



Padres Press Clips

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<u>Article</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Page</u>
Padres spring training primer: Rotation	SD Union Tribune	Lin	2
NFL teams not as prone to tanking as MLB/Padres	SD Union Tribune	Krasovic	4
With Spring Training about to get started, excitement builds around Padres' youth	AP	AP	9
5 Padres Make Fangraphs' Top 100 Prospect List	Friar Wire	Lafferty	11

Padres spring training primer: Rotation

Dennis Lin

With pitchers and catchers set to report Feb. 14 to spring training in Peoria, Ariz., we're providing an overview of each area of the Padres' roster. Today, the rotation:

2017 recap

The Padres' patchwork rotation did not perform as poorly as many feared. Dinelson Lamet posted one of the top rookie strikeout rates in history. Luis Perdomo gained more consistency after early-season struggles. Opening-day pitcher Jhoulys Chacin revitalized his career, setting a career high in starts. Clayton Richard brought more to the table than a high ERA; the lefty supplied needed innings and leadership, earning a two-year extension near the end of the season. Another veteran, Trevor Cahill, was arguably the team's most effective starter before being traded to Kansas City. The developments weren't all positive. Jered Weaver retired after several disastrous starts, and Travis Wood, who had been acquired in the Cahill trade, was released in December.

ADVERTISING

Current picture

Richard, Lamet and Perdomo return as heavy favorites to make the starting five. Chacin parlayed his solid season into a two-year deal with Milwaukee, leaving a sizable hole for San Diego. Candidates to fill vacancies are largely unproven, coming back from injuries or attempting to prolong careers. The list includes Robbie Erlin, Colin Rea and Jordan Lyles. The Padres like the upside of new acquisition Bryan Mitchell, who struggled in limited opportunities with the New York Yankees. Tyson Ross and Chris Young, once fixtures in San Diego, have returned on minor league deals. Matt Strahm, who underwent knee surgery last year, can start or relieve. The organization's best starting-pitching talent resides in the minors, and a number of prospects will be in major league camp next week.

On the farm

Enyel De Los Santos, dealt to Philadelphia in December, was one of several prospects to reach Double-A last season. The Padres still have Joey Lucchesi, Cal Quantrill, Jacob Nix, Eric Lauer and Brett Kennedy in the organization, with Lucchesi perhaps at the front of the line for a 2018 arrival at Petco Park. Further down in the minor leagues are arms with even greater potential, including MacKenzie Gore and Michel Baez, widely considered two of San Diego's top three prospects. Starting pitching appears to be the strength of a deep farm system.

Potential moves

Finding little appeal in free-agent prices, the Padres seem content to open spring training with their present set of options.

NFL teams not as prone to tanking as MLB/Padres

Tom Krasovic

Baseball is back, starting next week when pitchers and catchers report to spring training.

In other words, let the losing begin

“You could argue you're going to compete with more clubs to get the first pick in the draft than you would to win the World Series,” Seattle Mariners General Manager Jerry DiPoto said recently.

It surprised me that DiPoto spilled the beans to reporters.

But his comment rang true.

Increasingly, baseball teams are embracing losing so they can reap the windfalls of a baseball system that ... rewards losing.

It pays for many teams to go young on the profit ledger, and can pay off on the field, if done right.

The past three World Series champions are inspiration. The Royals, Cubs and Astros all stripped down their teams and revved up youth movements. Seasons with close to 100 defeats became the norm. At an opportune time years later, each franchise went all in to win and pulled it off.

“Tanking” isn’t new to baseball or sports, but the past two labor pacts in baseball have further encouraged the practice.

“There definitely are greater incentives to be bad rather than mediocre these days,” longtime baseball analyst Jim Callis of MLB Pipeline told me last week.

Under the Collective Bargain Agreement (CBA), higher loss totals were rewarded not only with higher slotting in the annual draft but a more level field when it came to signing the potential draftees.

“When the bonus pool restrictions on the draft came into play with the 2012 CBA, teams can't just spend whatever they want on the draft — no one is going to exceed their pool by more than 5 percent and start forfeiting future first-rounders,” Callis said. “The 2017 CBA tightened up the disparity at the top of the draft a little bit, but the bottom line is that if you want greater spending power in the draft, which is the most cost-efficient way to acquire talent, you need to lose.”

He gave an example.

“The worst team in 2016, the Twins, got \$14,156,800 in their pool last year, bolstered in part by an extra competitive balance selection. The 10th-worst team, the Angels, got \$8,212,800.”

Have some NFL teams embraced losing to gain better draft picks?

Of course they have.

Under former Padres executive Paul DePodesta, the Cleveland Browns over the past two years accumulated draft picks in a manner similar to MLB teams.

However, it's probably true that NFL teams are less inclined to tank than MLB teams because the NFL season is only one-tenth as long.

