



Padres Press Clips

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Eric Lauer finishes strong, Padres finish off D-backs in 15th

[Jeff Sanders](#)

Eric Lauer saved his best for last.

The 23-year-old rookie struck out six over 6 1/3 innings of one run-ball in a 3-2 win in extra innings – before eight relievers followed him into Friday’s game, before [Hunter Renfroe](#)’s pinch-hit homer tied it in the 12th, before [Freddy Galvis](#)’ walk-off double in the 15th early Saturday morning – to put the finishing touches on an up-and-down first year in the majors.

“I didn’t have a hot start,” Lauer said after allowing an unearned run on seven hits, a walk and a hit batter. “I figured I had to finish strong to let them know I’m here to stay. I think today is a step in the right direction.”

Really, Lauer had been trending in the right direction since returning from a month-long stay on the DL.

He turned in five no-hit innings in his first start back from his forearm strain, four shutout frames the next time out and posted a 1.08 ERA and a .174 opponent average over his final five starts.

The surge lowered Lauer’s final ERA to 4.34 and improved his bid to enter [spring training](#) as a rotation favorite. It had been as high as 7.67 after the first seven starts of his career, which included allowing seven runs in his [MLB](#) debut in Colorado, six runs in 2 1/3 innings in his first Petco Park start and five runs in 2 1/3 innings to the Marlins to close May.

“It helps,” Lauer said of his finish. “I don’t want to say it’s a cherry on top because it wasn’t great all the way through, but it’s definitely a step in the right direction. It helps me feel better going into the offseason.”

Said [Padres](#) manager Andy Green before Friday’s game: “There’s a lot of work ahead still. None of these guys, all these young guys, are expected to be finished products right now and they’re going to continue to grow. Eric is one of those guys that’s going to have a chance to solidify himself in our rotation for years to come, but he’s going to have to perform to do it.”

Lauer certainly performed Friday.

Especially in tight spots.

He retired [Paul Goldschmidt](#) on a flyball to right and struck out David Peralta and Nick Ahmed after allowing back-to-back hits to start the game. He stranded two more batters in the second, one in the third, one in the fifth and benefitted from [Eric Hosmer](#) starting a 3-6-3 double play after David Peralta’s leadoff single in the sixth.

In the seventh, Lauer gave up a bad-hop single to [Chris Owings](#), a double to [John Ryan Murphy](#) and was pulled with runners on second and third after Galvis, with his back to the plate, reeled in pinch-hitter Patrick Kivlehan’s pop-up in shallow center.

Robert Stock walked a batter and Francisco Mejia allowed a run to score on a passed ball before Hosmer threw to the plate for one out on a groundball from [Eduardo Escobar](#). The inning ended when Galvis made an up-the-middle play on a grounder from Goldschmidt.

After Patrick Corbin shutout the Padres for five innings, the Padres tied the game seventh on Jose Pirela’s solo homer off reliever Silvino Bracho, his fourth of the season.

Arizona broke a 1-1 tie in the 12th when Ketel Marte doubled off Miguel Diaz to open the frame and moved to third on flyout to right-center.

After back-to-back walks to Goldschmidt and David Peralta, Marte scampered home on Nick Ahmed's shallow flyball to right.

The ball traveled only 220 feet, but Franmil Reyes casually hauled it in and then did not uncork a throw home quickly enough when Marte decide to go for the plate.

A half-inning later, Renfroe's pinch-hit homer to left – after a head and chest cold scratched him from the starting lineup – extended the game another three innings for Galvis to follow Javy Guerra's leadoff walk with a double to right for his first walk-off hit with the Padres.

“He wasn't feeling good at all today,” Green said of Renfroe. “I kept asking him if he had a [Kirk Gibson](#) moment, Michael Jordan flu game in him. He said he had a swing in him. That's what he had.”

Said Renfroe: “I was aware. I was there. I felt fine. ... I'll probably feel better tomorrow.”

Young arms could alter who Padres target this offseason

Jeff Sanders

Two years ago, [Edwin Jackson](#) arrived in San Diego as a midseason injection for a rotation that needed innings more than anything else. The task at hand was similar when [Clayton Richard](#) followed Jackson through Petco Park's clubhouse doors later that summer, returned to the organization the following winter and signed a two-year extension last summer. Other additions to an innings-starved rotation in the Andy Green era include a diminished [Jered Weaver](#)'s first foray into free agency, rebound projects in [Jhoulys Chacin](#) and [Trevor Cahill](#) and [Tyson Ross](#)' return on a minor league deal.

