



Padres Press Clips

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Clayton Richard let go, another sign Padres going young in '19

[Kevin Acee](#)

[Clayton Richard](#)'s time with the [Padres](#) appears finished, a further signal the team is committed to giving its collection of young pitchers an abundance of innings in 2019.

“Opportunity,” Padres General Manager A.J. Preller said. “... We expect this group to grow, with another group coming behind them.”

With Richard being designated for assignment Thursday to make room on the 40-man roster for infielder [Ian Kinsler](#), the Padres have no pitcher who has made more than 26 major league starts. (Garrett Richards, signed recently, is not expected to pitch in 2019.)

In addition to Joey Lucchesi, who made 26 starts in 2018, the Padres have Eric Lauer, Jacob Nix and Brett Kennedy returning after their rookie seasons to compete to be in the rotation. Highly anticipated prospects Logan Allen, Chris Paddack and Cal Quantrill are expected to join them in big league camp.

Matt Strahm will be given a chance to make the transition from reliever to starter, and [Robbie Erlin](#), Bryan Mitchell and [Luis Perdomo](#) are also in the mix for the spring competition. Dinelson Lamet, considered an emerging possible ace last season before requiring Tommy John surgery, is believed on track to return midsummer.

Preller left open the possibility Richard could rejoin the Padres in the spring.

With a strong bullpen, so many young starters and a number of pitchers – such as Erlin and Perdomo – who have been highly effective going one time through the order, the [Padres plan a sort of mix-and-match approach with their staff](#) this season. They will often ask starters to go just four innings or so.

That piecing together would serve as a bridge as the young starters learn and build up their arms. The Padres also have a half-dozen other top pitching prospects due to arrive in San Diego between 2020 and '22.

Richard, whose second stint with the Padres began in the final two months of 2016, was given a two-year, \$6 million contract in 2017 that will pay him \$3 million next year. The 34-year-old left-hander had a 7.01 ERA with 1.63 walks and hits per inning pitched in 2018. Despite going on the disabled list at the end of August, his 158 2/3 innings led the Padres for the second straight season.

“He brought a ton to us the last few years,” Preller said. “He took the ball. He was a tremendous example to our players.”

The Padres do still seek a veteran pitcher to add to the staff, though that has cooled as a priority.

Kinsler, whose two-year, \$8 million deal struck last week became official Thursday, is expected to fill a leadership role.

Kinsler, 36, was traded in July from the Angels to the [Red Sox](#), with whom he won a [World Series](#). It was his first title after two previous trips to the World Series with the Rangers. Preller said Kinsler’s postseason experience among his 13 seasons in the majors, which includes him winning his second [Gold Glove](#) last season, will help foster “the culture we’re trying to build.”

Kinsler, a career .271/.339/.443 hitter who batted .240/.301/.380 in '18, is expected to start the season at second base for the Padres and eventually shift into a utility role filling in all over the infield.

The likelihood Kinsler will play second with Luis Urias beginning the season at shortstop seems to indicate top prospect Fernando Tatis Jr., a shortstop, is expected to begin the season at Triple-A.

Kinsler’s part in that evolution is what he and Preller talked about in a face-to-face meeting at the winter meetings and again last week before the sides struck a deal.

“He has a lot of baseball left in him,” Preller said. “... We talked about him coming to another stage in his career. He understand we have a lot of good young players coming up.”

Padres roster review: Travis Jankowski

Jeff Sanders

Sizing up the Padres' 40-man roster, from A to Z, heading into the 2019 season:

TRAVIS JANKOWSKI

- **Position(s):** Outfielder
- **2019 Opening Day age:** 27
- **Bats/throws:** L / R
- **Height/weight:** 6-foot-2 / 185 pounds
- **Acquired:** First round (44th) in 2012 (Stony Brook University)
- **Contract status:** Earned \$544,300 in 2018; will not be arbitration-eligible until after the 2019 season at the earliest.
- **Key stats:** .259 avg., .332 OBP, .346 SLG, 4 HRs, 17 RBIs, 45 runs, 24 steals, 37 walks, 73 strikeouts (117 games, 347 at-bats)

STAT TO NOTE

- **7** – Outs above average, tied for 17th in the majors with the Dodgers' **Cody Bellinger**, the Rays' **Kevin Kiermaier**, the Braves' **Adam Duvall** and the Astros' **Josh Reddick**. This range-based metric, as calculated by MLB's Statcast, accounts for both the number of plays made and the difficulty of them.

TRENDING

- **Up** – Jankowski debuted in the summer of 2015, spent much of 2016 in the majors as a fourth outfielder and had his opportunity to expand that role derailed the following April when a foul ball fractured his foot. He didn't make the big league roster out of camp in 2018, but he needed only a few weeks to

remind the Padres that the Pacific Coast League was beneath him. Jankowski hit .363/.452/.450 in 22 games with Triple-A El Paso in April, was recalled before the beginning of May and spent the rest of the season in a reserve role with San Diego. The look against right-handed pitchers was effective, too, as Jankowski hit .276/.345/.371 in 315 plate appearances compared to .188/.278/.234 against southpaws. Even in a crowded outfield, Jankowski started in 78 games, appeared in 101 (759 1/3 innings) and set or matched career-highs in batting average, on-base percentage, slugging, homers and RBIs. His 24 stolen bases were six off his career-high, but Jankowski improved his success rate from 71.4 percent in 2016 (30 steals) to 77.4 percent in 2018.

2019 OUTLOOK

- As odd as it sounds, Jankowski might be the best bet to return to the Padres outfield in 2019. He and **Franchy Cordero** are the only left-handed-hitting outfielders on the 40-man roster and Jankowski's abilities in the outfield (see stat to note) are matched by few across baseball. He might not develop into much more than a fourth outfielder, but his skillset is unique in an outfield flush with right-handed hitters (**Manuel Margot, Wil Myers, Hunter Renfroe** and **Franmil Reyes**).

