



SF Giants Press Clips Wednesday, May 16, 2018

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants beat Reds, thanks in part to Bruce Bochy's aggressive early-game managing John Shea

Pierce Johnson rushed to the bullpen and hurriedly warmed up. It was still the fourth inning, and Giants starter Ty Blach was not tired or hurt.

Bruce Bochy wasn't messing around.

The Giants were trailing 3-1 and threatening, and Bochy chose not to manage by the book, instead pulling Blach for a pinch-hitter, Pablo Sandoval, the turning point in Tuesday night's 5-3 victory over the Reds.

Sandoval hit a two-run single to tie the score, and Andrew McCutchen's fielder's choice broke the tie. It was a four-run rally that began with Brandon Belt's homer into McCovey Cove and included a stretch of five singles over six at-bats.

Bochy's aggressive managing helped dig the Giants out of a hole and win their third straight to push their record above .500.

"I thought my hand was forced and we had enough pitching to get us through it," Bochy said.

“You don’t know when those chances come up like that, so you go for it. That’s what we did there, and Pablo made it look good by getting that huge hit.”

Blach threw just 62 pitches, and two of the runs he yielded were unearned. Second baseman Kelby Tomlinson committed a two-out error in the third, and Eugenio Suarez followed with a home run for a 2-0 Reds lead. The Reds scored again in the fourth on Billy Hamilton’s soft single.

Blach wasn’t struggling, but Bochy figured it was the perfect time for a big inning. Belt opened with his eighth homer of the season, and Evan Longoria, Brandon Crawford and Austin Jackson singled to load the bases.

That’s when Bochy had Johnson rush to the bullpen. Tomlinson struck out, and Blach was called back to the dugout so Sandoval could hit. Sandoval’s opposite-field single drove in Longoria and Crawford for a 3-3 game, chasing Reds starter Tyler Mahle.

While Bochy pulled his starter early, Reds manager Jim Riggleman left his in too long.

“I was surprised a little bit at the situation,” Sandoval said of Bochy’s move, “but the game dictated every move he did. It felt good to help your team win.”

Blach said he had no problem yielding to Sandoval: “We were down a couple runs and needed a big hit right there. We pulled the right strings. That was awesome.”

Buster Posey added, “Those who have been around long enough know you don’t question the moves (Bochy) makes. Obviously, he thought that was a big moment in the game for us, and it turned out to be.”

McCutchen’s fielder’s-choice grounder put the Giants up 4-3. Johnson tossed a perfect fifth, the first of five relievers to each throw a shutout inning.

Tomlinson hit an RBI single in the eighth to give closer Hunter Strickland a two-run cushion, and Strickland earned his ninth save.

One pitch before the final out, a foul tip off Posey's mask shook him up, and Bochy said the catcher told him it was "one of the worst shots he's taken." Bochy considered replacing him with Nick Hundley, but Posey said he wanted to stay in.

"I feel good now," Posey said. "Obviously monitor it and hopefully (I'll) feel good tomorrow."

MORE: Giants update forecast on Bumgarner, Williamson, Melancon, Panik

Crawford went 4-for-4, giving him nine hits in his last 12 at-bats. He's hitting .455 in May, during which his season average jumped 101 points to .290.

Crawford was the only Giant with more than one hit. Longoria would have had two if Hamilton hadn't made an amazing diving catch in right-center in the eighth inning.

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants update forecast on Bumgarner, Williamson, Melancon, Panik
John Shea

The word from sickbay is promising. Several Giants players are closing in on significant steps toward recovery, though the club is exercising caution with **Madison Bumgarner**.

Manager **Bruce Bochy** said Bumgarner will make at least three rehab starts before joining the Giants, a revised and more conservative timetable than previously conveyed.

"Three minimum, and we'll see where he's at after the third one and then make the decision whether he'll need that fourth one or not," Bochy said.

Bumgarner is scheduled to make his first rehab start for Triple-A Sacramento a week from Saturday. If he pitches every fifth day, his third rehab start would be June 5. Five days later (June 10), the Giants play in Washington. Ten days later (June 15), they're at Dodger Stadium.

Bumgarner will throw off a mound Wednesday for the second time since he broke his left pinkie March 23 and will throw to hitters for the first time Tuesday.

“He feels fine,” Bochy said.

The same goes for **Mac Williamson**, shelved since April 24 with a concussion. Williamson has passed tests “with flying colors,” according to Bochy, and, if he continues to stay clear of concussion symptoms, would be cleared to start a rehab assignment this weekend.

Reliever **Mark Melancon** finally has a timetable in the wake of the stem-cell injection in his pronator April 12. He’ll face hitters Thursday and, if all goes well, start a rehab assignment Sunday or Monday. He is expected to make several minor-league appearances.

Second baseman **Joe Panik**, who underwent left thumb surgery April 30, is at least two weeks from a rehab assignment, Bochy said. Panik is able to close his glove but isn’t yet catching the ball. He’ll take dry swings later in the week as he continues to improve his grip strength and will accompany the team on next week’s trip to Houston and Chicago, where he’ll ramp up his baseball work.

Right fielder **Hunter Pence** (thumb sprain) has seven hits in his past 15 at-bats at Sacramento. Bochy didn’t indicate when Pence would return to the Giants.

Briefly: Outfielder **Austin Slater** was optioned to Sacramento, and **Miguel Gomez** was recalled from Double-A Richmond to provide depth at second base in the absence of Panik and **Alen Hanson**. ... Bochy is considering resting **Brandon Crawford** on Wednesday, so Gomez could get a start with **Kelby Tomlinson** moving from second to short. ... **Matt Harvey** will make his second start Wednesday since the Reds acquired him from the Mets. Harvey threw four hitless innings in L.A. in his first start, quite a contrast from his New York days. “Great (acquisition) by Cincinnati,” Bochy said. “I think a change of scenery is probably good for him.”

San Francisco Chronicle

Giants’ Madison Bumgarner throws off mound; could return in 2 weeks

John Shea

Madison Bumgarner passed his latest test by throwing off a mound for the first time since he broke his left pinkie on March 23, the final day of the Cactus League.

“I feel good,” he said Monday after tossing 20 pitches, all fastballs. “The only thing now is

building arm strength and getting the pitch count up. Everything feels completely normal now.”

Bumgarner is eligible to come off the disabled list May 25, but manager **Bruce Bochy** said it’s unrealistic to think the lefty will be activated that soon because he will make at least two rehab starts.

Bumgarner will throw off a mound again Wednesday (and mix in off-speed pitches) and Saturday. From there, he’ll throw to hitters next week in Houston, where the Giants begin an eight-game trip, and then begin a minor-league rehab assignment.

