



Minnesota Twins Daily Clips Friday, November 16, 2018

- Another AL Central team may target Donaldson. MLB.com (MLB.com) p.1
- Twins to hire Johnson as pitching coach. MLB.com (Bollinger) p.1
- Twins to name Arkansas' Wes Johnson as pitching coach. Star Tribune (Miller) p.2
- Twins fan banned from Target Field over pursuit of baseballs goes to bat to stay at games. Star Tribune (Furst) p.2
- Twins, Baldelli hire longtime college pitching coach Wes Johnson. Pioneer Press (Shipley) p.3
- Twins to name University of Arkansas' Wes Johnson pitching coach. The Athletic (Hayes) p.4

Another AL Central team may target Donaldson

MLB.com | MLB.com | November 16, 2018

Josh Donaldson has battled injuries in recent years, but his track record of MVP-level production should make him a coveted free agent nonetheless this offseason.

Below, you will find a list of the latest news and rumors surrounding the third baseman.

A one-year 'make-good' contract for Donaldson with the Twins?

Nov. 15: ESPN 1500's Touch 'Em All Podcast featured a discussion Thursday about whether the Twins should make a run at free agent third baseman Josh Donaldson. The signing of Donaldson would mean Minnesota could move Miguel Sano to first, and if Donaldson remains healthy and returns to form in 2019, that could mean a vast improvement in production from the hot corner.

"He's only 32, he's only three years removed from an MVP season ... Josh Donaldson on a 'make-good' one- or two-year contract ... I think if you strike out on Bryce Harper and Manny Machado, I think if you were to bring in Josh Donaldson, move Miguel Sano to first base and/or DH, and Tyler Austin and Miguel Sano could fight over first base and DH, and if you put a bona fide -- if he's healthy -- bona fide, solidified, stud player at that position, that makes it a lot easier to stomach the Twins' lineup going in[to '19]."

Donaldson was the AL MVP in '15, but was limited to 52 games last season due to injury. Between the Blue Jays and Indians, to whom he was traded in August, Donaldson hit .246/.352/.449 with eight home runs. The season prior, he belted 33 homers in just 113 games for Toronto.

Twins to hire Johnson as pitching coach. MLB.com

Rhett Bollinger | MLB.com | November 16, 2018

MINNEAPOLIS -- The Twins have found their next pitching coach, and he's coming from the collegiate ranks, as they're set to hire Wes Johnson from the University of Arkansas to join manager Rocco Baldelli's staff, according to a Major League source.

Minnesota has yet to make an official announcement, but one is expected to come as early as Friday. The club is also expected to announce on Friday that Jeremy Hefner has been named bullpen coach, replacing Eddie Guardado. Hefner was the Twins' advanced scout the last two years and pitched with the Mets from 2012-13.

Johnson, who had served as pitching coach for the Razorbacks the past two seasons, will replace Garvin Alston, who was dismissed after one year as the Twins' pitching coach. Johnson helped lead Arkansas to the College World Series championship against Oregon State this season.

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

According to his University of Arkansas bio, Johnson has helped develop more than 40 pitchers who were drafted or signed professional contracts

over the past 11 years, including Dakota Hudson, the No. 34 overall Draft pick in 2016, and Blaine Knight, the No. 87 overall pick in the 2018 Draft.

Johnson is the first of what will be five new additions to Minnesota's coaching staff after it dismissed first-base coach Jeff Smith, third-base coach Gene Glynn, Major League coach Jeff Pickler, bullpen coach Eddie Guardado and Alston. Bench coach Derek Shelton, hitting coach James Rowson and assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez were retained.

Johnson, a Sherwood, Ark., native, graduated from the University of Arkansas-Monticello in 1994.

Twins to name Arkansas' Wes Johnson as pitching coach
Phil Miller | Star Tribune | November 16, 2018

Wes Johnson made his name developing velocity in nontraditional ways.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Twins fan banned from Target Field over pursuit of baseballs goes to bat to stay at games
Randy Furst | Star Tribune | November 16, 2018

Jason Gabbert says he is just an enthusiastic fan trying to collect baseballs tossed into the stands by players and ball boys at Target Field.

The Twins disagree.

The team issued a trespass notice against Gabbert in August, banning him from the ballpark for a year, claiming he had violated the Twins' code of conduct for guests by his overly aggressive behavior in chasing down the balls. The Twins allege incidents have included physical altercations and approaching families and asking to trade their game-used souvenir. Officials with the team call issuing the notice a drastic measure taken when a fan acts “in an extraordinarily unfavorable way.”

Gabbert has fought back in court, but so far has struck out in his attempt to get the trespass notice lifted.

Hennepin County District Judge Bruce A. Peterson last week dismissed a lawsuit filed by Gabbert, rejecting his claim that the Twins had no right to issue the trespass. Peterson ruled that the Twins, as a private entity leasing the ballpark, can issue trespass notices as they see fit.