PADRES POWER RANKINGS

(Currently 40 players on the 40-man roster)

ADVERTISING
[inRead invented by Teads](#)

1. **Eric Hosmer**
2. **Austin Hedges**
3. **Franchy Cordero**
4. **Jose Castillo**
5. **Anderson Espinoza**
6. **Travis Jankowski**
7. **Robbie Erlin**

8. Miguel Diaz
9. Greg Garcia
10. Austin Allen
11. Pedro Avila
12. Ty France
13. Javy Guerra

Removed from the roster

- [Carlos Asuaje](#) (claimed by the Rangers)

Padres roster review: Brett Kennedy

Jeff Sanders

Sizing up the Padres' 40-man roster, from A to Z, heading into the 2019 season:

BRETT KENNEDY

- **Position(s):** Right-handed starting pitcher
- **2019 Opening Day age:** 24
- **Bats/throws:** R / R
- **Height/weight:** 6-foot / 300 pounds
- **Acquired:** 11th in 2015 (Fordham University)
- **Contract status:** Made major league debut in 2018; earned at a rate of \$545,000 per season while in the majors in 2018
- **Key stats:** 1-2, 6.75 ERA, 18 strikeouts, 12 walks, 1.80 WHIP, 3.30 opponent average (6 starts, 26 2/3 innings)

STAT TO NOTE

- **2.0** – Home runs surrendered per nine innings in the majors, significantly up from his minor league rate (0.7).

TRENDING

- **Down** – Kennedy had never been a minor league midseason all-star before winning 10 of his 16 starts at Triple-A El Paso to earn the honor in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League. He'd been a level-at-a-time prospect, too, but the rebuilding Padres wanted a look at his stuff against major league hitters after a strong start to 2018 (2.72 ERA). It did not go well. Called up in August after RHPs **Tyson Ross** and **Jordan Lyles** were waived, Kennedy became the first

pitcher in big league history to allow three consecutive homers in his first big league inning and joined **Bill Fulton**(1987) and **Tyler Thornburg** (2012) to allow three straight homers in his debut. Kennedy allowed six runs in four innings in that start, five in his next and was sitting on a 7.58 ERA when he finally turned in a quality start, a six-shutout-inning effort at home against the Rockies. The momentum did not last. Kennedy allowed four runs in 1 2/3 innings in his next start in Cincinnati, his last of the year after having a season-ending patellar tendon debridement on his left knee.

2019 OUTLOOK

- Kennedy struck out 399 batters in 402 1/3 minor league innings, a rate (8.9 per nine innings he'll have to begin to approach to even entertain earning a long-term job. The stuff is average (92.1 mph average fastball velocity), so he'll have to be pitch-efficient in the strike zone, too. Also, Kennedy has never been hailed as a top prospect so the leash will be short as bigger names (think **Logan Allen**, **Michel Baez** and **Cal Quantrill**) push for big league innings. The list of names competing for the big league rotation is one fewer after **Clayton Richard** was DFA'd on Thursday, but Kennedy will have to impress from Day 1 this spring to truly be considered for the job.

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- Carlos Asuaje (claimed by the Rangers)

Kinsler eyes versatile role in SD; Richard DFA'd

Infielder brings experience to help top prospects Urias, Tatis

By AJ Cassavell MLB.com

SAN DIEGO -- No matter which positions [Ian Kinsler](#) ends up playing in 2019, he insists his role hasn't changed.

"Really, it's always been about doing whatever I can to help the team win," Kinsler said.

That may be true. But San Diego clearly presents a new situation for the longtime second baseman. On Thursday, the Padres and Kinsler finalized their [two-year, \\$8 million deal](#) with a club option for a third season. Lefty [Clayton Richard](#) was [designated for assignment](#) to clear space.

Kinsler is the reigning American League Gold Glove Award winner at second base, and he's clearly one of the game's best defenders at the position.

And yet, he's expected to see a bit of a change in roles in San Diego. With [Luis Urias](#) -- ranked by MLB Pipeline as the game's [top second-base prospect](#) -- on board, Kinsler's future as a second baseman is no longer certain.

For now, it seems likely that Kinsler will open the season at second, with Urias shifting to shortstop. But that middle-infield dynamic might be short-lived. When top shortstop prospect [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) arrives, the Padres will presumably look to use their two youngsters in the middle of the diamond. That might mean Kinsler seeing time at third base -- where he's played all of two big league innings.

"He's always been a good defender," said Padres general manager A.J. Preller. "He's a guy that catches the ball, has range, handles himself well. He obviously hasn't gotten a lot of opportunity on the left side. But he's a professional, and when we talked to him about being able to go over and play some on the left side, he said he was very open to it. He said, 'I'll be ready.'"

The Padres feel Kinsler's presence will make things much easier on Tatis and Urias, who are 19 and 21 years old, respectively. There's a steep adjustment for any youngster learning to play middle infield in the Majors, and Kinsler, 36, should help with that burden -- whether it's with an occasional start or with more than a decade of big league wisdom.

"In 14 years of playing Major League infield, there's a lot that goes into it that he's going to be able to share with that young group of infielders coming up," Preller said.

"Whatever I can bring to the younger guys, any experience I can offer, I'm happy to be there and to help," said Kinsler, who was recently crowned a World Series champ with Boston after two shots at the Fall Classic with Texas in 2010 and '11.

In Spring Training, Kinsler will take reps at both second and third base. When Tatis and Urias arrive in the Majors, he could find himself in a battle for playing time at the hot corner. But the Padres are still actively searching for another infielder -- preferably a third baseman.

That might force Kinsler into more of a utility role. Of course, his playing time with the 2019 Padres will be largely dependent on his bat. He slumped to a .681 OPS last season, a number that's 101 points lower than his career mark.

"I want to prove I've got a lot of baseball left," Kinsler said. "And I'm confident I'll be able to do that this year."

Kinsler's game has always been predicated on multiple facets. He's swiped at least 10 bags in all 13 of his big league seasons, and he's hit 10-plus homers in every year but one. He's won two Gold Gloves and owns a .339 career on-base percentage (though that number's dipped significantly in the past two seasons, as has his slugging).