That would push his return to early June, meeting the team’s initial prognosis.

“It’s hard to be at that happy medium and not try to ramp it up too fast and then cause a setback with your arm getting ready and getting in shape,” Bumgarner said. “But it’s also hard to harness that and hold it back when you want to get back out there. I feel like we’ve been definitely aggressive but not too aggressive.”

Admittedly, it has been tough for Bumgarner to miss significant time for a second straight season. In 2017, he was out three months with shoulder and rib injuries after a dirt bike accident.

“Last year was obviously my fault. Those emotions are a little bit different,” Bumgarner said. “This year was just a freak thing, the last day of spring, and such a small thing at that. It’s amazing how much that pinkie can affect you, not just in baseball but everyday life, too. I’m definitely ready to get back out there.”

Mark Melancon also threw off a mound, 25 pitches. The Giants haven’t given a timetable for his return

Roster moves: **Austin Slater** was promoted from Triple-A Sacramento to replace second baseman **Alen Hanson**, who was put on the disabled list with a strained left hamstring. Slater had a single, walk and two steals in Monday night’s win over Cincinnati but apparently is heading back to Sacramento. The Giants need an infielder and will add second baseman **Miguel Gomez**, a .297 hitter at Double-A Richmond.

Slater has experience at second (96 games in 2015) but primarily is an outfielder. Recently, he has been learning first base and appeared at first in two games at Sacramento.

Bochy said Hanson could be on the disabled list up to two weeks.

MLB.com

Bochy's faith in Panda pays off in winning rally

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- Giants manager Bruce Bochy knew he was potentially placing Tuesday night's outcome on the line at an unusually early stage: the fourth inning.

The Giants trailed by two runs when Bochy sent **Pablo Sandoval** to pinch-hit for starter **Ty Blach** with the bases loaded and one out. If Sandoval couldn't produce, Bochy would have to negotiate the final five innings without his starting pitcher and, possibly, with a two-run deficit.

View Full Game Coverage

But Sandoval made the move look good by smacking a two-run double past third base for the biggest hit in a four-run, fourth-inning uprising against Cincinnati starter **Tyler Mahle**. And the bullpen did the rest, as **Pierce Johnson, Will Smith, Sam Dyson, Tony Watson** and **Hunter Strickland** contributed a scoreless inning apiece to propel the Giants past the Reds, 5-3.

"You go for it," Bochy said. "It's great when it works, but if it doesn't, then you've used your 'pen quite a bit. Because of the job they did, it worked. ... You have to do what you think is right for that game. I felt like we had the pitching to get us through the game. You can't take the starter out after four very often, but the [relievers] that we had needed work, almost."

The two hottest Giants remained in their respective grooves. Cincinnati led, 3-0, when **Brandon Belt** christened the Giants' big fourth with his eighth homer of the season. Besides matching **Evan Longoria's** team-high homer total, Belt also reached San Francisco bay on the fly with his drive, which increased his career Splash Hit total to eight.

Belt's on an 8-for-18 binge that includes three doubles, two homers and five RBIs. He definitely savors opposing the Reds, having built a .341 career batting average (45-for-132) against them. Dating back to May 13, 2017, Belt has homered in four consecutive games against Cincinnati.

Brandon Crawford went 4-for-4 to hike his May average to .455 (25-for-55) in 14 games. He has

hoisted his batting average from .189 to .290 this month. Crawford singled to help set up the Giants' fourth-inning rally before singling and scoring in the eighth to fatten San Francisco's cushion.

But the game truly revolved around Bochy's fourth-inning move, which he implemented after **Kelby Tomlinson** struck out. Bochy considered factors other than the Mahle-versus-Sandoval matchup.

"It's not something you like doing and you do very often," Bochy said. "... Blach was throwing the ball, I thought, pretty good. When Tommy struck out, I just thought my hand was forced and I felt like we had enough pitching to get us through it. You don't know when those chances come up like that, so you go for it. That's what we did. Pablo made it look good by getting a huge hit there."

Andrew McCutchen generated the inning's final run, which put the Giants ahead, by beating out the back end of a potential double-play grounder. That enabled **Austin Jackson** to score. "That may get unnoticed," Bochy said.

The unswerving parade of relievers, who combined to allow two hits, walk none and strike out eight, ended with Strickland, whose ninth save in 11 opportunities and seventh in a row facilitated the Giants' ninth win in their last 12 home games.

"I felt everybody did their job. It was outstanding," Strickland said. "We've got confidence in whoever's in there."

SOUND SMART

And the Major Leagues' most successful club with the bases loaded is -- you guessed it -- the San Francisco Giants.

Well, maybe you didn't guess it. But the numbers don't lie. They say that the Giants' .379 batting average with the sacks full is currently the best in the bigs.

San Francisco's top performer in these situations is Jackson, who's batting .228 overall, but is 3-for-4 with the bases loaded.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

Crawford lingered around second base after Mahle picked him off in the second inning. And for good reason: Replay reviews proved that Crawford was safe and the call was overturned. The Giants did not capitalize on the one-out break, though, as Mahle coaxed groundouts from Tomlinson and Blach.

UP NEXT

The Giants will learn a little about **Andrew Suarez's** resilience in Wednesday's 12:45 p.m. PT series finale against Cincinnati. The rookie is coming off the shortest outing of his brief career, a four-inning performance on Friday at Pittsburgh where he yielded five runs and seven hits in an 11-2 Giants setback. Command has been a constant for Suarez, who has struck out 23 while walking four in 21 2/3 innings. The Reds will counter with **Matt Harvey**, making his second start since being traded from the Mets.

MLB.com

Timetable for Bumgarner's rehab adjusted

Chris Haft

SAN FRANCISCO -- The schedule of activities that conceivably will lead **Madison Bumgarner** back to the Major Leagues changed again Tuesday, when Giants manager Bruce Bochy said that the ace left-hander might need as many as three Minor League injury rehabilitation starts before he's ready to return to the Majors.

Previously, one rehab start reportedly had been prescribed for Bumgarner, then two. Tuesday, however, Bochy pointed out that the trio of outings will help Bumgarner elevate his pitch count and his stamina along with it.

View Full Game Coverage

Bumgarner, the four-time All-Star and hero of the 2014 postseason, has not pitched since his throwing hand was fractured by a line drive on March 23.

Bochy said that Bumgarner is tentatively scheduled to pitch to hitters, most likely in a round of extra batting practice, on May 22 in Houston. That would be followed by Bumgarner's initial rehab start with the Giants' Triple-A Sacramento affiliate on May 26 against Albuquerque. From that point, Bumgarner's progress would be judged on a day-to-day and game-to-game basis.