As often as the [Padres](#) think outside the box, General Manager A.J. Preller is sure to dig up an upside play or two (think Bryan Mitchell) for a rotation that ranks last in the NL in ERA. His farm system's coming of age, however, could significantly push the acquisition targets the organization considers this offseason to another level.

"That probably does change who we look at in the offseason," Padres manager Andy Green said entering the final weekend of the season. "We have a long list of guys that we believe in and want to look at in due time and if we feel there's a veteran anchor at the top of the rotation I'm sure A.J. will explore that."

Already has, actually.

But upside [prospects Chris Paddack and Luis Patino were a no-go](#) when the [Rays](#) considered moving right-hander [Chris Archer](#) to San Diego in July.

Both join MacKenzie Gore, Adrian Morejon and Michel Baez as the leading candidates to provide the Padres with homegrown, top-of-the-rotation arms for the forthcoming push to contend.

The quest to fill out that rotation with in-house talent is also well underway as the Padres, by the end of the season Sunday, will have handed 67 of their 162 starts to rookies, third most in the majors behind the Marlins (71) and Rays (70).

Rookies accounted for only 27 starts last year, one fewer than left-hander Joey Lucchesi will have made after Sunday's season finale against Arizona.

His trio of nine-strikeout efforts as well as near shutout bids from Eric Lauer and Jacob Nix are among the highlights in this discovery season. Similar opportunities await the likes of Logan Allen and Cal Quantrill as the Padres draw up spring competition depth chart that looks quite a bit different than having arms like Paul Clement, Jarred Cosart and Zach Lee vie for back-end jobs as they did in Green's second big league camp.

"We feel like we've got guys who have the capacity to pitch in the three-, four-, five-spots in the rotation in the big leagues, that have been here this year, that are young and that are coming," Green said. "Now it's can we move those guys toward the front end of the rotation? They haven't pitched like front-end starters. That wasn't the expectation of them, but now it's can we move those guys up to the two-spot in the rotation or if there's a five, can we move them up to a three-spot?"

Lauer's strides of late had been especially noteworthy as he was holding hitters to a .134/.256/.239 batting line in four starts off the disabled list before Friday's final turn.

Nix will be looking to end a four-game slump (9.82) in his final start on Saturday and Lucchesi can put his worst start of the season – seven runs in 3 2/3 innings in LA – behind him with a quality effort Sunday.

The list of 2019 rotation candidates beyond those three include Richard on the last year of his deal, the second year of the Mitchell experiment, Dinelson Lamet off Tommy John surgery around the all-star break, rookie Brett Kennedy, former Rule-5 picks Luis Perdomo and Miguel Diaz and left-handers Matt Strahm and Robbie Erlin. [The organization is even considering "bullpenning" games](#) to help bridge a

rotation gap that has dipped from 6th in the NL in 2014 (3.55 ERA) to dead-last this year (5.13 ERA).

In other words, Preller, as usual, will leave no stone unturned.

Not even the bigger ones, for a change.

“From a starting pitching standpoint,” Preller said, “we haven’t been good enough. Having some young players that we like that we think are going to grow into being quality starters, that will be a big part of the discussion. Exactly how do we supplement that group? Is it going to come from within or are some of these guys going to really climb a rotation and settle in as front-of-the-rotation guys that you need to win a division or are we going to need to have some guys from outside, from either the trade or free agency front?”

“That pursuit really starts on Monday when the season is over.”

Padres' Brett Kennedy undergoes knee surgery

Jeff Sanders

The way his left knee felt, **Brett Kennedy** wasn't expecting to pitch again this season. On Wednesday, the 24-year-old right-hander got a head start on corrective measures ahead of next [spring training](#): A patellar tendon debridement and PRP injection to address tendonitis.

Kennedy's left knee was in a brace Friday afternoon as he moved around on crutches. He said he expected to resume throwing by mid-November and would be 100 percent by the start of spring training, when he'll be among a long list of in-system pitchers competing for a rotation spot.

The ups and downs of his first stint in the majors, Kennedy said, at least gives him a leg up entering camp.

Kennedy finished the season with a 1-2 record, a 6.75 ERA and a 1.80 WHIP in six starts, but threw 10 scoreless innings at one point – including six shutout innings in a win over the playoff-hopeful Rockies – before allowing four runs on four walks and a hit in 1 2/3 innings in his final start in Cincinnati.

Before his promotion, Kennedy – an 11th-round pick in 2015 – was 10-0 with a 2.72 ERA and 80 strikeouts in 89 1/3 innings as an all-star at Triple-A El Paso.

He'll be near the top of long list of in-house pitchers – from rookies **Joey Lucchesi** and **Eric Lauer** to minor leaguers **Logan Allen**, **Chris Paddack** and **Michel Baez** – looking to win spots out of camp next spring.

