



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips Thursday, November 8, 2018

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Free-agent signings each team can be proud of

Will Leitch | MLB.com | November 8, 2018

Twins: Jim Thome, one year, \$1.5 million, 2010

He came back for \$3 million the next season, but he was outstanding in 2010, helping the team to the playoffs and looking like a natural fit in a Twins uniform.

Key 2018-19 free agents for all 30 MLB teams

Thomas Harrigan, Do-Hyoung Park, Chad Thornburg | MLB.com | November 8, 2018

Minnesota Twins

Key free agents: RHP Matt Belisle, 2B Logan Forsythe, C Chris Gimenez, 1B/DH Joe Mauer, 1B/DH Logan Morrison, RHP Ervin Santana

The most pressing offseason question for the Twins will be at first base, with the possible departure of Mauer to either free agency or retirement and Morrison's disappointing performance in 2018, after which the Twins declined to pick up his \$8 million option for '19. The departures of Forsythe, Brian Dozier (traded to Dodgers) and Eduardo Escobar (traded to D-backs) also leave openings in the middle infield for the Twins. The Twins need lots of help in the bullpen and could always use more starting depth, with Santana's \$14 million option also being declined.

Kennys Vargas Signs with Chiba Lotte Marines

Jeff Todd | MLB Trade Rumors | November 8, 2018

Japan's Chiba Lotte Marines announced that they have agreed to a one-year deal with first baseman Kennys Vargas (h/t YakyuDB.com). The burly switch-hitter is said to be earning approximately \$1.5MM in the pact. Vargas is a client of Rep 1 Baseball.

Still just 28 years of age, Vargas failed to crack the big leagues in 2018 after seeing at least some action in each of the prior four campaigns. He bounced around the waiver wire at the outset of the season but spent most of the year off of the 40-man roster, playing at Triple-A Rochester. The Twins organization which had employed him since 2009, recently released Vargas, who'd have qualified for minor-league free agency unless he was added back to the MLB roster.

Vargas did not turn in his most useful campaign in the upper minors in 2018. In the past, though, he has at times put up intriguing numbers. At his best, Vargas blends an excellent eye at the plate with good power, though his raw strength has never really shone through with eye-popping slugging numbers. In 859 MLB plate appearances, he owns a .252/.311/.437 slash with 35 long balls.

Minnesota Twins Potential free-agents targets

Fox Sports North | Fox Sports North | November 8, 2018

The Minnesota Twins will have a new manager in 2019 and presumably some other news faces. Could some free-agent acquisitions help Rocco Baldelli make the Twins a contender next season? With the offseason and free agency upon us, FOX Sports North runs down some (and certainly not all) possibilities for the Twins.

RP Tyler Clippard

Minnesota's front office brought in some experienced arms last offseason (Zach Duke, Addusib Reed, Fernando Rodney), so might they go that route again this offseason to help stabilize the bullpen? Clippard, who turns 35 in February can offer some durability (he's pitched 60 innings or more in each season since 2009) and can close in a pinch if necessary (68 career saves). Coming off a subpar year in 2017, he signed for just \$1.5 million with Toronto last year and proceeded to have a 3.67 ERA, 1.165 WHIP and 11.1 K/9 over 68 2/3 innings. He'd probably get more than that this offseason, but he's not going to break the bank like some of the relievers in this free-agent class.

DH Nelson Cruz

The Twins need some pop in their lineup. Minnesota hit just 166 home runs last season, fourth-worst in the American League. Robbie Grossman - he of the 36 career home runs and .378 slugging percentage (5 and .394 in 2018) -- batted cleanup 28 times for Minnesota and 14 times he was fifth, meaning he was in a traditional power spot for roughly 1/4 of the Twins' games. In the past five seasons, Cruz has hit 40, 44, 43, 39 and 37 home runs. The problem is he's a DH only (he's played a smattering of games the past couple of years in right field when Seattle played in a National League park), so it doesn't offer much lineup flexibility. But he's a safer choice than say someone like Logan Morrison and you can pretty much pencil in at least 35 homers.

DH Evan Gattis

If you like the idea of a power-hitting designated hitter, but also one who can play a position on occasion, then maybe Gattis is the answer. He's hit 21+ home runs in each of his six major-league seasons save one -- 2017 when he played in just 84 games but still hit 12 with a .457 slugging percentage. Despite hitting 25 home runs last season, Gattis is coming off his worst season, setting career lows in batting average (.226), on-base percentage (.284) and slugging percentage (.452). However, he could fill in as a backup (or third-string) catcher and/or first baseman.