Thus, his timetable could change yet again.

- Bochy said that outfielder **Mac Williamson** (concussion) soon could be ready to begin a rehab stint. However, the number of games Williamson might need to play himself back into big league shape is uncertain.

"He's missed a little more time than we thought he would," Bochy explained.

- Wednesday, when the Giants and Reds conclude their three-game series, looms as a possible off-day for shortstop **Brandon Crawford**, despite his torrid hitting (.412 in his previous 13

games, entering Tuesday). It'll be a day game following a night game, providing an optimal opportunity for Crawford to rest his sore back.

NBCsportsbayarea.com

Giants battle back, win third straight

AP

SAN FRANCISCO -- **Brandon Crawford** continued his strong May with four more hits, **Brandon Belt** homered and the San Francisco Giants beat the Cincinnati Reds 5-3 on Tuesday night.

Pinch-hitter **Pablo Sandoval** hit a tying two-run single in the fourth inning, **Andrew McCutchen** drove in the go-ahead run with a grounder and five relievers combined for five scoreless inning for San Francisco.

Crawford doubled, singled three times and scored twice. He is batting .454 (25 for 55) in May and has raised his overall average from .189 to .290.

The Giants opened the fourth with four consecutive hits off Reds starter **Tyler Mahle** (3-5), including Belt's leadoff home run into McCovey Cove.

After **Kelby Tomlinson** struck out with the bases loaded, Sandoval pinch-hit for San Francisco starter **Ty Blach** and singled in two runs to tie the score at 3-all. **Gregor Blanco** followed with a single and McCutchen hit into a force play at second, driving in **Austin Jackson** from third.

The Giants' bullpen did the rest.

Pierce Johnson (2-1) retired three batters for the win while **Will Smith, Sam Dyson, Tony Watson** and **Hunter Strickland** pitched one inning each with Strickland getting his ninth save.

Eugenio Suarez homered and doubled with two RBIs while **Scouter Gennett** added two hits for Cincinnati, which has lost two straight after a season-high six-game winning streak.

The Reds got the tying run to second with one out in both the seventh and eighth but couldn't score.

Suarez homered on a 2-0 pitch from Blach after **Jesse Winker** reached on a two-out error by Giants second baseman Tomlinson.

Blach allowed three runs (one earned) and five hits over four innings.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Reds: 1B **Joey Votto** was held out of the starting lineup after leaving Monday's game with back tightness. Votto struck out as a pinch-hitter to end the game.

Giants: LHP **Madison Bumgarner** will need to make at least three rehab starts in the minors before rejoining the big league club, manager Bruce Bochy said. Bumgarner is slated to begin a rehab assignment on May 26, which puts him on pace to return in mid-June. . OF **Mac Williamson** continues to go through concussion protocol and could begin a rehab assignment this weekend. . Closer **Mark Melancon** (right elbow flexor strain) is progressing is potentially headed for a rehab assignment Sunday or Monday.

UP NEXT

RHP Matt Harvey (0-2, 6.10 ERA) starts in the series finale Wednesday, his second after being acquired by the Reds in a trade from the Mets. Harvey pitched four scoreless innings in his Cincinnati debut. LHP **Andrew Suarez** (1-2, 4.57) goes for the Giants.

The Athletic

Beruce Bochy's bold move pays off in Giants' series-clinching win over Reds **Shayna Rubin**

It was 11 p.m. Tuesday night and Pablo Sandoval was almost out the door — he'd need to be back in the clubhouse in 12 hours, after all.

Not so fast. Sandoval had some questions to answer, given he'd hit the two-run, game-tying single — as a pinch hitter — in the Giants' eventual 5-3 win over the Cincinnati Reds.

The first question came from a teammate, a phone-toting Gregor Blanco.

"You did a good job," Blanco said, patting him on the back. OK, not a question, but a valid statement.

Sandoval's big hit — off Tyler Mahle's slider he dug out and laced down the third base line — was pretty good. It proved to be the apex of the Giants' third-straight win, all while validating a bold managerial move by Bruce Bochy.

The hit came in the fourth inning with the bases loaded. Brandon Belt led off the inning with a splash hit solo home run, cutting the Reds' three-run lead down to two, and Mahle surrendered three straight singles to Evan Longoria, Brandon Crawford and Austin Jackson.

Kelby Tomlinson struck out grasping at a slider for the first out of the inning. FOMO (fear of missing out) and a quick gander at the line of well-rested relievers pushed Bochy to make the big move. Ty Blach, the night's starter, was summoned back from the on-deck circle. Sandoval sauntered in to expectant cheers. He delivered.

"Yeah, I was a little surprised he did it," Sandoval said of Bochy's decision to have him pinch-hit. "But the game dictated every move he did."

Said Buster Posey: "Boch has been around long enough that you don't question him in these situations."

Bochy is human, though. If Sandoval whiffs hard on that slider, he's probably got five long innings to reflect, to just sit back and hope another opportunity brews. His team's been there before, plenty.

It's great if it works, Bochy noted, but the aggressive in-the-moment move was predicated on the decision to have all bullpen arms on deck the rest of the way.

"You have to do what you think is right, and it felt like we had the pitching to get us through the game," Bochy said.

Turns out, Bochy was well in-tuned with his staff. The Reds were on the receiving end of a barrage of the Giants' best. Pierce Johnson, Will Smith, Sam Dyson, Tony Watson and Hunter Strickland each took an inning, carving through a hot opposing lineup fresh off a four-game sweep of the Dodgers. Cincy managed two one-out doubles against Watson and Dyson. Both pitchers weaved around the blips and the crew held the line on that one-run lead — taken when Andrew McCutchen beat out a double play ball, scoring Austin Jackson, in that fourth inning — until Kelby Tomlinson's RBI single in the eighth provided a softer cushion.

A gutsy move made from behind the dugout walls was the win's catalyst. It takes some sort of inspiration to invoke the call. Like an offense that's cooking.

Belt's home run was his eighth of the year; he's hit one in four straight games against the Reds. McCutchen extended his on-base streak to 25 games (the second-longest active streak in the majors).

And then there's Crawford.

Crawford went 4 for 4 in Tuesday's game, scoring two runs. He's been unstoppable since moving his hands up on the bat a bit.

At April's conclusion, Crawford was batting .189. In the last 14 games, he's woven together a .455 average, upping his overall average to .290 in that span.

Crawford's been so on, even a tight back hasn't deterred him. Bochy wants to give his shortstop

a needed day off, but can't find the right moment.