Undeterred, Gabbert, 49, of Plymouth said Thursday in an interview that he had committed no crimes at Target Field and he plans to re-file the suit in federal court, alleging his civil rights were violated when Twins security asked for his ID and called police, who escorted him out of the ballpark.

“I don’t take the ban seriously because they can’t enforce it,” he said. “People don’t get banned from a ballpark for bumping into other people trying to get a baseball.”

Gabbert said that last year he collected some 50 baseballs, thrown by players to fans, often at the end of innings.

Twins spokesman Dustin Morse issued a brief statement Thursday applauding the court’s decision.

“After duly considering Mr. Gabbert’s claims against the Minnesota Twins, the Hennepin County District Court summarily dismissed the case with prejudice,” he wrote in an e-mail. “The Court’s decision is a matter of public record. The Minnesota Twins believe the Court’s decision was correct, and the team does not wish to provide further comment on the matter.”

The Twins allege in court documents that Gabbert was involved in four incidents at Target Field in 2018, culminating in the last one on Aug. 17 that led to the trespass — his second in consecutive years.

“At the conclusion of the top of the 7th inning, Mr. Gabbert attempted to retrieve a baseball that been thrown into the stands, and in so doing, had a physical altercation with at least two guests who were seated in Section 6,” according to an affidavit by Dave Horsman, senior director of ballpark operations for the Twins.

Twins lawyers cite an affidavit from Carol Stenback, a Twins fan who was sitting in the section near another fan, Bradley Haddy. Gabbert “shoved his way into our row and he went over Brad and me to try to grab the baseball,” she wrote. She said that Gabbert repeatedly said “that’s my ball” as he tried to grab it.

Haddy wrote that Gabbert made physical contact with him and Stenback and said something like “get your hands off me” or “don’t touch me,” which Haddy said was surprising because it was Gabbert who initiated the contact. He said he told Gabbert to go back to his own row.

“The seats we had for the game were the best seats we had ever had for a Twins game and the man’s actions ruined our experience,” Stenback wrote, adding that a Twins usher approached her after the incident to ask how she was doing. “I told her it was the worst thing that has happened to me at Target Field.”

In another instance during a game the previous month, security staff noted an incident in which a father caught a ball and gave it to his son. Gabbert allegedly approached them and asked for the ball.

When he was warned by security to not approach families and children to ask for their ball, he “immediately raised his voice and start[ed] arguing that he gave that family 2 balls and did not take anything and he can do whatever he wants,” according to an incident report.

In August the Twins banned Gabbert for a year.

“Because of his conduct at the August 17, 2018 game and at previous games and for the safety of Target Field guests and defendant’s employees, Mr. Horsman made the decision that Plaintiff would give the 2018 trespass notice,” Jason Asmus, a Twins attorney with Briggs and Morgan law firm, wrote in a memorandum on Oct. 4.

Gabbert insists he never touched the two people and never went into their row.

He said that a note on the trespass notice accused him of “tackling another patron at Target Field” which he said was untrue and has demanded to see a video that he says the Twins had of the incident.

He said it would prove his case.

The documents indicate that Twins security has become increasingly upset with Gabbert’s behavior at games.

Gabbert was issued a trespass notice banning him for a year in 2017. Gabbert said he settled it with the Twins, allowing him to return after several months in 2018.

The Twins say he was the only fan trespassed in the past two years and the small number of trespass notices in the past five years is proof that a fan only gets banned if he or she “distinguished himself or herself in an extraordinarily unfavorable way,” Horsman wrote in his affidavit.

“From the start of the 2014 baseball season through August 6, 2017, a total of 7,847,739 tickets have been sold to fans to attend Target Field,” Horsman wrote. “In that time frame, the Minnesota Twins have had the occasion to issue notices to depart using the City of Minneapolis ‘trespass notice form’ to just 54 individuals, which represents just .000688 percent of ticketed fans.”

Gabbert represented himself in court, but says he plans to get an attorney when he tries to overturn the trespass notice in federal court, although he has not secured one yet.

“I have committed no crime nor was I under suspicion of committing a crime,” Gabbert said.

Twins, Baldelli hire longtime college pitching coach Wes Johnson
John Shipley | Pioneer Press | November 16, 2018

Manager Rocco Baldelli and the Twins have hired Wes Johnson as their pitching coach, a source told the Pioneer Press. Johnson was pitching coach at Arkansas.

In addition, Jeremy Hefner has moved from the Twins’ analytics office to become bullpen coach.

Johnson spent the past two seasons with the Razorbacks, who finished runner-up to Oregon State in last spring’s College World Series. In 2016, he was the pitching coach at Mississippi State, where six of his pitchers were selected in the MLB amateur draft, including Dakota Hudson, taken 34th overall by St. Louis.