“I feel like I got a nice taste of what I need to do going into spring training next year,” Kennedy said Friday afternoon. “I've had really good positives and really bad negatives. I know the spectrum of being a starting pitcher in the major leagues and

what you have to do to bounce back and what you have to do to get ready for you next start.

“Stuff like that will make it a lot easier next year trying to win a spot.”

Trevor Hoffman Way

Trevor Hoffman’s unforgettable summer officially concluded Friday afternoon as the [Padres](#) unveiled Petco Park’s new address: At the corner of Trevor Hoffman Way and Tony Gwynn Drive.

The San Diego City Council previously approved renaming the portion of Park Boulevard stretching from Imperial Avenue to the street named for the Padres’ Hall-of-Fame right fielder.

Hoffman’s honor comes two months after his induction into the Hall of Fame.

“To have the opportunity to once again be in connection with the great Tony Gwynn,” Hoffman said during the ceremony, “to be in the front of Petco Park, on a Chamber of Commerce Day, I don’t think I can elaborate much more than I’m honored to again be a part of Tony’s Legacy and commitment to the San Diego Padres. Just a tremendous year with so many celebrations, so many moments to be able to share with the fans, it’s something I’ll always remember.

“It’s tough to come up with a better summer than Trevor Hoffman had this year.”

Notable

- LF **Hunter Renfroe** was scratched from Friday’s starting lineup with a head and chest cold. **Travis Jankowski** started in his place.

Minors Talking with ...

Padres pitching prospect MacKenzie Gore

Jeff Sanders

The No. 3 overall pick in the 2017 draft and the top left-handed pitching prospect in the game according to MLB.com, 19-year-old MacKenze Gore threw once for low Single-A Fort Wayne before a blister on his left middle finger sent him to the disabled list. The bothersome blister sent him to the DL again in May and an issue with his fingernail ended his season in August. Gore finished his first full year in pro ball with a 4.45 ERA, 74 strikeouts and 18 walks in 60 2/3 innings.

Union-Tribune: How would you sum up your first full year of pro ball?

Gore: It was tough. It was a tough year. I learned a lot. I didn't pitch great. You can look at the results, look at the stats. It wasn't really normal. I was good in spring training. I was on the DL about half the year. It wasn't a great year, results wise. But I did learn a lot and hopefully I can get better from it.

U-T: What do you think is the most important lesson?

Gore: I learned a lot about myself, about how to prepare, about how when things aren't going your way, how to react to them. I knew I was going to overcome the struggles and I felt like I did the best I could.

U-T: Is it safe to say that that's the first time you've ever struggled in baseball?

Gore: For that long, yeah.

U-T: Plenty of farm directors will say they want their prospects to struggle before they reach the majors so they learn how to pull out of them.

Gore: In a long season, you're not always going to have your best stuff. You have to learn how to get people out with your B and C stuff and I got to pitch with that just about the whole year. Hopefully I figured that out.

U-T: So the numbers we see, none of that was with your A stuff?

Gore: In my opinion, no. I had flashes of good stuff, but on a consistent basis, there was never an outing where I had just great stuff.

U-T: Is it especially frustrating because it was about a blister?

Gore: I never wanted to make excuses about it. In my head I wanted to just figure out what was going on. I never wanted to say it was because of the blister, but by the last start it was almost to the point where we couldn't beat our head against the wall and we just had to call it quits.

U-T: What is your history with blisters?

Gore: I never had one until pro ball.

U-T: Do you think it had something to do with throwing a different ball than in high school?

Gore: I don't know what it is. We just have to get the finger tougher.

U-T: How much homework have you done on blisters this year?

Gore: (Laughs) There's been so much talk. I can't tell you how many times I've been asked "how's your finger?" over the last year. We've done a lot of homework. ... We have tried everything.

U-T: The left-handed high schooler taken this year, Ryan Weathers, was bumped quickly to Fort Wayne this summer. What was your impression of him?

Gore: He threw well in Fort Wayne. He's got a lot of feel and he threw a lot of strikes. This is his first offseason, so he's got to realize what he needs to work on and get after it these next four or five months. He'll be in good shape for next year.

U-T: You were participating in instructional league in Arizona when floodwaters from Hurricane Florence threatened your hometown in Whiteville, N.C. What was it like to watch that unfold from so far away?

Gore: It's tough, but being able to communicate with them helped a lot. I got home last week so it was nice to help as much as I could. My family was really involved in getting people stuff and things like that. The community really came together.