"This is a time when you check on the player. Sometimes they don't know until they get to the park," Bochy said.

Don't be surprised if Crawford is out of the lineup Wednesday with Miguel Gomez (who was called up prior to today's game with Austin Slater optioned) playing second and Tomlinson at short.

The timetable for Madison Bumgarner's highly anticipated return is fluid, for the time being.

The plan as of Monday was for Bumgarner to face hitters on the Houston trip, then get in at least two rehab starts with Sacramento before rejoining his team.

Plans change within the 24-hour clock, apparently.

Manager Bruce Bochy announced before Tuesday's game that Bumgarner would throw a minimum of three rehab starts following the Houston exercise, with his first start happening Saturday, May 26 in Sacramento. That would put him at a possible mid-June return.

In fact, it wouldn't be surprising at all if they had Bumgarner return for the opener against the Dodgers in Los Angeles on June 15. Though, that does seem a bit deep into the month given the trending optimism. The difference, as Bumgarner noted Monday, could be the team's hope to have him go 100 pitches versus 60 when he returns.

Then again ... this speculation could all be old news following his scheduled throwing day Wednesday.

The takeaway still seems to be that he's on the downhill end of his trek back to the AT&T Park mound.

Extra Innings

— Mac Williamson took BP Tuesday and launched some big whoppers into the bleachers. An exertion test Tuesday opened the gates for him to start his rehab assignment this weekend, potentially, Bochy said.

— Mark Melancon will face hitters this Thursday and could also start his rehab assignment this weekend or early next week. With the high-leverage bullpen jobs looking tight as glue, it'll be interesting to see where Melancon is sewn into the seam.

The Athletic

Stark: There are outside-the-box ideas for changing baseball... and then there is The Samson Plan

Jayson Stark

Imagine you could rewrite the rules of baseball to produce the ultimate drama. Now imagine this:

Mike Trout leads off the ninth inning of Game 7 of the 2018 ALCS with a double. The Angels trail the Yankees, 4-3. The tying run is now in scoring position. Yankee Stadium is throbbing. And heading for the plate is ...

Uh, Mike Trout?

Wait. Would this be the same Mike Trout who just hit that double? Why, yes, it would.

And what is he doing heading back to the batter's box? We'll let David Samson explain that.

But first ...

A word about David Samson. You might remember him. He spent 18 years working in baseball, the last 16 as the president of the Marlins. He lost that job when his team got sold and Derek Jeter immediately kicked off his quest to render the entire Jeffrey Loria era invisible.

So Samson now works as a baseball analyst for CBS Sports HQ. But in his previous life, he was a member of baseball's competition committee – where he developed a reputation as an energetic outside-the-box thinker whose creative brainstorming generally went where most outside-the-box baseball brainstorming winds up. Right. That would be nowhere. Until we came along.

Just last week, we surveyed people across the baseball landscape on what this sport could do to produce more balls in play. We included Samson in that survey because of his past work on the competition committee. But it turned out he had much, much bigger ideas in his head than whether this sport should, say, tweak the strike zone. They were ideas like this:

— Once in a game, and only in the ninth inning, a team could do what the Angels did in the scenario we sketched out earlier – send up its best player to hit in *any* situation if it's trailing, even if that player had already hit in that inning.

— To DH or not DH? That would be a question decided by the home team every day before the game – in the AL *and* the NL. If it's MadBum Night, the pitcher obviously hits. But if it's a Wei-Yin Chen start (2 for 62, with 24 whiffs), what better time for an NL game to feature the DH?

— Or how about a Designated Fielder? Samson thinks that's worth a try, too. Does your team have an Alcides Escobar kind of guy, whose bat doesn't match his leatherwork? Or maybe a

backup catcher who hits .153 but has a special rapport with your ace starter? Perfect candidates for a Designated Fielder – also the home team’s decision.

— A two-pickoff-throw limit – for any runner at any base? That’s another of Samson’s proposals. Would it speed up the game? Would it be likely to make baserunning a bigger part of the action every night? He would say: Yes and yes.

— If you hate the idea of minor-league games that put a runner on second base to start every extra inning, you’ll definitely need an antacid for Samson’s companion plan – to combat blowouts by allowing every team that gives up a crooked number in one half-inning to start the next half-inning with a runner on second. He’ll explain!

— And finally, he sees one more way baseball could mirror the other sports – with a nightly “halftime.” That would dictate shorter between-inning breaks to keep the flow moving, but also a 12-minute “halftime” in midgame that could be used for entertainment, pizza-stand runs, selling ad time, etc. You know that drill.

These weren’t the topics on the table when we reached out to him last week. But these *were* the big thoughts he found floating around his brain. So why not fire them out there?

“You asked me to think about the game,” he told *The Athletic*. “So I thought about the game. I’ve got time now that I didn’t used to have. I’ve got a distance (from baseball) now that I didn’t used to have. So I spent time running through in my head all the things I’ve learned in baseball and all the things I’ve seen. And I came up with a list of things that could be done to make baseball better, that are actually not impossible.”

No, they’re not impossible. Of course, that doesn’t mean they’re real likely, either. But here’s why Samson thinks it’s important for people in the game to at least start kicking around bold ideas like these – because there is a generation of fans it’s in danger of losing if it doesn’t.

“These are things that could help make the game better and more exciting for a new generation of fans who demand excitement in small doses and 30-second clips,” he said. “And that’s an issue. The way people are digesting baseball in those little clips hurts attendance and hurts ratings.”

So what he’s aspiring to create, he said, is a sport that will “get people involved in the experience” of going to a baseball game, not just luring them there once with Dollar Dog Night. And that means trying stuff that’s not just different but dramatically different. So how different is it all? Let’s run through his big ideas.

THE 9TH INNING WILD CARD AT-BAT

There is an epic moment from the 2003 World Series that is stuck in Samson’s memory bank. It happened in the final inning of the final game of that World Series. As he watched Josh Beckett

eliminate the mighty Yankees at Yankee Stadium that night, Samson's eyes stopped at the sight of Derek Jeter – because you know what Jeter *wasn't* doing in that moment? He wasn't playing. Or hitting. Or even fiddling with a bat in the dugout.

"I looked at Derek Jeter, leaning on the rail, and he was watching the game – the same way I was," Samson said. "And I was totally struck by that. I thought, 'What a crazy game. It's Game 6. His team is about to be eliminated. It had one last chance. And their best player was doing what the team president (of the opposition) was doing. Watching.'"