"I like to push the envelope, and I'm going to make things happen," Kinsler said. "I like to play all-out, whether it's on defense, on the bases, at the plate. I'll do whatever it takes. I'm going to try to make things happen to put the pressure on the other team."

As for Kinsler's decision to play in San Diego, he was quick to cite the culture change he sees brewing. He's taken note of the team's top-rated farm system and even spoke with first baseman [Eric Hosmer](#) about the club's direction.

Kinsler and Hosmer were teammates on Team USA for the 2017 World Baseball Classic. A pair of epic games at Petco Park -- including a winner-take-all showdown against the Dominican Republic -- are clearly fresh in his mind.

"They were great games," Kinsler said. "They were really good teams, and really the atmosphere was tremendous. It was loud, it was energetic, electric."

"San Diego is really second to none. I've seen the park like that, and I want to be a part of it."

Padres part with Richard

San Diego's decision to part with Richard qualified as a surprise, given that the 35-year-old left-hander is still owed \$3 million in 2019. But Richard struggled in '18, having posted a 5.33 ERA and allowing a hit per inning.

Richard had surgeries on both knees during the offseason, though he was expected back and healthy for Spring Training. Ultimately, Preller said, he didn't want to limit the opportunities for his young pitchers in 2019. With Richard out of the rotation mix, the Padres still have three spots seemingly up for grabs behind [Joey Lucchesi](#) and [Eric Lauer](#).

"Clayton has been very professional," Preller said. "We gave him an opportunity a few years ago, and he made the most of that opportunity. He's a guy that's taken the ball, given us innings and given us a lot off the field, in terms of helping a younger group of pitchers."

"He had real value for us over the last few years. It was definitely not an easy call. Ultimately, looking at our club, we're going to value seeing some of these younger arms take innings. We want to see what they can do."

Gore poised to break out in 2019

By William Boor, Jonathan Mayo and Mike Rosenbaum MLB.com

When it comes to prospects, part of the fun is trying to identify the next breakout star before he becomes a highly touted, well-known name. Those prospects are often flying under the radar, either because they are coming off injuries, haven't performed up to expectations or are just beginning their pro careers.

With 2019 around the corner, MLB Pipeline has picked one of these types of prospects from each organization as a potential breakout candidate. Some of the names below might be more familiar than others, but they all could jump on the scene during the upcoming season and establish themselves as exciting prospects.

MacKenzie Gore, LHP, [Padres No. 2 \(MLB No. 13\)](#)

Gore, the No. 3 pick from the 2017 Draft, was limited by a recurring blister issue during his first full season and logged only 60 2/3 innings, posting a 4.45 ERA with 74 strikeouts and 18 walks over 16 starts. The 19-year-old southpaw's stuff and overall feel were still plenty good, though, and there's reason to believe he'll be even better once fully healthy, with a chance to move relatively quickly, in 2019.

Kinsler, Padres make 2-year deal official

Veteran infielder could move Urias to shortstop until Tatis arrives

By AJ Cassavell MLB.com [@AJCassavell](#)

The Padres entered the offseason in dire need of infield help. They landed some -- in a move that certainly qualifies as a surprise.

San Diego signed free-agent second baseman [Ian Kinsler](#) to a two-year contract with a club option for 2021, the team announced on Thursday. The deal is reportedly worth \$8 million.

To make room for Kinsler on the 40-man roster, the Padres designated left-hander [Clayton Richard](#) for assignment.

For the most part, the Padres' infield openings revolved around the left side, with both shortstop and third base available. Even though Kinsler is a lifelong second baseman, his signing might help address both of those needs.

[Luis Urias](#), the presumed second baseman of the future, is now the favorite to open the season at shortstop. He's played there plenty in the Minors, and has been mostly solid defensively.

When [No. 1](#) prospect [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) arrives at short -- potentially as early as May -- Urias will slide to second base, and Kinsler would serve as a utility option who could also play third. Still, a team source said the Friars are still looking to add at third base.

Kinsler, a four-time All-Star and reigning American League Gold Glove Award winner at second base, struggled at the plate last season, batting .240/.301/.380 with 14 homers. He was dealt from the Angels to the Red Sox midseason and played a useful role in their run to the World Series title.

Team sources made it explicitly clear that the Kinsler deal does not mean Urias is going anywhere in a trade. Quite the contrary, in fact. The Padres wanted a veteran with big-game experience to help guide their young infield.

They feel as though they've gotten that in the 36-year-old Kinsler.

Toolshed selects the 2018 All-MiLB Team

Guerrero, Jimenez, Paddack were among the best of the best

By Sam Dykstra / MiLB.com | December 21, 2018 10:00 AM

Each offseason, MiLB.com goes position by position for every farm system and honors the players -- regardless of age or prospect status -- who had the best seasons in their organization. The result is our [Organization All-Star series](#), which is now in the books for 2018.

This edition of Toolshed caps the 30-part series with its picks for the top performers at each position across every system. To qualify, a player must have been named an Organization All-Star for his farm system. In short, this is the best of the best from Minor League Baseball in 2018.

Introducing the inaugural All-MiLB Team:

Catcher -- [Danny Jansen](#), Buffalo (88 games), Toronto (31 games): Coming off a breakout 2017 in which he climbed three levels, the [Blue Jays' No. 3 prospect](#) solidified his place as one of the game's best-hitting catching prospects, and he was justly rewarded with a Major League debut in August. The 23-year-old backstop posted a .390 OBP, .863 OPS and 146 wRC+ during his time with Triple-A Buffalo -- the top marks for Minor League catchers with at least 300 plate appearances in 2018. His 12 homers in the International League represented a career high, two more than he hit in 2017 in 16 fewer games. He continued to show laudable plate discipline, with 44 walks and 49 strikeouts in his 360 plate appearances at the Minors' top level. Jansen's profile remains bat-first, though he was an above-average framer in the Majors. The 2013 16th-rounder has earned his spot as Toronto's expected Opening Day catcher, moving ahead of veteran backstop [Russell Martin](#).