“It's a simple rule: the smaller the sample, the larger the variance,” ESPN's Bill Barnwell wrote last year while comparing the pros and cons of tanking in the NFL and the NBA, which has an 82-game schedule. “A truly great team will have a much better shot at standing out over a longer schedule because it has more chances to press its advantage and prove its strength.”

The 16-game NFL season, Barnwell noted, makes the tank harder to pull off.

“The point is that teams have less control over the results of their tanking attempt across a 16-game season than they do over an 82-game campaign. Other teams that aren't trying to tank might still piece together a disastrous season. Even worse, a team might try to tank and accidentally piece together a mediocre-to-competent season with a subpar team — the worst possible outcome of a tanking attempt.”

There's an emotional price, too.

Simply, losing stings far more in the NFL.

An NFL game has 10 times the significance of an MLB game. This raises the emotional stakes for players, coaches, ownership, fans — everyone involved.

While MLB teams have indulged four, five, six or more consecutive losing seasons to foster a more effective rebuild, Cleveland Browns All-Pro tackle Joe Thomas said that two NFL seasons of “the process” became intolerable in Cleveland.

Thomas linked the dismissal of Browns GM Sashi Brown late last season to the toll of chronic losing. The Browns had lost 15 of 16 games the previous season — which equates to about 150 losses in a baseball season — and were en route to an 0-16 season this past year.

“Ultimately the degree of losing became simply unpalatable, and the guys who enacted the plan couldn't see it through,” Thomas wrote for MMQB.com, although DePodesta held his job as chief strategy officer.

“The team realized that while some of those strategies may work to rebuild baseball teams,” Thomas wrote, “it doesn't quite work the same way in the NFL; the pain of losing is so much greater in the NFL, and fans, management and coaches struggle to tolerate it.”

Near the time in 2012 when the Pads franchise was sold, shrewd baseball men such as Theo Epstein, a former Pads exec, were embracing the tank.

Soon after the Chicago Cubs hired him to try to replicate the World Series drought-busting success he'd helped to effect with the Boston Red Sox, Epstein declared famously that staying out of the middle was the best path for teams like the Cubs that had no reasonable hope of contending for the World Series tournament.

As I wrote in 2012, there was a growing sense among the baseball sharps that, for non-contenders, a putrid win-loss record was better than a mediocre one, with the caveat that smart player evaluation and development was needed to capitalize on the increased opportunities that tanking would bring.

Incoming Pads owners Ron Fowler and Peter Seidler were aware of what was happening in the industry they'd bought into.

They took another road. They tried to win in the big leagues. They increasing spending on major leaguers, but not without a safety net. Back-loaded deals were budgeted at a time when both the team's local TV revenues and the MLB-shared revenues were rising.

The playoff berth that Fowler forecast under the Josh Byrnes regime didn't materialize, costing Byrnes his job.

Nor did the Pads muster a playoff run under ownership's hand-picked talent man, A.J. Preller, even after his flurry of "win now" moves.

Changing course, Pads owners embraced a long-term rebuild that apparently will run into the coming season.

The plan makes sense, while the prevailing baseball climate shields the Pads owners (and their colleagues with other rebuilding teams) from some of the public-relations blowback that chronic non-contention can inspire.

But, turning the tank into sustained World Series contention is tricky.

"Teams that don't believe they can contend are better off losing as much as possible," Callis said. "That said, teams with loaded farm systems — and I think San Diego has the best system in baseball right now — often contend a year earlier than expected. So you don't want to get too cute."

Over in Cleveland, where the NFL team has reached the Super Bowl, the Browns are operating under a new GM, John Dorsey, who comes from a traditional scouting background.

At his disposal are surplus premium draft picks accumulated under the more analytically driven Sashi Brown.

The Dorsey-DePodesta regime, which also includes coach Hue Jackson, a survivor of the 1-31 win-loss record, holds the first and fourth picks in the coming NFL draft.

Also, the Browns have other draft goodies this year and next year, and more salary cap space than most NFL teams.

Wouldn't it be something if the Pads got into the World Series in the same year that the Browns reached a Super Bowl?

With Spring Training about to get started, excitement builds around Padres' youth

SAN DIEGO (AP) — With the San Diego Padres still in deep rebuilding mode, the player a lot of fans are interested in seeing the most is a 19-year-old shortstop who has yet to spend a day in the big leagues.

Fernando Tatis Jr., the son of the former major leaguer, earned an invitation to spring training with the big league club. So did some other top prospects, including second baseman Luis Arias and pitchers Cal Quantrill — also the son of a former big leaguer — Eric Lauer, Joey Lucchesi and Jacob Nix.

Tatis is the crown jewel of the Padres' highly rated farm system. Once he reaches the big leagues, the organization hopes he can stop the years-long turnstile at shortstop.

Manager Andy Green is looking forward to working with Tatis and other young players who will form the next waves of callups for a franchise that hasn't been to the playoffs since 2006.