Most people in the game would have seen that and said, "Well, that's baseball." What David Samson thought to himself, however, was: *Why are we just accepting that? Why can't we change it?*

He reflects on what makes the other sports so magnetic in moments like that. It couldn't be clearer. What sells crunch time in the NBA finals? The ball is in the hands of LeBron or some megastar like him. What force pulls you into the final minute of the Super Bowl? Tom Brady has one last opportunity to drive the Patriots up the field.

Now think about baseball. Nobody sees the downside of having the World Series come down to the 7-8-9 hitters in the ninth? All right, maybe there's someone out there who does. But this is the first we've heard of anyone trying to address it.

"This came up in the competition committee, but only as an outlier," Samson said. "Impossible. Never could happen. Let's dismiss it before we dive into it. It wasn't originally my idea, but I loved it. I couldn't get any conversation generated about it, and I was very serious about it from the moment I heard it."

Before you write it off as crazy, do Samson a favor. Try to envision the scene as Aaron Judge hops up the dugout steps in that spot. Or Bryce Harper. Or José Altuve. It's the equivalent of giving LeBron the ball – except with a whole new strategic debate attached.

"The level of excitement would be staggering," Samson said. "And you'd get something the NBA doesn't get, because in the NBA, you expect that if the game is tied at the end, LeBron is getting the ball. But in baseball, imagine the conversation. Imagine the strategy. When will you pull the trigger on that one wild-card at-bat you'd have? It would be unbelievable."

HOME TEAM PICKS THE DH RULE

What fueled this idea, Samson said, is his concern that the home team doesn't have enough of a home-field advantage in baseball, compared with the other sports. Sure, it's cool that the home team gets to bat last. But if you want to give it a whole 'nother sort of advantage, why not give it a chance to choose the rules it wants to play by that day?

"Every game," he said, "we'd let the home team decide if it wants to use the DH or not. Maybe

the other team has a big-time DH you want to get out of the lineup, and that puts them at a big disadvantage. Maybe you have a pitcher who can really hit...But my idea was, what can we do to make the home team's advantage stronger?"

In an era where very few teams have a Nelson Cruz or Victor Martinez, almost full-time DHs who play the field as little as possible, this idea actually might have less impact than in the past. But Samson would spice up the drama by allowing the home team to keep its choice secret until the exchange of the lineup cards. So the road team would actually have to prepare two different lineups, one for each set of rules.

And in the meantime, he would pair this concept with ...

THE DESIGNATED FIELDER

We've already explained this idea. But in essence, it would create a lineup with two DHs – one hitting for the pitcher, another for the Designated Fielder.

"I just feel like it's a fun concept that helps with action," Samson said. "And it's lack of action that's hurting the game. It's just one more idea to try to have more people in the game with the ability to put the ball in play."

THE TWO-PICKOFF LIMIT

This is an area that the competition committee once explored extensively to streamline pace of play. But it mostly talked about a four-pickoff limit, not two, before the whole notion died.

"The reason it was dismissed," Samson said, "was that, with any number we chose, the impact on the game was that no one would ever get to within one (pickoff) of the limit, because once you got one away, everyone would know – the runner included – that you wouldn't throw over anymore. So he would be able to take larger leads. And I said, 'What's wrong with that?'"

The more he thought about it, the more he thought that unleashing the running game is a jolt of energy the sport could use. So his goal with this proposal was to pretty much eliminate all pickoff throws. By setting a limit of two, "it was really like zero," for the reasons we just laid out.

If the result is that runners can take longer leads because they have virtually no fear of being picked off, he wondered, why is that inherently a bad thing for the game? It could mean more base-stealing (which is at an all-time low). It could mean more runners going first to third on singles. It could mean closer plays at second on what are now routine force-outs.

Yes, it penalizes the defense. But in the bigger picture, with the rise of shifting, the defense is now at a greater advantage – in virtually all other respects – than ever before.

"So this is not even about the stolen base," Samson said, "as much as it's about putting the

game in motion. And that's exciting."

THE CROOKED NUMBER RULE

We're not sure how many folks out there are on board with any of this. We're guessing there aren't many of you. But if there is anyone left who loves it all so far, there's an excellent chance this is where you'll be leaping off this roaring train ride up the slopes of Mount Innovation.

Samson's proposal would go like this: Any time you allow a team to put up a crooked number of any size or shape (in other words, two runs or more) in any half-inning, your hitters would start the next half-inning with a rally already in progress. Runner on second. Nobody out.

Before you yell "Blasphemy," at least listen to his logic. His thinking is that nothing is less entertaining than a blowout. So theoretically this is an idea that could keep the game interesting, even after a team starts to blow it open.

"Ask yourself this," Samson said. "What makes people leave the ballpark? It's when you give up five runs and a 3-0 game becomes an 8-0 game... So what this does is give a team the ability to score runs after giving up runs."

When we objected to the whole concept of penalizing a team for scoring runs, Samson responded: "It's not unfair. They only get one runner on second, whether you scored eight runs or two. And if the other team scores two runs, then *you* get a man on second yourself."

But the real selling point, he said, is that "it's must-see TV. There's stuff happening. You don't have to worry about starting a rally. You've got a rally as soon as you come to bat. It keeps people watching."

Of course, it wouldn't just keep people watching. It also would keep people screaming – about gimmicking up the sport to tweak ratings or sell a few more hot dogs. But Samson said he's ready for all the screaming and all the criticism that he has no doubt these deep-thinking ideas will inspire. Heck, he can probably already hear it.

"Look, any time you say something different than most people say or you think something different than most people think, you're susceptible to criticism," he said. "I've been down that road for 18 years. I've never shied away from that."

Hey, it's a good thing. Does he expect people to agree with all of this? How could he? Does he expect the sport to act on any of this? It never did when he was actually working inside baseball. Why would people in the sport listen to him now?

"For me," Samson said, "my issue with the game is a lack of desire to change. Rob (Manfred) has done an unbelievable job of trying to start that process. But too many people in the game are too worried about making significant changes from what's been done in the past. They're so busy wanting to save baseball as the National Pastime that they're missing the fact that they're

in danger of losing it as the National Pastime.”

In a world where change has to be approved by a three-fourths vote of 30 owners (i.e., 23 votes) and then has to be negotiated with the players’ union, there are already built-in obstacles to clear that are taller than the Green Monster. But one of these days, Samson believes, baseball needs to summon the will to make the kind of significant changes the other sports make on a regular basis.

“What baseball needs,” he said, “is 23 (owners) who realize that change is inevitable and who also have the courage to be wrong. What’s wrong with making real change and then realizing, three or four years down the road, that it didn’t happen the way you thought and fans aren’t happy, so you change back or adjust back? Baseball is very worried about never being wrong.”