SP Gio Gonzalez

Unless you're counting on youngsters Stephen Gonsalves and/or Adalberto Mejia to be in Minnesota's rotation, Minnesota won't have a left-handed starter. Gonzalez could fix that. Since becoming a regular in Oakland's rotation in 2010, Gonzalez is 120-86 with a 3.49 ERA in 283 starts. Gonzalez was stellar in 2017 for Washington with a 2.96 ERA and 1.179 WHIP, but struggled in 2018 before being traded to Milwaukee at the deadline. Gonzalez reverted to old form (and then some) with the Brewers, posting a 2.13 ERA and 0.947 WHIP in five starts. There's definitely risk (as there is with most pitchers), but there's also certainly some potential big upside.

UT Marwin Gonzalez

We don't know how Baldelli will manage, position flexibility is all the rage in MLB and with his background in Tampa Bay it wouldn't be a surprise if Baldelli liked to move players around the field. Gonzalez fits this new-wave type of player to the bill. Last year with Houston he played at least 24 games at first base, second base, shortstop and left field, as well as a smattering of games at third, right and center. Gonzalez had a huge season in 2017 (.303/.377/.530, 23 HR), which seems something of an outlier when compared to the rest of his career, but he still popped 16 homers in 2018 and has a career .419 slugging percentage. With potentially holes at a number of positions around the infield, Gonzalez might be a nice luxury for a rookie manager.

SP J.A. Happ

The Twins reportedly have interest in the left-hander, who is coming off three straight strong seasons. He won 20 games in 2016 with Toronto, sporting a 3.18 ERA and 1.169 WHIP. He followed that up with a 3.53 ERA in 2017 in 25 starts and a 3.65 ERA and 1.131 WHIP, along with 9.8 K/9, this past season with the Blue Jays and Yankees (he was 7-0 with 2.69 ERA for the latter). Happ just turned 36 in October but is expected to be sought-after by many teams and should command a nice contract. He made \$13 million each of the past two seasons.

2B/3B Josh Harrison

From 2014-17, Harrison was a nice, steady hitter for Pittsburgh, combining to slash .290/.331/.428 in that span while stealing at least 10 bases each season. He hit a career-high 16 home runs in 2017, but injuries curtailed him last year and he batted just .250/.293/.363 with eight homers in 97 games. Minnesota might need a second baseman, depending how the Twins feel about the readiness of prospects, and while there's a lot of free agents available, none of them are under 30 (currently, that is, there could be some who are arbitration eligible and non-tendered, like Jonathan Schoop). Harrison will be 32 in July and could be looking for a one-year prove-it deal for a better contract in 2020. That could well fit into Minnesota's timeline as well. Plus, he can play third base if/when the Twins opt to rest Miguel Sano, or move him to first base or DH.

RP Kelvin Herrera

Might Herrera want to get back over to the AL Central with a chance to close again? Herrea posted a 2.75 ERA and 1.154 WHIP with 60 saves for Kansas City before being traded at the deadline to Washington, where he allowed 24 hits and nine runs in 18 2/3 innings (4.34 ERA). There are a lot of potential closers on the market (Cody Allen, Zach Britton, Craig Kimbrel and David Robertson, to name just a few) and just so many teams looking to fill the back end of the bullpen.

RP Joe Kelly

After some middling success as a starter, Boston converted Kelly to a full-time reliever and he's done quite well for himself in that role, most prominently greatly increasing his strikeout production. In 2017 he had a 2.79 ERA with a 1.190 WHIP and 8.1 K/9 in 58 innings while this past

season he was fourth in the American League in appearances (78) and had a 4.39 ERA, 1.355 WHIP and 9.3 K/9. Kelly helped make a name for himself in the World Series -- and perhaps upped his price tag -- when he pitched six scoreless innings in five games, allowing four hits with 10 strikeouts. He'd be a boon to any bullpen.

1B Joe Mauer

You know the deal. Mauer is either going to retire or sign a team-friendly one-year contract with the Twins (it's hard to imagine him playing for anyone else, isn't it?). After donning catcher's gear one more time in the final game of the season it seems like Mauer was headed towards not playing again, but there's been no announcement yet and you never know how time away from the game can change things.

RP Andrew Miller

From 2014-17, Miller was one of the most -- if not the most -- devastating relievers in the game. In 297 games over that span he had a 1.82 ERA, allowed 5.1 hits per nine innings with 14.5 K/9. But he struggled in 2018 due to injuries and pitched in just 34 innings, with a 4.24 ERA and 1.382 WHIP. His 11.9 K/9, while good, was his lowest rate since 2012. His season didn't end well, appearing in two playoff games for Cleveland but getting just one out while allowing a hit and three walks (one intentional) and throwing a wild pitch. Miller is reportedly healthy, but teams might be skeptical and perhaps he'll need to sign a prove-it deal to help get a better contract in 2020. Minnesota can also likely offer him a chance to close.