"These are guys we've been talking about for a while and now they're here," Green said, "For me, that's exciting."

Here are some things to look for when the Padres open spring training:

NEW LOOK: While many of the prospects are still a year or more away from reaching the bigs, the Padres have made some additions to a squad that finished fourth in the NL West at 71-91, 33 games behind the pennant-winning Los Angeles Dodgers. Among them are the latest shortstop, Freddy Galvis, obtained in a trade with Philadelphia, and a familiar face, third baseman Chase Headley. The Padres reacquired Headley and his \$13 million salary from the New York Yankees but the real score in that trade was right-hander Bryan Mitchell. The Padres then dealt Yangervis Solarte, who had been projected as the third baseman, to Toronto.

ROOKIES TO WATCH: No rookies are projected to crack the starting lineup. What Padres fans are watching is the so-called next wave of young talent to come up. Tatis could make the jump in the second half of the season, although the Padres might wait until 2019 to start his service time clock. Otherwise, the next round of callups could include pitchers Quantrill, Lucchesi, Lauer or Nix.

THEY'RE SET: Galvis, catcher Austin Hedges, center fielder Manuel Margot, second baseman Carlos Asuaje have spots nailed down, and the Padres really like the way left fielder Jose

Pirela played last year. Clayton Richard, 34, is the presumed opening day starter, but wasn't promised much beyond that after he signed a two-year extension late last season. The Padres value Richard for his clubhouse leadership.

THEY'RE NOT: Wil Myers could move from first base back to the outfield if the Padres sign Eric Hosmer, right fielder Hunter Renfroe could be back on shaky ground if he doesn't hit well and Headley may or may not be moved. Renfroe was in the first wave of young talent to arrive in September 2016 after the Padres ended their win-now experiment with high-priced veterans. But he struggled at the plate and was sent to Triple-A for a month. After being recalled on Sept. 18, he hit six homers in 11 games, including one in his first game back and had his first three-homer game. He finished with a .231 average and 140 strikeouts, with only 27 walks. Despite his nice finish, the Padres will keep a close eye on him.

ON DECK: The most competition will be to fill the rotation, with a mix of young players and veterans competing for jobs. Among the young players are Dinelson Lamet, who had an impressive rookie season, and Luis Perdomo. Leading the way for the veterans is Richard, whose spot in the rotation isn't guaranteed beyond opening day. The Padres also brought back Chris Young, 38, and Tyson Ross, 30, who are longshots to make the rotation.

5 Padres Make Fangraphs' Top 100 Prospect List

Fernando Tatis Jr. earns No. 5 overall spot

By Justin Lafferty

As more and more top prospect lists start to roll in, it's evident that the Padres have a wealth of talent in the minor leagues.

FanGraphs released its top 100 prospect ranking Tuesday, with 19-year-old shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. at the No. 5 overall spot.

FanGraphs compiles their prospect rankings a little differently from other sites. They have players grouped by their Future Value grades, based on a 20–80 scouting scale.

Only one prospect, pitcher/outfielder Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Angels, earned a grade of 70. Tatis Jr. was given a Future Value grade of 65, along with highly touted prospects such as Atlanta outfielder Ronald Acuña and Toronto infielder Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

Here's how FanGraphs ranked Padres prospects, along with their FV grade:

5. Tatis Jr. (65)

28. Luis Urías (55)

33. MacKenzie Gore (55)

41. Michel Baez (55)

62. Anderson Espinoza (50)

FanGraphs explained why Tatis Jr., who was acquired via trade with the Chicago White Sox, was rated so highly:

“He was sent to full-season Fort Wayne as an 18-year-old in 2017 and hit .280/.390/.520 with 20 homers and steals and, perhaps most impressively for his age, a 14.5% walk rate. He also

flashes occasional acrobatic brilliance at shortstop, though scouts are not unanimous about his long-term prospects there because of the size of Tatis's frame."

The site is especially bullish on Tatis Jr.'s raw power. It gives him a present grade of 60 and a future grade of 70. In a chat, FanGraphs' Eric Longenhagen predicted that Tatis Jr. could be the top overall prospect next year.

FanGraphs also loves Uriás' hit tool, grading him a 50 now, with 65 potential:

"Urias's strikeout rate doubled in 2017 and was still so low that it would have ranked him in the top 15 among qualified MLB hitters. He has sublime feel for contact, adjusting the barrel to where it needs to be, when it needs to be there. His track record of excellent hitting suggests it's going to continue."

Espinoza, who last year FanGraphs rated as the Padres' top prospect (№10 overall), checks in at №62 on this year's list. The talented right-handed pitcher turns 20 this season, but he will miss significant time this year while recovering from Tommy John surgery. FanGraphs believes in Espinoza's fastball, curveball and changeup — all of which received future grades of 60.

Cal Quantrill, Logan Allen, Joey Lucchesi and Adrian Morejon were all listed as other prospects in consideration.