Honorable mention: [Joey Bart](#) made an incredible first impression by hitting .298/.369/.613 with 13 homers in 45 games with Class A Short Season Salem-Keizer after going No. 2 overall to the Giants in June. [Austin Allen](#)'s 22 homers for Double-A San Antonio were most by a Minor League catcher, and he backed those up with a 130 wRC+. [Ronaldo Hernandez](#) hit .284/.339/.494 with 21 homers for Class A Bowling Green and also threw out 36 percent of attempted basestealers.

First baseman -- [Peter Alonso](#), Binghamton (65 games), Las Vegas (67 games): The Mets' No. 2 prospect may have captured the Joe Bauman Home Run Award on his last swing of the year, but it was his season-long breakout that landed him here. Yes, Alonso tied for the Minor League lead with 36 homers and led the Minors with 119 RBIs, but he was also among the full-season Minor League leaders in total bases (277, third), extra-base hits (68, third), slugging (.579, fifth) OPS (.975, ninth) and walks (76, 14th). With a 180 wRC+ at Double-A and 139 wRC+ at Triple-A, Alonso dominated both levels he saw in 2018 and would have pushed for a Major League cameo had the Mets been at all close to contention down the stretch. He'll bring big right-handed pop to Queens this spring.

Honorable mention: One of the closer calls in this category was omitting [Nathaniel Lowe](#) after the Rays' No. 13 prospect hit .330/.416/.568 with 27 homers in 130 games at Class A Advanced Charlotte, Double-A Montgomery and Triple-A Durham. A drop in production at that final stop kept him from jumping past Alonso, but the 2016 13th-rounder certainly put himself on the map

and has a Futures Game appearance to show for it.

Second baseman -- Jeff McNeil, Binghamton (57 games), Las Vegas (31 games), New York (63 games): At times in 2018, the Rumble Ponies and 51s had the best offensive right side of the infield across Minor League Baseball. McNeil led full-season second baseman in the slash-line categories, hitting .342/.411/.617 at the upper levels. The left-handed slugger's 176 wRC+ was not only 10 points higher than the closest competition at the position -- **Brandon Lowe** had a 166 mark -- it was fourth-best among all Minor Leaguers. McNeil collected 50 extra-base hits while striking out 42 times in 384 Minor League plate appearances, making him one of six of the 759 qualified full-season Minor Leaguers who had more extra-base knocks than whiffs. McNeil carried that hot bat to the Majors in late July and hit .329/.381/.471 in 63 games there. While that earns him no extra points here, it does emphasize just how real his 2018 offensive breakout was.

Third baseman -- Vladimir Guerrero Jr., GCL Blue Jays (three games), Dunedin (one game), New Hampshire (61 games), Buffalo (30 games): The easiest selection on here. The game's top overall prospect enjoyed a Minor League season for the ages, one that saw him still hitting .400 as late as Aug. 12. His final .381 average was 32 points above the next qualified full-season Minor Leaguer, and he also nearly lapped the field as the leader in slugging percentage (.636), OPS (1.073) and wRC+ (194). To put that into context, a wRC+ above 194 has only been posted in the Majors five times since 2000. Four of them were by Barry Bonds. The other was by **Bryce Harper**, in 2015. Guerrero clubbed 20 homers in 92 games and posted a nearly even 38/37 K/BB ratio. When he arrives in Toronto in 2019, he could become one of the game's best hitters immediately. As far as 2018 is concerned, he was undeniably the Minors' best hitter.

Honorable mention: **Taylor Ward** hit .349/.446/.531 with 14 homers and 18 steals at Double-A and Triple-A. **Josh Fuentes** was the Pacific Coast League MVP. **Bobby Dalbec** clubbed 32 homers and finished with a .919 OPS. Play a sad song for those who had to play the same position as Guerrero this season.

Shortstop -- Wander Franco, Princeton (61 games): There's only one Minor Leaguer on this list who played exclusively for a Class A Short Season or Rookie-level affiliate in 2018, and for good reason. With a limited schedule, that player would have to really dominate the lower levels to stand out compared to a large field of Minor Leaguers who played a full season at his position. Well, Franco really, really dominated the Appalachian League. At 17 years old, the Rays' top prospect was the circuit's MVP after hitting .351/.418/.587 with 11 homers, seven triples and 10 doubles in 61 games. His 159 wRC+ and 1.004 OPS were each tops among Minor League shortstops with at least 250 plate appearances, as was his rate of 1.42 walks per strikeout. The switch-hitter's .236 isolated slugging percentage ranked third among the 84 players in that group, ahead of more celebrated sluggers like **Fernando Tatis Jr.** (.221) and **Carter Kieboom** (.164). All of that happened in his first professional season, stateside or otherwise, as Tampa Bay got aggressive with the player it signed out of the Dominican Republic for \$3.825 million in July 2017.

Honorable mention: **Kevin Smith** hit .302/.358/.528 with 25 homers and 29 steals at Class A Lansing and Class A Advanced Dunedin, making him one of two 25-25 Minor Leaguers this season. **Gavin Lux** led full-season Minor League shortstops with a 147 wRC+ after hitting .324/.399/.514 with 15 homers. **Jazz Chisholm** hit 25 homers between Class A Kane County and Class A Advanced Visalia, six more than the next closest shortstop (Tatis).

Outfielders

Alex Kirilloff, Cedar Rapids (65 games), Fort Myers (65 games): Kirilloff entered 2018 as a bit of an unknown, coming off a Tommy John surgery that robbed him of his first full season. He finished it anything but. The Twins' No. 2 prospect led the Minors with 71 extra-base hits -- 20 homers, seven triples and 44 doubles -- and 296 total bases in his 130-game run. His 172 wRC+ ranked second among qualified Minor League full-season outfielders, behind only **Michael Reed**'s 178, which came in 157 fewer plate appearances. His .348 average was tops among the same group while his .578 slugging percentage came in second. It's worth noting that his spray chart was also **a thing of beauty**. Kirilloff showed one of the best combos of hit and power tools in the Minors this season, and it should be fun to see what he can do another year removed from major surgery.

