches give each hitter the most trouble. Johnson in particular studies the mechanics of each pitch and pitcher — spin rates, release points and methods for adding mph to a fastball.

He developed a reputation in college for developing training methods designed specifically to help pitchers add velocity. Arkansas last year struck out 619 batters in 603⅓ innings and had a team ERA of 4.21, both ranking third in the SEC. Johnson's methods helped Arkansas reach the finals of the College World Series last June, where the Razorbacks finished as runners-up to Oregon State.

"I can't say enough about the amazing job Wes has done for our program over the last two years," Razorbacks head coach Dave Van Horn said in a statement. "I know he had a positive impact on everyone he worked with and every aspect of our program. I'm excited for him, personally and professionally."

Johnson and Hefner replace Garvin Alston and Eddie Guardado, coaches on Paul Molitor's staff who were fired along with the manager after the Twins' disappointing 78-84 season. Minnesota's 4.50 ERA ranked ninth in the AL.

They join bench coach Derek Shelton, hitting coach James Rowson and assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez, holdovers from Molitor's staff, on the 2019 coaching staff, with three more vacancies to be filled.

Base coaches Tommy Watkins, Tony Diaz to join Twins staff **Phil Miller | Star Tribune | November 19, 2018**

Tommy Watkins believes several members of the Salt River Rafters, the team of prospects he will lead in the Arizona Fall League championship game Saturday, will reach the major leagues next summer.

But he'll be there before them.

The former Twins infielder and minor league manager was hired as Minnesota's next first base coach, the Twins announced Friday. Watkins and Tony Diaz, a longtime coach in the Rockies system hired to coach third base, are the latest additions to new manager Rocco Baldelli's staff. Earlier this week, pitching coach Wes Johnson and assistant pitching coach Jeremy Hefner were named to the staff, which has just one vacancy remaining.

"It's very exciting. It kind of caught me off guard a little bit, but I'm very grateful for the opportunity," said Watkins, whose MLB career amounted to nine games — and a .357 batting average — in 2007. "The emotions of [being promoted] are just as high as when I was called up as a player."

After 12 years in the Twins system, Watkins, 38, ended his playing career in 2009 and embarked on a coaching career, first as hitting coach in Class A, where Eddie Rosario, Byron Buxton and Miguel Sano were among his first pupils. He was named manager at Class A Cedar Rapids in 2017, promoted to Class AA Chattanooga last year, and has handled the Twins' Arizona Fall League entry for the past six weeks.

In addition to his first-base duties during Twins games, Watkins will coach the team's outfielders and first basemen.

"Rocco was an outfielder, so I'm looking forward to getting his input and help in working with them," Watkins said. "I've coached quite a few of the [current Twins], so it'll be good to get into a rhythm with them and get to work."

Diaz, 41, has a similar history with one franchise — but it's Colorado. The Twins lured him away from the Rockies, an organization with whom he spent 19 seasons, by making him third-base coach, after spending two seasons as first-base coach in Denver. The hire adds a second Spanish speaker to the Twins staff, along with assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez. Diaz, in fact, is the author of "Practical English for Latin Players," a manual the Rockies use to help prospects adapt to living in the U.S.

Diaz has six years of managing experience in rookie leagues.

The Twins also hired Billy Boyer, an assistant coach at Seattle University, to be their minor league infield and baserunning coordinator. A former minor league infielder in the Angels system, Boyer, 34, replaces former Orioles manager Sam Perlozzo, who is being promoted within the Twins system.

Prospects update

Six Twins prospects, led by Class AA outfielder Jaylin Davis, play for East Division champion Salt River, which meets Peoria for the Arizona Fall League title in Scottsdale on Saturday. It may only be a developmental league, Watkins said, but "the winners do get rings. Every ballplayer wants to play for a ring."

Watkins, who manages a team composed of players assigned from the Twins, Diamondbacks, Marlins, Rockies and Nationals, will be trying to capture the ninth championship by a Twins affiliate in the Arizona Fall League's 27-year history.

Minor leaguers signed

The Twins have begun stocking their system for 2019, adding three minor league free agents and re-signing two members of their 2018 Class AAA team. Righthander Ryne Harper, a reliever with six saves and a 3.60 ERA at two levels, and catcher Wynston Sawyer, who was sidelined for 10 weeks with a fractured hamate bone, will return to Class AAA Rochester.

In addition, the Twins agreed to minor league contracts with Randy Cesar, an infielder in the Astros system, and two righthanders who made major league appearances in 2018: Zack Weiss (3-3, 5.40 in the Reds' system) and Preston Guilmet (a 6.00 ERA in 11 total innings with the Blue Jays and Cardinals).

Twins' manager Baldelli adds Watkins, Diaz to coaching staff

John Shipley | Pioneer Press | November 19, 2018

New Twins manager Rocco Baldelli has nearly finalized his coaching staff, adding third base coach Tony Diaz and first base coach Tommy Watkins to team that has grown piece by piece since he was hired Oct. 25 to succeed Paul Molitor.

Diaz, 41, has been a major league coach for 19 seasons, the past two as first base coach for the Colorado Rockies. He has been a minor league manager and hitting coach and in 2002 was Colorado's player development "Man of the Year." He also is the author the manual "Practical English for Latin Players."