Hudson, 24, was 4-1 with a 2.86 earned-run average in 26 appearances with the Cardinals last season.

Johnson becomes the first external candidate hired since Rocco Baldelli was named manager. The Twins already have retained the services of bench coach Derek Shelton — who interviewed for Baldelli’s job — as well as hitting coach James Rowson and his assistant, Rudy Hernandez.

Twins to name University of Arkansas’ Wes Johnson pitching coach
Dan Hayes | The Athletic | November 16, 2018

Rocco Baldelli’s new pitching coach is experienced with analytics and has a strong history of development.

The Twins are set to name the University of Arkansas’ Wes Johnson as their pitching coach, according to multiple sources. Johnson held the same role the past two seasons for the Razorbacks, who in June lost to Oregon State in the College World Series championship.

He also previously was the pitching coach at Mississippi State University, Dallas Baptist University and Central Arkansas.

The Twins also are promoting Jeremy Hefner, who is set to take over as the team’s bullpen coach next season, according to multiple sources. Hefner spent the previous two seasons as the Twins’ advanced scout.

Johnson’s bio said that prior to his arrival at Arkansas he had 30 pitchers under his tutelage in nine years who had been drafted or signed a pro contract. The past two seasons, the Razorbacks have had 11 more players drafted, including Blaine Knight, who was selected with the 87th pick of the 2018 amateur draft.

Johnson also mentored Dakota Hudson, who was drafted 34th overall out of Mississippi State in 2016 by the St. Louis Cardinals. Hudson appeared in 26 games for the Cardinals in 2018, compiling a 2.63 ERA.

Johnson is the first external coach hired to join Baldelli’s staff since he was named Twins manager on Oct. 25. The Twins already brought back bench coach Derek Shelton, hitting coach James Rowson and assistant hitting coach Rudy Hernandez.

But the rest of the Twins coaching staff is being overhauled as Baldelli handpicks the group around him. Even though former pitching coach Garvin Alston was hired a year ago, it was thought that Baldelli would be allowed to choose his own pitching coach given the position’s importance to a new manager. Baldelli identified the hiring of his coaching staff as a priority in a press conference last month.

“I’d say every day a significant amount of time is spent on this,” Baldelli said. “This is extremely important. This is the group we’re going to go to work with at the major-league level and be representing the organization as a whole in all regards.

“We want to be as thoughtful, diligent — in some instances, as patient — as we need to be to fill out the staff in the ideal possible way.”

Johnson has openly embraced the use of TrackMan — a tool that catalogs a number of advanced stat data points — as part of his work with young pitchers. Instead of focusing on repeatable deliveries, Johnson told Whole Hog Sports that he's more concerned with a consistent release point height and works with pitchers to disguise their pitches.

“Velocity is one thing it gets and spin on the baseball, but more importantly to me is release point, tilt on their hands, spin axis of the baseball, extension,” Johnson said in January 2017.

The point of view has to be music to the ears of the Twins analytics team, which is still trying to smooth out its process of efficiently and effectively delivering information to its players. The front office is hopeful to avoid a repeat of last season when Ryan Pressly credited the Houston Astros for pushing him to use his curveball more often, something that was emphasized by Alston in spring training. Pressly credited Alston for making him feel much more comfortable using his curveball in any and all situations. However, somewhere along the way, emphasis on Pressly using the curve more got lost in translation. He increased his usage to 39 percent with Houston after throwing it only 24 percent of the time with the Twins, which led to a sparkling performance after the July 27 trade by the right-hander, including in the postseason.

A native of Sherwood, Arkansas, Johnson began his career coaching high school and American Legion. He has since coached twice at Central Arkansas and also worked as an assistant at Southern Arkansas.

Johnson's teams advanced to four NCAA Regionals in his five seasons between Dallas Baptist and Mississippi State, which won the 2016 SEC regular-season title and reached the NCAA Super Regional in his only season on campus.

The Twins had cast a net far and wide in their search for a pitching coach. Former Los Angeles Angels and Arizona Diamondbacks pitching coach Charles Nagy was among those considered. The Twins were also one of 7-8 teams to show considerable interest in Cincinnati Reds pitching coach Derek Johnson, who was hired away from the Milwaukee Brewers on Nov. 2.

Throughout the process, the Twins had discussed elevating Hefner. A pitcher with 50 major-league appearances to his credit, Hefner impressed former manager Paul Molitor so much early in the 2017 season that he was asked to join the traveling staff after one month. Pitcher Kyle Gibson has credited Hefner's work in his career turnaround. After he was sent up and down three times in 2017, Gibson rebounded and posted strong numbers over his final 10 starts of the season. He backed up that performance in 2018 and established career bests in ERA (3.62), innings pitched (196 2/3) and strikeouts (179) en route to being named the team's most improved player.