But if there’s one thing Samson proved in his time running the Marlins, it was that he wasn’t afraid of being different, wasn’t afraid of expressing his opinion, wasn’t afraid of taking positions that often unleashed an avalanche of blowback. He’s convinced that sometimes, good things came from taking those stands and absorbing that heat. And that’s his hope here, too.

“I’m not saying this is a panacea,” he said. “I’m not saying this will save baseball. I’m just trying to foment conversation and thought...That’s my sole motivation.

“If enough people want change,” David Samson said, “you get change. But how can you agree on anything without a conversation?”

ESPN.com

Law: Scouting Vlad Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette and Cavan Biggio Keith Law

My second look at **Vlad Guerrero Jr.** this year was a little more impressive than my first, as the best prospect in the minors hit an opposite-field homer on the second pitch he saw Monday night in Hartford, Connecticut, and gathered two more hits as the Toronto Blue Jays’ Double-A affiliate won a 10-5 slugfest against the Yard Goats.

- Prospect rankings index

Guerrero hits like his dad but with patience and plate discipline, showing the same wide plate coverage and furious swing, with the strength and bat speed to drive a ball way out to right field against left-handed starter Jack Wynkoop. Vlad later singled on a tapper that might have gone about 30 feet, running just a little below average to first, and then had a hard-hit single to left on a slider from another left-handed pitcher, before striking out in his last at-bat on a very good slider from former Orioles reliever Jason Garcia. (Garcia seemed to dial it up a little for Vlad in that at-bat, with the bases loaded, only to let up for the next batter, Juan Kelly, who hit

a ball so hard it sounded like he had split an atom, putting it in the second deck in right field.)

That's the good; here's the not so good. In two games I've seen Vlad make multiple misplays at third, some from a lack of lateral range, and some just from getting too cute in trying to field ground balls. He has a 70-grade arm, but he rifled a throw that should have started a 5-4-3 double play into right field. He seems to like to backhand routine grounders rather than getting his (large) body in front of them. He did make a great play coming in on a ground ball that likely would have gone foul, and he has no problem leaving his feet to try to make a play. But he's not an average defender at third, probably not even a 40 right now, and given his sheer size already at age 19, the odds are against him getting to a 50. Fortunately for everyone involved, this is a grade-80 bat that will profile even if he ends up at first base rather than in right field.

- **Bo Bichette** played shortstop and hit ahead of Vlad, with three hits, all hit hard, including a double off the left-field wall on a curveball down and in from a left-handed pitcher. His swing is just as it was last year, unconventional with a wrap and generally noisy, but his hands are so quick and hand-eye coordination so good it doesn't seem to matter, and he showed no trouble adjusting to off-speed stuff. His one strikeout came on a 92 mph fastball down below the zone.

Bichette's footwork remains an issue at short, but his hands and arm are more than adequate for the position or for second base, where he has played one game this year. He plays everywhere like his hair is on fire; he made a catch over the left-field tarp despite starting the play shifted to his left from the normal starting position for a shortstop (if such a thing even exists anymore). He's not as advanced a hitter as Vlad Jr. -- who is, really? -- but I think next fall is a realistic time for his arrival.

- **Cavan Biggio** appeared to be just an organizational player coming out of college and even after a 2017 season in which he hit an underwhelming .233/.342/.363 as a 22-year-old in high-A with 11 homers. It's May 15, and he already has 10 homers in Double-A, with just three of them at home in New Hampshire (a good park for left-handed power) and two in Reading, Pennsylvania (a good park for power, period), along with an OBP that rose to .412 after he drew three walks and hit a line-drive single to center against a lefty's slider in his one official at-bat. (He left the game after he was dinged up while sliding into second base.)

Biggio's power looks legitimate; there's some length to his swing and it's not great bat speed, but he does seem to have loft to his finish and enough strength to be this sort of 20-homer bat. The Blue Jays have mostly played him at second, where he's a fringy defender at best, and he may profile best on defense at first, where I don't think his bat would make him a regular. Three months ago, he wasn't even a potential backup, though, and this looks like real, sustainable progress.

- On the Hartford (Colorado Rockies) side, **Brendan Rodgers** got off to a rough start in Double-A this year but has warmed up with the weather, hitting .344/.393/.573 since a couple of days off for bad weather in mid-April. The team's first-round pick in 2015, taken third overall, Rodgers had hit well at both levels of A-ball, but both clubs play in strong hitters' parks, so this is his first real pro experience in a neutral environment.

Keith Law's Mock Draft 1.0



Which high school and college stars could your team be targeting? [Story »](#)

On Monday night, Rodgers smoked two balls, one a 95 mph fastball that he lined up the middle off the shifted Bichette's glove, before walking and tapping out in his last at-bat. He didn't seem to have any trouble with velocity or recognizing balls and strikes, and he has been making a ton of contact since that terrible first two weeks. The Rockies have been using him at three infield spots, so he played third on Monday night, showing plenty of hands and arm for the position, although I don't think there's an opportunity for him there in Denver just yet.

- Outfielder **Sam Hilliard** was 12th in my Rockies organizational rankings this winter, when I cited his power/speed upside against the risk entailed in his high strikeout rate. I think that's still a fair summary of where he stands as a prospect -- he has struck out in 30 percent of his plate appearances this year, but he's showing speed (he's a 65-grade runner), some power and he's getting on base more than enough to overcome the downside of the low contact rate so far. He's playing mostly right field this year and was the designated hitter on Monday, but based solely on how well I saw him run, I'd try him in center.
- The pitching was not very good; Garcia threw hard and showed a plus slider, but he got knocked around. So did New Hampshire starter and former first-rounder Jon Harris, who was throwing 94-97 mph as well as a cutter and slurve, but he might as well have been throwing 82 for how well the Hartford hitters turned on his fastball. Right-hander Zach Jackson threw two perfect innings in relief for New Hampshire, working at 92-95 mph as well as a power curveball at 83-85 mph. He comes from a very high arm slot that gives him some plane on the fastball, similar to Tyler Thornburg's slot (which limits him to a relief role).
- When I saw New Hampshire at Reading a few weeks ago, Sean Reid-Foley started for the Fisher Cats and showed two plus pitches but not command. His fastball was 92-95 mph, a four-seamer with some life up in the zone, and his slider was plus at 85-87. He also showed a hard slurve in the 82-84 mph range -- they are two distinct pitches, according to a Toronto source -- and a fringy changeup that comes in at 83-85.