Watkins, 38, is a longtime Twins organization player, manager and coach who spent last season managing Class AA Chattanooga. He also has managed Class A Ft. Myers (2017) and was a minor league hitting coach from 2010-16.

The Twins are still looking to hire one additional coach.

Bench coach Derek Shelton, hitting Coach James Rowson and assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez remained from the staff of Molitor, who led the Twins to winning records in two of his four seasons as manager. On Thursday, the Twins hired Wes Johnson as pitching coach and moved Jeremy Hefner from the scouting department to be assistant pitching coach.

Johnson, 47, spent the past two seasons as the pitching coach for 2018 NCAA runner-up Arkansas. He previously was pitching coach at Mississippi State (2016), Dallas Baptist (2012-15) and Central Arkansas (2010-11). This will be his first job in pro baseball.

Should Twins pursue the 3 free agents suggested by MLB Trade Rumors?

Derek Wetmore | 1500 ESPN | November 19, 2018

It's hot stove season in Major League Baseball and as far as speculation goes it's one of the best times of the year. Now, MLB Trade Rumors has listed their idea of the top-50 free agents, and made predictions for all 50 landing spots. Should Twins pursue the 3 free agents suggested by MLB Trade Rumors?

The Twins were mentioned in excerpts for about a dozen players (see how this works?), and MLBTR picked 3 to land in Minnesota from that top-50 list.

Let's explore whether the Twins should make a real run at...

No. 16: Marwin Gonzalez (Astros)

I don't have a good guess at the necessary contract here but Trade Rumors guessed it'll be 4 years, \$36 million. He's spent his whole big league career in an Astros uniform, and by far his biggest year came in 2017, when he put up monster numbers en route to a World Series title. That season, the multi-position star hit .303/.377/.530 with 23 home runs and 90 RBIs. Perhaps you didn't hear much about him because Houston's lineup also boasted Jose Altuve, Carlos Correa, Alex Bregman and George Springer, to name a few. Gonzalez was a significant contributor, though, and if he could return to that level of performance, this would be a no-brainer pick-up for the Twins, and you'd figure out his position later.

Over the past 3 seasons, Gonzalez has hit .268/.331/.445 with 52 home runs combined. He's also walked in 7.8% of his plate appearances compared with a 21.6% strikeout rate. (Think Eduardo Escobar or Mitch Garver in that regard.) Actually, Escobar is an interesting comparison, if you don't believe that Gonzalez will duplicate his terrific 2017 campaign. The former Twins utility infielder hit .274/.338/.514 this year before signing a 3-year pact with the Diamondbacks. That's more power than Gonzalez's 3-year track record, but the former Astros do-everything switch hitter tops Escobar for best single season.

Like Escobar, Gonzalez plays all over the diamond. He's split his defensive innings between shortstop and left field, primarily, and he's also played at third base, second base and first base, depending on the need at the time. (He filled in for Altuve when he was hurt this year, and for

Correa, too; his primary position on the healthy 2018 version of the Astros was in left field.)

No. 17: Jeurys Familia (A's)

Familia is an intriguing name, even if he'd only pitch 65-75 innings in the Twins' bullpen. Based on his track record, he's instantly become Minnesota's most trustworthy late-inning reliever. And maybe one of the better pitchers on the staff as a whole.

Trevor May could get a look in the bullpen after some success in the role last year. Taylor Rogers is a lock for one of those late-inning roles, you'd have to figure. Familia, a right-handed sinker/slider pitcher, would jump into that mix. He averages 97 mph with his fastball, according to Brooks Baseball, and he's top shelf when it comes to swinging strikes. Opposing hitters whiffed on 14.1% of their swings last year, in a season he split between the Mets and A's. That helped him run up a 27.5% strikeout rate, which is on par with a guy like former Indians reliever Cody Allen — or just a bit below Rogers from last season.

For me, interest in Familia would hinge on wanting to assemble a bullpen like the A's had last year. They added Fernando Rodney and Familia to a relief corps that already included Blake Treinen. They were good and deep, and it made them a potential October threat (although things didn't play out that way). You're never going to be quite sure what you get if you make a multi-year bet on a 29-year-old reliever. Over the past 3 seasons, he's pitched to a 3.05 ERA in 174 1/3 innings, with a 26.2% strikeout rate and a 10.1% walk rate.

In short: Familia is a good but not an elite reliever, and the Twins need to upgrade their bullpen. They can afford to spend money to do so, and I'd expect to see them address that this winter.

No. 22: Nelson Cruz (Mariners)

I think Nelson Cruz is underrated. I think he's consistently been at minimum a good hitter, and almost always great hitter, since 2008. Since the former M's slugger made his first all-star game in 2009, he's batted .277/.345/.528 with 328 home runs and averaged about 140 games per season. Oh, and over the past 5 MLB seasons, he's averaged 40 homers a year. He doesn't miss time, he hits home runs and he gets on base. That's a recipe for a great player and it just seems like Cruz doesn't always get his due on the national stage.

With that said, he's also 38 years old and I'm not sure how much the Twins ought to count on a great hitter continuing to defy normal aging curves. It would be especially difficult to give such a big commitment to a player who, more than likely, will not play a defensive position for you.

He's a better hitter than Robbie Grossman (and I like Robbie Grossman!) So if it's for a short-term contract to fill a need at DH, then I think it could make sense for the Twins. If it's more than that, it seems to me that the team has more pressing needs to address.