Kyle Tucker, Fresno (100 games), Houston (28 games): Tucker's .590 slugging percentage beat out Kirilloff's for highest among full-season outfielders. The Astros' top prospect slugged 24 homers and 54 extra-base hits over 100 games in the Pacific Coast League, also pacing full-season outfielders with a .989 OPS. Beyond his power, he showed a good hit tool and enough plate discipline to post a .332 average and a .400 OBP. He also stole 20 bases, making him one of six members of the 20-20 club in the Minors in 2018. A lack of consistency in the Majors and the recent addition of **Michael Brantley** might complicate Tucker's situation in Houston, but there's no doubt he's earned an extended Major League look somewhere next season.

Eloy Jimenez, Birmingham (53 games), Charlotte (55 games): Jimenez was already one of the Minors' top hitters after he produced a .317/.368/.556 line with 10 homers at Double-A Birmingham into late June, and then he was promoted to Triple-A Charlotte, where he hit .355/.399/.597 with 12 blasts. By the end of the season, he ranked third among Minor League full-season outfielders with a .577 slugging percentage and 168 wRC+ while batting .337 over his two stops. The White Sox are chasing big fish in the free agency department, and a big reason is that a lineup that featured Jimenez, **Jose Abreu** and **Manny Machado** and/or Bryce Harper would be feared across baseball. MLB.com's No. 3 overall prospect brings that much thunder to the table.

Honorable mention: **Casey Golden** may have played in an offense-friendly environment at Class A Asheville, but his combination of 34 home runs and 24 stolen bases are mention-worthy. **Myles Straw** led the Minors with 70 thefts (in 79 attempts) between Double-A Corpus Christi and Triple-A Fresno. It helped that he had a .381 on-base percentage and 78 walks in 131 games.

Designated hitter -- Jabari Blash, Salt Lake (83 games), Los Angeles (24 games): If a Minor League team needed somebody to capital-H Hit in 2018 (and Vlad Jr. wasn't around), there was no better option than Blash. The 29-year-old outfielder's .700 slugging percentage and 1.131 OPS led Minor Leaguers who accrued at least 300 plate appearances. With 29 homers in 83 games with Salt Lake, he would have easily challenged Alonso and **Ibanel Isabel** for the Minors lead if he hadn't been called up to the Majors five times before the Minor League season was out. Yes, that production had to do with Blash's time at Smith's Ballpark, where he slugged .839 and hit 19 homers in 42 games, but even his .285/.405/.563 line on the road was mighty impressive. He was the definition of a Quad-A player -- he went 4-for-39 with 24 strikeouts in the Majors -- but his Minor League dominance has earned him a \$1.06 million contract with the Rakuten Golden Eagles in Japan for next year.

Right-handed starter -- Chris Paddack, Lake Elsinore (10 games), San Antonio (seven games): This shouldn't be a surprise since Paddack won the MiLBYP for **Top Starting Pitcher** in October, but it's worth reviewing just how dominant the Padres' No. 5 prospect was this season.

He struck out 120 batters and walked eight over 90 innings between Class A Advanced Lake Elsinore and Double-A San Antonio. Among Minor Leaguers with at least 75 innings pitched, that rate of 15 strikeouts per walk was the best. His strikeout rate of 35.3 percent placed fourth while his 2.4 percent walk rate was third-best. He was second in FIP (2.01) and 20th in ERA (2.10). With an above-average fastball and plus-plus changeup, Paddock kept California and Texas League hitters off-balance all summer, and he made that package play up by pitching consistently in the strike zone. He also did all of that after missing the entire 2017 season due to Tommy John surgery. With those health concerns in the past, no Minor League right-handed starter was as consistently dominant across the board as Paddock.

Honorable mention: **Dylan Cease** posted a 2.40 ERA and 1.06 WHIP while striking out 160 in 124 innings. **Josh James** led qualified Minor Leaguers with a 36.3 percent K rate by punching out 171 in 114 1/3 innings at Triple-A Fresno. **Michael King** ranked second among full-season hurlers with a 1.79 ERA and did so in 161 1/3 innings, fifth-most by a Minor League pitcher in 2018. **Denyi Reyes** finished with a 1.97 ERA and ranked second in the Minors with a 0.91 WHIP, thanks to his stellar control (19 walks in 155 2/3 innings).

Left-handed starter -- David Parkinson, Lakewood (17 games), Clearwater (five games): The Phillies' No. 19 prospect vaults into this spot for one big reason -- his ability to limit opposing runs. Parkinson's 1.45 ERA over 124 1/3 innings was the lowest among Minor League full-season pitchers this season and the fourth-lowest since 2005 behind **Justin Verlander's** 1.29 in 2005, **Jon Duplantier's** 1.39 in 2017 and **Blake Snell's** 1.41 in 2015. His other numbers were pretty spiffy, too -- 28.7 percent strikeout rate, 1.01 WHIP, 2.64 FIP. Philadelphia didn't exactly get aggressive with the 2017 12th-rounder out of Ole Miss, but that can't be held against him in Organization All-Stars considerations. Parkinson kept opponent after opponent at bay in his two stops in the lower levels.

Honorable mention: **Jesus Luzardo** became one of the game's best pitching prospects during his first full season post-Tommy John surgery and finished with a 2.88 ERA, 1.09 WHIP and 129 strikeouts in 109 1/3 innings while climbing from Class A Advanced Stockton to Triple-A Nashville. **Patrick Sandoval** split time between the Astros and Angels systems, posting a 2.06 ERA and 0.96 WHIP with 145 strikeouts and 29 walks in 122 1/3 frames across three levels. **Zac Lowther's** numbers (2.18 ERA, 0.98 WHIP, 151 strikeouts, 35 walks in 123 2/3 innings) were nearly similar at Class A Delmarva and Class A Advanced Frederick.