He has had trouble with control this year, walking 17 in 38 innings (despite one six-inning, no-walk outing), and has a wide platoon split thanks to the lack of an average changeup. There's still starter potential here, but it's now his second year at Double-A and his main issues aren't really resolved to the point where I could say he's going to be a starter in the big leagues.

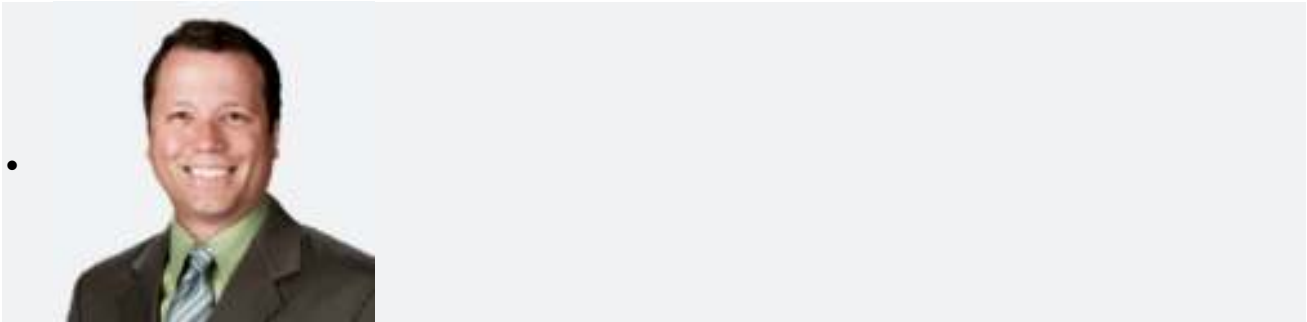
Comments

Insider

Law: The biggest busts of the 2008 MLB draft

Two Beckhams went high in the 2008 draft as the White Sox took Gordon not long after the Rays made Tim the No. 1 overall pick -- neither selection worked out as planned. David

Richard/USA TODAY Sports
May 12, 2018



Keith Law ESPN Senior Writer

Facebook

Twitter

Facebook Messenger

Pinterest

Email

print

comment

The draft is a time of hope and promise, and after it's all over, a scout sits with his staff and marvels over the players the team just picked. Well, sometimes they don't work out as planned, as is the case for most of these 20 first-rounders who didn't make the top 30 in my re-draft of the 2008 class. Some are truly 'busts,' while others just haven't been good enough to fully justify their first-round selections. Some failed because of injuries, some because their tools weren't good enough, some because they just weren't good picks in the first place.

You can see the 2006 "misses" column for comparison (spoiler alert: There weren't nearly as many misses). And to look at how I would re-draft the first round of the '08 draft, click here.

ADVERTISEMENT

Note: All WAR figures come from the indispensable Baseball-Reference.com.



1. Tim Beckham: first overall, Tampa Bay Rays (4.0 WAR)

Beckham is still just 28 and may yet have a career as a utility infielder, but for a player taken first overall, he hasn't come close to expectations. I don't think any one thing slowed Beckham's ascent as a prospect; he struggled on defense, wasn't that advanced as a hitter when he first signed, and had trouble with conditioning and with a suspension for marijuana use. He's still never posted a full-season OBP of .350 or better at any level, and his 22 homers last year nearly

doubled his output from any previous season. (Five of those came in the insane three-week stretch he had right after the Rays traded him to Baltimore for pitching prospect Tobias Myers, after which Beckham went back to not producing.)

The Rays were choosing between Beckham and Buster Posey in the 2008 draft, and they chose ... not wisely, in hindsight, although at the time Beckham was seen as at least the top prep prospect in the class. (It wasn't a great class for prep hitters, unfortunately; only two high school position players drafted and signed in 2008 have produced at least 10 WAR since then, Eric Hosmer and the out-of-baseball Brett Lawrie.) It turned out to be a pick that altered two franchises, as the Rays' catchers have produced a total of 7.5 WAR from 2009 through today, less than Buster Posey produced by himself ... in 2012 alone (7.6).



2. Brian Matusz: fourth overall, Baltimore Orioles (2.3 WAR)

Matusz was a very advanced four-pitch lefty from the University of San Diego. He ripped through the minors and reached the majors in 14 months, had a successful rookie year as a starter in 2010 (3 WAR), and then proceeded to post the highest ERA ever for a pitcher who made at least 10 starts in a season in 2011 – 10.69, a shade above the previous record set by the late Roy Halladay.

Matusz had injury issues that year, including an intercostal strain, and his velocity was down for most of the season, but his pure stuff was back by 2012. His changeup became totally ineffective, so right-handed batters killed him, and he struggled to keep the ball in the park when working from the stretch. He was there at the same time Jake Arrieta was also scuffling and clashing with the coaching staff, including pitching coach Rick Adair -- perhaps Arrieta was the lucky one who got out, while Matusz's career stalled permanently. He threw a few innings for Triple-A Reno last year and remains unsigned.



3. Kyle Skipworth, sixth overall, Miami Marlins (-0.1 WAR)

High school catchers are a historically risky proposition in the first round, and Skipworth is one of the all-time busts in that department: His major league career amounts to three at-bats, a walk, and zero hits, while his minor league career line was .211/.278/.381 across parts of nine seasons. He had power and threw OK, but never could hit in any sense of the term.

I should have stuck with my first instinct on this one -- even when Skipworth homered at what

was then the AFLAC All-American Game, I didn't like the swing, but there was so much industry support for him the next spring that I overruled myself.



4. Gordon Beckham, eighth overall, Chicago White Sox (6.0 WAR)

Beckham raked in college and in the minors, reached the majors in 2009, had a tremendous rookie year, and ... stopped hitting. Maybe it was the huge hitch in his swing, which he had as an amateur, but that never held him back until the 2010 season. From then until his last MLB appearance in 2017, he hit .235/.297/.356, but somehow received over 3,000 PA to prove it wasn't a fluke.



5. Aaron Crow, ninth overall, Washington Nationals (did not sign)

The Nats ended up botching the negotiations for Crow, with allegations of an offer made after the midnight signing deadline, a failure that didn't really work out well for most parties involved. Crow fell a few spots the next year to Kansas City and never seemed to recover from the lost summer/fall of pitching, while the Nats' GM who couldn't complete the deal, Jim Bowden, resigned amid an ethics scandal that winter. Mike Rizzo took over and used the compensation pick in 2009 to draft and sign Drew Storen, which did work out for the team.



6. Jemile Weeks, 12th overall, Oakland Athletics (1.1 WAR)

Rickie's younger brother played parts of six years in the majors but only sparingly after 2012. He didn't have Rickie's elite bat speed, had no power (but tried to pull the ball too often) and never settled into a clear position.