U-T: Year 2 is around the corner. What are your goals for next season?

Gore: I've got a lot to work on. I have to get a lot better. Pitching wise, I have to get better in every aspect that I can — my command, holding runners, everything. I have to get bigger and stronger and come into spring training ready to go.

Column | Fowler: Padres won't consider raising ticket prices until they win

[Bryce Miller](#)

The other day at Petco Park, [Padres](#) executives took part in the team's annual "social summit" meeting with ticket holders.

Executive Chairman Ron Fowler, COO Erik Greupner and General Manager A.J. Preller put their public-relations chins on the line in front of a couple hundred fans. When you're 25 games back in the [National League West](#), it's a position most execs in professional sports would avoid like a plate of typhoid tacos.

One fan wanted to know if Preller planned to re-sign shortstop [Freddy Galvis](#). Another wondered why the [Braves](#) could turn the corner so quickly. One made light of a ticket-renewal reward that amounted to a glass of champagne.

Fowler stole the spotlight.

When talk shifted to ticket prices, Greupner rightfully pointed out that prices have remained flat for three seasons. But yes, he said, an increase will come if and when the team begins to collect more wins than losses.

Fowler stepped in, ticking off the beauty of the park, the quality of the concessions and the experts in key organizational roles before slamming on the brakes: "Frankly, it means diddly until we win baseball games."

Circling back to Fowler on Friday, he added more specifics to internal discussions.

"First of all, I think we need to play .500-plus baseball before we'd even consider it," he said. "There was a proposal to go up this year, but I said no. Based on how we played last year, there's no way. They wanted to consider going up next year and I

said absolutely not. I would be embarrassed to try a ticket increase. There's nothing going on for next year.

“Frankly, the product has to precede the money. We've got to improve the product first.”

I've called out the Padres on plenty, from the depth of the investment in first baseman [Eric Hosmer](#) to hall of fame decisions, national anthem gaffes, the on-field product and more. To frame this ownership group as more of the same, though, simply doesn't pass muster.

Start with investment.

The genesis of the dizzying turnaround that transformed the Padres' sleepy farm system into the top-ranked group in the game was sparked by an unprecedented \$78 million worth of international talent. The pace and scope of that reinvention dwarfed the previous club record for one signing period, by at least \$73 million.

When [MLB](#) distributed more than \$50 million per club last August from Disney's \$1.58 billion investment in the homegrown streaming media service called BAMTech, Fowler said the Padres sank every nickel back into the team.

This, after back-to-back capital calls totaling \$35 million buoyed plans for upcoming roster acquisitions. Fowler said none of the money, other than an interest payment, has been returned to owners.

The player development staff was increased by more than 30 percent to accelerate the timeline for the glut of incoming prospects. In four years, there have been about \$60 million in improvements to Petco — with a plan to spend nearly \$13 million in the next three years on structural steel enhancements, along with about \$2.5 million to remake the Omni Premier Club.

To boot, Fowler said he believes the Padres are only owners in baseball that buy their individual season tickets.

When the meeting with ticket-holders wrapped up, Fowler pointed to a patch of rust he noticed. Earlier, he pointed out some areas that needed power-washing. The work orders went out before the first pitch of the prospects game that night.

That attentiveness to the details and fan experience is something Chargers fans only dreamed of when the NFL still called Qualcomm Stadium home.

“You can’t do it once and expect it to stay great for 10 years,” Fowler said of improvements. “Next to the water (San Diego Bay), it doesn’t work that way.”

Call out the play on the field all you want. There’s plenty of reason to gripe and grouch aplenty. The team desperately needs a third baseman, a veteran starter, a car-load of bats.

Call them out if there’s not a faster start in 2019 and clear improvement by the end of the season. Call them out if they’re not competing for a playoff spot in 2020 ... and beyond.

To call out a lack of genuine front-office effort or investment, though, just doesn’t match the facts.

Back at the meeting with ticket holders, Fowler explained that he calls Preller once a week to be reassured about the direction of the franchise. Preller fills a unique GM role, seeing more talent in more places with his own eyes than perhaps anyone with the same business card in the game.

Those faces represent the future.

“I just see the clunker in San Diego,” Fowler said. “I think I should be cutting his salary because he’s having all the fun.”

That, after leading off the event by telling fans, “Thank you for sticking with us. ... I can appreciate it’s been difficult for you.”

Fowler gets it. He usually does.

Galvis ends marathon with walk-off 2B in 15th

By Katie Woo

SAN DIEGO -- The Padres and D-backs are eliminated from the postseason, but that didn't stop them from putting up a fight Friday night at Petco Park. [Freddy Galvis](#) provided the knockout punch for the Padres via a walk-off double in the 15th inning for a 3-2 win.