Reliever -- Colin Poche, Jackson (nine games), Montgomery (three games), Durham (28 games): The 24-year-old left-hander struck out 23 batters and allowed five baserunners to reach in 11 innings at Double-A Jackson before the D-backs sent him to the Rays in May. After another scoreless spell at Montgomery, he turned into the International League's most dominant reliever, posting a 1.08 ERA and 0.92 WHIP with 78 strikeouts and 17 walks in 50 innings with Durham. His combined 45.6 percent strikeout rate led all Minor Leaguers with at least 60 innings pitched. His 1.26 FIP was lowest among all Minor League relievers while his 0.82 ERA placed second. On top of all that, Tampa Bay's No. 24 prospect, who pitches with an above-average fastball and slider, was tough against both righties (.138 average-against) and lefties (.173 average-against). Poche was the prototype of what a dominant Minor League relief pitcher can be.

The Padres continue to seek impact talent after signing Ian Kinsler, but they're still waiting for the stars to align

By Dennis Lin

The Padres on Thursday dotted an “i” in their infield, announcing their two-year contract with Ian Kinsler while jettisoning another veteran, post-prime asset. Clayton Richard, who signed a two-year extension 15 months ago, was designated for assignment, a corresponding move that registered as a moderate surprise.

Yet greater intrigue remains in an offseason that has lacked it, at least in the way of headlines. If the Padres plan to field some star power in 2019, they continue to leave that “t” uncrossed.

A skeptical observer might view swapping Richard for Kinsler, a 2018 World Series champion who logged a .681 OPS during the regular season, as continued wheel-spinning. The Padres have uses for players who have seen and experienced baseball’s brightest stages. But to approach those stages themselves, they undoubtedly will need younger, nimbler additions.

Kinsler, they believe, will aid in molding at least a couple of up-and-comers. Much as Richard did throughout his return tour in San Diego, and much as Freddy Galvis did in his one-season stop, the 36-year-old has accepted the task of sharing his knowledge with younger teammates. Kinsler’s primary charges, fellow middle infielders Luis Urías and Fernando Tatis Jr., will be 21 and 20, respectively, on Opening Day.

In the short term, Kinsler’s arrival will require some day-to-day maneuvering. Urías, a versatile defender still considered the Padres’ future at second base, could be the starting shortstop on March 28, tangoing with Kinsler on double plays. Kinsler, a noted competitor who earned a second Gold Glove award last season, should see part-time duty at third base, where he has recorded two career innings and where the Padres continue to seek a more permanent solution. Tatis is expected to begin 2019 in the minors.

Longer term, after Tatis' inevitable promotion to San Diego, Kinsler's role should be well-defined: He's likely to spell Urías at second and whoever winds up being the pick at third, understanding that his two-year, \$8 million deal — which includes a \$3.5 million team option for 2021 — does not guarantee everyday playing time for long.

“We have some really good young infielders coming, and (Kinsler expressed interest in) being part of their growth and their development,” said Padres general manager A.J. Preller, who was in the Texas front office for the entirety of Kinsler's tenure there. “I think that was a big reason behind the two-year deal, and I think he expressed a lot of interest in the role. We think he's going to add a lot of value to the young guys, the clubhouse and to the team on the field.”

Preller employed similar rhetoric last September. Richard had just turned 34 and received a two-year, \$6 million extension. Now, after surgeries on both knees and a season in which he permitted a 5.33 ERA, the respected left-hander will depart to make room for younger options. That means further opportunities for young starters such as Joey Lucchesi and Eric Lauer and prospects such as Logan Allen and Cal Quantrill. The Padres are particularly excited about Chris Paddack, who returned from Tommy John surgery to dominate the High-A and Double-A levels.

Like Tatis, however, Paddack is a logical candidate to begin next season in the minors. He operated throughout 2018 on a pitch count and finished at 90 innings.

“I think we're realistic,” Preller said when asked about another innings cap for the right-hander. “I don't think right now at this time we have a set number. ... A lot of it we'll find out more in spring training, about where he's at from a performance standpoint. And then throughout the season, if he's able to make our club, then we'll start talking about what types of innings are a good next tier for him.”

Such uncertainty, surrounding Paddack and other pitchers, explains why Preller continues to sift the trade and free-agent markets for potential matches. Sources indicate that the Padres have mostly glossed over lower-tier possibilities, reasoning that their current young pitchers deserve those opportunities over the likes of Matt Harvey, who signed a one-year, \$11 million deal with the Angels.

“It’s definitely something we’ve been talking about and looking for, in terms of adding the right veteran piece to the rotation,” Preller said.

And while Kinsler might have plenty left to offer — his 57.3 career WAR dwarfs the accomplishments of any other Padre — he recently submitted a second consecutive down season. He will turn 37 in June.

At any rate, the Padres aren’t counting on either Kinsler or Wil Myers to hold down third base full time. The team appears to have some level of interest in Troy Tulowitzki, who reportedly is open to moving off shortstop; three team officials, including pro scouting director Pete DeYoung, attended the new free agent’s recent workout in Long Beach. (One rival scout described Tulowitzki as being in “incredible shape.”)

But despite retaining the power of name recognition, Tulowitzki, who would cost his next club only the league-minimum salary, represents more uncertainty. Toronto released the oft-injured former All-Star earlier this month, weeks after his 34th birthday.

“The million-dollar question is, how long will he be able to stay on the field?” the scout said.

So, the Padres are staying in the market for a younger, nimbler third baseman. The Yankees’ slick-hitting, not-so-slick-fielding Miguel Andújar could be an option, and at least one rival executive [sees San Diego as a possible destination](#). But unlike Tulowitzki, he would not come cheap.

That has been the case with every top name San Diego has pursued, from Noah Syndergaard to J.T. Realmuto.

“We’ll see,” one official said. “We haven’t lined up yet.”