SP Charlie Morton

Morton might be flying under-the-radar compared to other starters on the market, such as his Houston teammate Dallas Kuechel (who has a qualifying offer thus a team would have to give up a draft pick to sign). Morton thrived in his two years with the Astros, recording a 3.36 ERA, 1.176 WHIP and 10.4 K/9 over 55 starts. He has had trouble staying healthy -- last season was the first time he reached 30 starts and just the second time he surpassed 160 innings. There's definitely risk (health, age (34) and if he can repeat what he's done outside of Houston), but, as with Gonzalez, there's upside.

RP Sergio Romo

Romo has a history with Baldelli, having pitched for the Rays in 2017 and '18, and if the new Twins manager is anything like his former boss in Tampa Bay, Kevin Cash, the reliever will know what to expect. Romo had 25 saves for the Rays last season but also was used as an "opener" five times. On the downside, Romo will be 36 in March and had a career highs in ERA (4.14) and WHIP (1.262), although to be fair he allowed four runs in 4 2/3 when he started and he did still strike out 10.0 per nine innings.

IF Neil Walker

Another position flexible player, Walker mainly can man first, second or third, although he also played some outfield last season for the Yankees. Walker had been a pretty steady player in his career, batting around .265-.270 with a slugging percentage around .430-.440, until 2018 when he slumped to .219/.309/.354 with 11 home runs in New York. Perhaps the 33-year-old just needs (another) change of scenery.

RP Justin Wilson

Taylor Rogers was Minnesota's only consistent left-hander in the bullpen last season -- Zach Duke was traded, Gabriel Moya struggled in his time there and Andrew Vasquez had little opportunity. Perhaps the latter two will get a chance in 2019. If not, Wilson could fit the bill. He's durable, having pitched in at least 65 games each of the past three years, and has struck out 10+ batter per nine innings in each season over the same span. He has allowed 7.4 hits per nine over his career, but does have control issues (4 BB/9) and has walked 5.4 per nine innings in each of the last two seasons (but there's room for hope -- he allowed 3.0/9 in 2015 and 2.6/9 in 2016).

Get to Know a New Manager: Rocco Baldelli Looks to Use Youth, Energy to Make Twins a Winner **Will Ragatz | Sports Illustrated | November 8, 2018**

The 37 year-old Rocco Baldelli was brought in to replace the 2017 AL Manager of the Year. What does Baldelli bring to the table in Minnesota?

If it's not the Yankees, managerial hires usually get little national fanfare, and they happen when most baseball fans are fully invested in the postseason. As a result, SI's MLB staff will be introducing you to the six new faces in charge of MLB franchises. Of the six openings that occurred at season's end, only the Orioles have yet to fill their vacancy. Next up: Rocco Baldelli.

Team

Minnesota Twins

Name

Rocco Baldelli

Who did he replace?

Paul Molitor, the 2017 AL Manager of the Year. Molitor alternated between surprising and disappointing in his four years with the Twins. He led Minnesota to its first winning record in five years in 2015, then lost an MLB-worst 103 games a year later. The Twins stunningly bounced back and secured an AL Wild Card berth in 2017, hence the award for Molitor, before once again underwhelming this season. His firing was as a surprise to many.

Who did he beat out?

The other two finalists for the job were Twins bench coach Derek Shelton and Cubs bench coach Brandon Hyde, according to The Athletic's Dan Hayes. The Twins' decision-making duo of GM Thad Levine and Chief Baseball Officer Derek Falvey elected not to go with the in-house candidate (though Shelton will be brought back in the same role) or Hyde, choosing the youngest option with the least coaching experience.

Playing career stats

Baldelli had a promising career cut short by a rare muscular disorder that caused frequent injuries. Drafted sixth overall by Tampa Bay in 2000, the centerfielder finished third in AL Rookie of the Year voting in 2003 and was a budding star with all five tools. However, injuries caused by the disorder forced him to miss the entirety of 2005 and chunks of every season until he retired in January 2011. He is beloved by Rays fans for his big hits in the 2008 ALCS. Baldelli hit .278 with 60 homers and 60 steals in 519 career games.