7. Brett Wallace, 13th overall, St. Louis Cardinals (-0.6 WAR)

Ah, Brett Wallace, how I thought you would hit. Wallace hit everywhere in college, and, in what

I thought was a huge positive marker for him, had no trouble left-on-left, something you seldom see in left-handed amateur hitters.

It turns out that Wallace, whose body was, shall we say, less than svelte, could hit lefties well because they spun the ball away from him, and his trouble rotating his hips didn't affect him the way it did against right-handers who could run the ball on the inner third against him. Wallace did play nearly 500 major league games and hit 40 homers, but nearly all of his reps were at first base or as a DH, wiping out the little value he created with his bat.



8. Ethan Martin, 15th overall, Los Angeles Dodgers (-0.5 WAR)

Martin was a two-way guy in high school who looked like a first-rounder as a hitter the summer before the draft, starring at the Area Code Games, but came out pumping 95 mph the next spring -- back when that was unusual for a prep pitcher -- and flew up the board as an arm instead. He walked way too many guys in pro ball from his first season on and was done after 2015.



9. David Cooper, 17th overall, Toronto Blue Jays (0.1 WAR)

Cooper was supposed to be a safe college bat who would hit for average but didn't offer much ceiling. When he didn't hit for average, however, there wasn't anything left to keep him on a roster. I do wonder if the launch-angle revolution might have helped him, as his swing was really flat.



10. Ike Davis, 18th overall, New York Mets (5.2 WAR)

I saw Davis on Cape Cod, at Wareham, where his college coach at the time, Pat Murphy of Arizona State, was in the stands holding court with a few scouts. He asked me, "Do you know what I think Davis is going to be in the big leagues?" I assumed he wanted to talk up his player to a member of the media, so I said, "Everyday first baseman?" And he said, without hesitation, "Left-handed reliever."

Davis went out as a hitter, of course, showed promise in his rookie year in 2010 (.264/.351/.440), but caught Valley Fever, a vicious fungal infection where the spores of one of two species of fungus get into the lungs and can, in rare cases, cause ongoing, chronic illness.

He did convert to the mound in 2017, throwing well in the Arizona Rookie League as a 31-year-old newbie pitcher, and is currently a free agent.



11. Josh Fields, 20th overall, Seattle Mariners (0.2 WAR)

The 2008 draft was the last one ESPN televised before it moved to the MLB Network, and, I guess rather infamously, I destroyed this pick when it was announced, pointing out that 1) drafting college relievers in the first round is dumb and 2) the Mariners weren't good enough to even argue that they would be an exception to this rule. (It's still dumb, by the way.)

Fields was drafted in the second round the year before by Atlanta, didn't sign, then held out almost another full year after Seattle took him and didn't debut in pro ball until 2009. He reached the majors with Houston in 2013, and has found a career as a back-of-the-bullpen reliever, first with the Astros and now with the Dodgers, for whom he's produced just over a win of value.



12. Ryan Perry, 21st overall, Detroit Tigers (0.2 WAR)

Perry was in the big leagues the following April and out of pro ball by June of 2015. A college reliever at the University of Arizona, he had velocity but not movement or command and never missed many bats in the minors.



13. Reese Havens, 22nd overall, New York Mets (did not play in majors)

Havens is the highest-drafted player from 2008 to never reach the majors; his pro career was marred by injuries and he stopped hitting after 2011, playing his last pro game in May of 2013.

He was part of the biggest college team I have ever seen, the 2008 South Carolina Gamecocks, who also featured first-rounder Justin Smoak and second-rounder James Darnell.



14. Allan Dykstra, 23rd overall, San Diego Padres (-0.5 WAR)

As the story goes, the Padres really wanted Havens, and when the Mets picked their pockets, they didn't have a good plan B in place and panicked, taking Dykstra despite his lack of a clear position or enough power to profile on a corner. He drew a ton of walks in pro ball -- two for every three games he played in the minors -- but couldn't produce enough beyond the walks to matter, especially since he played only first base.



15. Anthony Hewitt, 24th overall, Philadelphia Phillies (did not play in majors)

Hewitt was a huge reach at the time, a 19-year-old Connecticut prep schooler who had a great body and huge raw power but no idea how to hit, getting overmatched the previous summer at various showcases. He struck out 158 times with just 13 walks in his first year in full-season ball, eventually reached Double-A, never posted a .300 OBP in any season, and was out of organized baseball after 2015.



16. Christian Friedrich, 25th overall, Colorado Rockies (-0.6 WAR)

I loved Friedrich when I saw him on Cape Cod the previous summer, but his pro tenure was marked by injuries and trouble getting right-handers out.



17. Daniel Schlereth, 26th overall, Arizona Diamondbacks (0.0 WAR)

The A's took Schlereth in the eighth round in 2007 as a draft-eligible sophomore who'd had Tommy John surgery, but he returned to school and made a lot more money in 2008. He was in the majors just under a year later, but never threw enough strikes, thanks in part to a violent

delivery, and was last seen in Double-A Jacksonville last September.



18. Carlos Gutierrez, 27th overall, Minnesota Twins (did not play in majors)

A college closer at Miami and a low-slot sinkerballer, Gutierrez never missed bats in pro ball and was done by July 2013.



19. Gerrit Cole, 28th overall (did not sign), New York Yankees

The story, perhaps apocryphal, goes something like this: after the draft, Cole's father told the Yankees, "whatever amount you offer my son, I can match it," and so Cole went to UCLA instead of joining the Bombers. I had Cole No. 10 on my draft rankings in 2008, and No. 1 in 2011 when he was next eligible, coming off his best year for the Bruins and still only beginning to tap into his potential as a front-line starter.



20. Casey Kelly, 30th overall, Boston Red Sox (-1.6 WAR)

Kelly was a shortstop/right-handed pitcher/quarterback with a two-sport scholarship to Tennessee, and he could really field the heck out of short but couldn't hit.

The Red Sox gave him a year as a hitter before putting him on the mound, and within a few months he was hitting 95-96 mph and showing what looked like a plus change and above-average breaking ball, with an easy delivery and great athleticism. After he went to the Padres in the Adrian Gonzalez trade, nothing went right for Kelly -- hitters got a good look at the ball, his fastball was too straight, he blew out his elbow, and he's now in the Giants' system with a 7+ ERA in Triple-A at age 28.

Despite all of that, he has never had much of a chance to work out of the bullpen, with just 28 total relief appearances in his entire pro career, and I hope someone at least tries him there before closing the book on him.