Every passing day seemingly decreases the likelihood of alignment, of course. At some point, Preller’s claims that the focus remains within, on the development of internal talent, will be more reality than posturing.

Padres sign Kinsler to \$8 million deal, DFA Richard

SAN DIEGO (AP) — [Ian Kinsler](#) finalized an \$8 million, two-year contract Thursday with the [San Diego Padres](#), who cleared space on the 40-man roster by designating veteran left-hander [Clayton Richard](#) for assignment.

It's expected that Kinsler will play second base, allowing rookie [Luis Urias](#) to play shortstop until top prospect Fernando Tatis Jr. arrives in the big leagues sometime during the 2019 season.

Kinsler will make \$3.75 million in each of the next two seasons. The Padres hold a \$3.5 million option for 2021, with a \$500,000 buyout.

Kinsler, 36, won his second career Gold Glove Award last season, which he split between the Los Angeles Angels and the World Series champion [Boston Red Sox](#). The four-time All-Star batted .240 with 14 home runs and 48 RBIs in 128 games.

Richard, 35, was 7-11 with a 5.33 ERA.

Kinsler, Padres finalise two-year deal

Omnisport

Free agent Ian Kinsler swapped World Series champions the Boston Red Sox for the San Diego Padres.

Kinsler signed a two-year deal with a club option for the 2021 season, the Padres announced on Thursday.

The deal to bring the 36-year-old second baseman – a four-time MLB All-Star and two-time Gold Glove winner – to San Diego is reportedly worth \$8million.

Kinsler immediately becomes the elder statesman on a youthful Padres team, but do not expect him to be starting at second base on a regular basis.

According to reports, Kinsler will see time at both second and third as the team eases Luis Urias into the starting role at second and prepares top prospect Fernando Tatis Jr. to take over at shortstop.

Kinsler began last season with the Los Angeles Angels and ended it in a World Series parade after joining the Red Sox in a July 30 trade.

He slashed .240/.301/.380 with 14 home runs in 128 games overall — the worst offensive season of his 13-year MLB career.

2019 Category Sleepers: - BA

Seth Trachtman

It's never too early to prepare for your draft, and some of us draft fiends are already setting our draft dates for 2019 or even drafting now. The hot stove league is just taking shape, but it's still a fun time to look toward the 2019 fantasy baseball season.

For the fifth year in a row, I'll be breaking down category sleepers at each of the 5x5 roto categories. In the first installment of the series we'll be reviewing hitters who could be sleepers for batting average. Over 10 weeks, I will be providing a list of sleepers for each 5x5 roto category (BA, HR, RBI, R, SB, W, ERA, WHIP, K, SV). Since the hot stove league still has a long way to go this offseason, for the next few weeks we will focus on players in categories that are less based on opportunity and more based on skill. Other roto categories that are more dependent on opportunity, supporting cast, and batting order spot (R, RBI, SB) or team and manager (W, SV) will be discussed in the latter half of the 10-week series.

Before reading any further, it's important to note the definition of a sleeper. In this case, it's a player who will exceed draft day ADP AND projections in a particular category. The players are broken down by mixed league sleepers and single league sleepers.

Mixed League Sleepers

[Willians Astudillo](#), C, Twins

There's an emerging obsession in the baseball stat head community involving Astudillo, and it's not just that he resembles the cleanup hitter in your local softball league. Simply put, Astudillo's contact ability is legendary. He fanned only three times in 97 plate appearances during his MLB debut last season after tallying 14 strikeouts in 307 plate appearances at Triple-A Rochester. That means he recorded an unbelievable 4.2 percent strikeout rate for the year between Triple-A and the majors. He also has just three strikeouts in 205 plate appearances at the Venezuelan Winter League. Not only is Astudillo making contact with almost everything in sight, but he's a career .306 hitter in the minors and hit a whopping .355 in his limited sample size of playing time late last year with the Twins.

The .355 batting average hardly seems sustainable, but there's major promise for hitters with a sub-10 percent strikeout rate in the majors. Over the last four seasons, we've only had 14 qualified MLB seasons that have had a sub-10 percent strikeout rate, and nine of those hitters batted at least .280. Over the last 10 seasons, 49 of 79 (62 percent) hit at least .280. Astudillo has a truly unique offensive skill, especially in this day and age, and his qualification at catcher is a huge bonus for fantasy owners. Last season he appeared at catcher, third base, DH, second base, center field, left field, and even pitched in just the 29 games we saw him. If the Twins are committed to keep Astudillo around as a utilityman, the batting average upside almost certainly makes him worthy as a top 15 catching option.

[Willie Calhoun](#), OF, Rangers

Calhoun was supposed to be an AL Rookie of the Year candidate last season, but he never really got off the mat. The outfielder didn't make his first MLB appearance until July 20 and saw only 108 plate appearances for the entire season. The results were also disappointing when he did play (.222-2-11), and he suffered an odd power outage at Triple-A Round Rock, hitting only .294-9-47 in

470 plate appearances. It was a truly odd year after Calhoun hit 27 home runs at Double-A Tulsa in 2016 and 31 home runs at Triple-A in 2017.

At age 24, it's still much too early to give up on Calhoun, and there's reason to believe he can be a major batting average contributor. While his contact rate dropped off in the majors last year, Calhoun has notoriously been a great contact hitter in the minors with a career 11.2 percent strikeout rate and exactly 10 percent last year at Round Rock. It's no coincidence that Calhoun has also hit at least .294 in three out of four minor league seasons and his small strike zone at 5-foot-8 doesn't hurt, either. After a down year, Calhoun won't be handed anything next season, but there are positive reports this offseason with [Calhoun on his way to losing 20 pounds](#). His spring will be worth watching after last year's struggles, but he's at least still worth a flier.