Prior Job

Upon retiring, Baldelli joined the Rays' front office as a Special Assistant for Baseball Operations for the 2011 season. Four years later, new manager Kevin Cash added Baldelli to his staff as the first base coach. The Rays created a new role for Baldelli last season: major-league field coordinator. He was third in command behind Cash and bench coach Charlie Montoyo (the new Blue Jays manager who will be featured in this series soon) during games, was charged with implementing ideas and coordinated the outfield defense, per Marc Topkin. The Rays won 90 games in 2018 behind an analytically-savvy approach highlighted by their pioneering use of the "opener."

What to Expect

It's hard to know exactly what to expect from a first-time manager who is just 37 years old (making him the youngest managerial hire since AJ Hinch in 2009). Baldelli fits with the recent trend of teams hiring young former players with an open minds toward analytics. Falvey and Levine used the word "partner" to describe what they were looking for during their search, suggesting that they wanted someone who would work closely with them to continue to bring the Twins into the 21st century. Baldelli's time with the Rays, a franchise that has been ahead of the curve this decade, undoubtedly increased his allure. In his introductory press conference, Baldelli gave an encouraging quote on analytics.

Baldelli's role is to be the bridge between the front office and the players. His personality was a factor in his hiring; by all accounts, Baldelli is a likable, highly communicative guy. If he can build trust within the clubhouse, he'll be in a good position to take information from the Twins' research and development staff and verbalize it to players in order to implement it on the field. The idea is that if you have a personable guy who is well-respected in the locker room and truly believes in analytical information and its benefits, he will be able to get to the team to buy in. Molitor was no curmudgeon, which he showed by embracing things like defensive shifts and using an opener, but Baldelli's youth and personality should bring a different dynamic to the clubhouse.

Because Baldelli has never had this job at any level, we won't know what his tendencies are as an in-game manager until the 2019 season kicks off next spring. Baldelli still has several spots to fill on his staff before then, including pitching coach. For now, it's important to remember that the Twins hired him to do far more than fill out a lineup card and make bullpen decisions. He'll be counted on to unite everyone in the organization towards the task of winning baseball games. Still, the on-field role is important, and it will be fascinating to see how his personality and approach translate to the bench. Will he be fiery? Laid-back? Will he embrace the opener? We'll find out soon enough.

The Situation

Baldelli inherits a situation in Minnesota that remains promising despite a plethora of uncertainties. His most challenging and important task will be to help salvage the potential of Byron Buxton and Miguel Sanó, the two players who came up in 2015 and were supposed to be franchise saviors have floundered through inconsistent and injury-prone starts to their MLB careers. Buxton was once the consensus top prospect in baseball, a shoo-in future star who drew comparisons to some of the game's best outfielders. He's now played in parts of four seasons and that luster has all but worn off. Buxton's league-best defense and speed on the basepaths have been everything they were advertised to be, but he just hasn't been able to hit consistently. He's slashing an appalling .230/.285/.387 with a career 31.7% strikeout rate. He's had a few good stretches, including a 2017 second half in which he hit .300/.347/.546 and garnered MVP votes. Given his defensive ability, if Buxton ever puts it together at the plate for a full season he'll be one of the most valuable players in baseball.

Sanó is a similar case, albeit without the MVP potential. He flashed his otherworldly power frequently during his first three years, but his

problems rose to the surface in a disastrous 2018 season. Like Buxton, Sano simply struggles to make contact. There have been questions about his work ethic caused by a tendency to show up to spring training out of shape. Whether he can remain at third base is another question. Again, the potential for greatness is still there. Buxton and Sanó are just 24 and 25, respectively, and the Twins have a number of other young pieces that inspire optimism. Max Kepler, Jorge Polanco and José Berrios are all 25 or younger. Eddie Rosario just turned 27 and was a star in the first half of 2018. With the contracts of Joe Mauer, Ervin Santana and Brian Dozier off the books, the Twins will have the money to pursue several impact free agents this winter. Minnesota's farm system is arguably one of the best in baseball, led by a pair of top-10 prospects in Royce Lewis and Alex Kirilloff.

Should fans be excited?

Absolutely. Ever since he was hired, Baldelli has come across as the perfect manager to complement Falvey and Levine and help make the Twins a consistent winner. He's a razor-sharp guy who embraces analytics and will be able to relate to a young clubhouse. He can't do it all himself, of course; the Twins' front office needs to have a much better offseason than last year's Logan Morrison and Lance Lynn debacle. But Baldelli appears ready for the challenge of turning this thing around. For those concerned about his age, just remember: the last time Minnesota hired a manager this young, 36-year old Tom Kelly took over in 1986 and won two World Series titles in six years.