[Yandy Diaz](#), UT, Rays

Here's a confession. This is the third time I've mentioned Diaz in this section over the last four seasons and the second year in a row. This will by the last time, I promise! Lack of opportunity was a big issue for Diaz in Cleveland, but it doesn't look like that will be an issue anymore after he was traded to Tampa Bay in the Edwin Encarnacion/Carlos Santana three-team blockbuster during the Winter Meetings. The Rays apparently prefer Diaz's potential over Jake Bauers, and he's finally set to see playing time at the infield corners. Diaz did fare well late last year when Encarnacion was injured, hitting .312/.375/.422 in 120 plate appearances. For most of the year, he was stuck at Triple-A yet again and hit .293/.409/.388 while the team hoped he would develop more power.

The lack of power is what has kept Diaz down in the minors, but the Rays apparently don't care. Diaz has posted an on-base percentage above .400 in four straight minor league seasons, and he's also a career .311 minor league hitter with more walks (328) than strikeouts (322) in 2,247 career plate appearances. The fact that he appeared at DH more than any other position last year limits his eligibility in standard-rules leagues, but he should get eligibility at one or both of the infield corners in short order. It also wouldn't be surprising if Diaz hit near the top of the batting order given his on-base ability.

Luis Urias, 2B, Padres

Here's another repeat offender from last year. Urias didn't arrive to the majors until late August, playing 12 games before getting hurt. He's moved very quickly through the Padres minor league system relative to age, as he was just 21 at Triple-A El Paso last year. It's easy to see why the Padres wanted to take their time last year with a strikeout rate that ballooned to a career-worst 20.5 percent after it was at only 12.4 percent at Double-A in 2017. The good news is that Urias continued to hit for average, hitting .296 for the second straight year, and he's still a .306/.397/.405 hitter for his minor league career.

The fantasy upside beyond Urias' batting average is somewhat limited, as he's yet to hit double-digit home runs and has only one double-digit stolen base season over five minor league seasons. However, he's a proven on-base machine in the minors and has never hit worse than .296 before reaching the majors. San Diego's recent signing of Ian Kinsler could potentially push Urias to shortstop until [Fernando Tatis Jr.](#) is ready, but it shouldn't disrupt his playing time in 2019. Added is the runs potential, as Urias hit either leadoff or second in the order in all 12 games with the Padres.

Single League Sleepers

[David Fletcher](#), 2B/3B, Angels

Infield injuries allowed Fletcher to get regular playing time in the second half of last season, and he did make some noise early on by hitting .324 in June. However, he had a sub-.700 OPS over the last two months of the season, failing to do anything notable for fantasy owners. As of this writing, Fletcher should compete for regular at-bats at second base or third base for the Angels, depending on where Zack Cozart winds up. He finished his rookie season with a more than satisfactory 11 percent strikeout rate after hitting .350 with only 21 strikeouts in 275 plate appearances at Triple-A Salt Lake.

Fletcher is a career .294 hitter in the minors, but there are valid questions about his ability to be a regular in the majors. He hasn't shown much power (career .398 slugging percentage in the minors), but Fletcher does bring some speed, peaking at 20 stolen bases in 2017. The possibility of being a regular doesn't bring much upside, but Fletcher's great contact rate and recent success in the minors makes him an intriguing flier for batting average.

Josh Naylor, OF/1B, Padres

At this point, it's safe to assume the Marlins are regretting the trade that sent Naylor to the Padres for Andrew Cashner and company in 2016. The 2015 first-round pick hadn't done much in the majors to that point, but he's now coming off a breakout year at Double-A San Antonio in 2018. The converted first baseman hit .297-17-74 with 64/69 BB/K in 574 plate appearances, facing more advanced competition after turning 21 in June. His plate discipline showed enormous improvement, and Naylor's strikeout rate went from 17.2 percent in 2017 to 12.0 percent last year. The performance also followed an impressive Arizona Fall League in which he hit .304-3-14 in 19 games.

Naylor's major league arrival isn't exactly around the corner, especially if he remains with the Padres. San Diego's current outfield depth chart is loaded, and Eric Hosmer is now the long-term first baseman. Still, with the progress Naylor showed last season, he's looking like a surefire regular in the majors, and he has a good shot to see regular playing time during the second half if he gets off to a nice start at Triple-A. The batting average and contact improvement we've seen recently makes him a player to stash in NL-only leagues.

[Kevin Newman](#), SS, Pirates

Hello, Newman! The 19th overall draft choice in the 2015 draft, Newman arrived to the majors late last season and is currently set to compete with Erik Gonzalez for the starting shortstop job in Pittsburgh. The Arizona alum has a typical 1980's shortstop skillset, with great contact ability, defense, and some speed. After a down 2017 season, he hit .302-4-35 with 28 steals in 477 plate appearances at Triple-A Indianapolis last season. He also hit .320 in 2016 between High-A and Double-A.

While Newman struggled in his major league debut, there is reason to think he has more ability to hit in the majors based on his skillset. Last season he fanned only 50 times in 477 plate appearances at Triple-A (10.5 percent strikeout rate), and he's shown consistently strong contact ability up through the minors. It's still possible Pittsburgh could sign another shortstop to compete with Newman and Gonzalez, but for now Newman has a great shot at winning the starting job. There's plenty of ability for him to help in NL-only leagues.

Kevan Smith, C, Angels

Smith was claimed off waivers by the Angels in late October from the White Sox, and he makes for an interesting catcher if the team doesn't make any additional moves at the position this offseason. Obviously, the prospect of value would be shattered if the Angels sign one of the remaining catching

free agents such as Yasmani Grandal or former starter Martin Maldonado, but for now Smith has a great shot to pick up more at-bats next to Jose Briceno.

He's already hit .281 in 497 career plate appearances, and there's reason to think that can continue if he sees semi-regular playing time. Smith drastically improved his contact rate last season, fanning less than 10 percent of the time (18 strikeouts in 187 plate appearances), and the 30-year-old was a career .284 hitter in the minors. It's worth noting his 9.6 percent strikeout rate was a bit out of character with what we've seen from Smith in the past, but he's generally been an above average contact hitter for his career (14.1 percent strikeout rate). With more plate appearances, Smith is definitely rosterable as a second catcher in AL-only leagues.