Pinch-hitter [Javy Guerra](#) worked a walk off [Matt Andriese](#) to lead off the bottom half of the 15th, setting the table for Galvis' seventh at-bat of the game. He delivered, lining a sharp double down the right-field line for San Diego's sixth walk-off victory of the season.

The game was a seesaw battle from the start, with the Padres and D-backs spending the first six innings in a scoreless tie. The D-backs got on the board first after a [Francisco Mejia](#) passed ball allowed [Chris Owings](#) to score in the seventh inning. [Jose Pirela](#) tied it in the bottom half, hitting his second home run in three games on the first pitch from [Silvino Bracho](#).

Arizona reclaimed the lead in the 12th inning with some help from the Padres' defense. With [Miguel Diaz](#) on the mound, one runner on and one out, manager Andy Green opted to intentionally walk [Paul Goldschmidt](#) and [David Peralta](#) to load the bases. [Nick Ahmed](#) lofted a shallow fly ball to right fielder [Franmil Reyes](#). Reyes appeared catch the ball nonchalantly and bobbed it on the exchange. [Ketel Marte](#), who didn't initially break hard from third base, was able to score from third for the go-ahead run.

"From my vantage point, it looked like someone who didn't think the runner was going to go," Green said.

"You need to anticipate that they're always going to run. ... We'll catch up with that," Green said. "He's smart, he's going to learn from that really quickly. That was a frustrating way for a run to come in."

[Hunter Renfroe](#) tied it again in the bottom of the 12th. After [Archie Bradley](#) struck out Mejia and Pirela to leave the Padres down to their last out, Renfroe -- who was scratched from Friday's lineup with a cold -- entered the game as a pinch-hitter. He uncorked on Bradley's first pitch for a 422-foot home run.

"He wasn't feeling good at all today," Green said. "I kept asking if he had a Kirk Gibson moment in him or a Michael Jordan flu game. He said he had a swing in him, and that's what he had in him. He was able to go out there and gut it out in the outfield. That was gutsy from him."

The blast was Renfroe's 26th of the season and his third pinch-hit home run. It left the bat at 109.8 miles per hour, per [Statcast™](#).

"I got [to the park] today, took some medicine and really tried to relax," Renfroe said. "It calmed down enough for me to be able to pinch-hit."

LAUER ENDS ON HIGH NOTE

[Eric Lauer](#) saved one of his best efforts for the final start of his rookie season, hurling 6 1/3 innings of one-run ball (the run was unearned) and striking out six.

With his rookie season in the books, Lauer leaves a favorable impression leading into Spring Training's rotation race. September was especially emphatic for the 23-year-old, who posted a 1.33 ERA through his final four starts.

"It's been a really good September for him," Green said. "He's come back, thrown the ball really well, made some adjustments. For him, I think he knows that his fastball really does play. If he can locate some spin pitches, he's going to be fine. He really finished strong for us this year."

"I just feel like I'm pitching more like myself," Lauer added. "I didn't have a hot start, so I figured I have to finish strong and let them know that I'm here to stay. Today was a step in the right direction."

BULLPEN STELLAR ONCE MORE

Eight Padres relievers combined for 8 2/3 innings of one-run ball, with just three hits. Diaz ran into trouble in the 12th, issuing two walks, but Renfroe's key homer got him off the hook. [Brad Wieck](#) and [Kirby Yates](#) each had notable performances -- the duo struck out six of the combined seven batters they faced in the eighth and ninth innings.

MITEL REPLAY OF THE DAY

After tying the game at one in the seventh inning, the Padres had a good chance to extend their rally. [Travis Jankowski](#), the team's leader in stolen bases, followed Pirela's homer with a single. He tried to swipe second, but was tagged out. The Padres challenged, but the call stood for the second out of the inning.

UP NEXT

[Jacob Nix](#) will make his final start of the season, and he'll hope to fare much better than he did in his previous appearance. Nix lasted just 2 1/3 innings against the Dodgers and gave up six earned runs. Nix has shown promise for the future, but he's been plagued by inconsistency in his first two months in the big leagues. He'll face [Zack Godley](#), with first pitch scheduled for 5:40 p.m. PT.

Friars unveil Trevor Hoffman Way next to Petco

By Katie Woo

SAN DIEGO -- Petco Park has a new address. It now resides at the corner of Tony Gwynn Drive and Trevor Hoffman Way.

The Padres unveiled the new street alongside their stadium -- named in honor of Hoffman, who was enshrined in the Hall of Fame earlier this year -- on Friday before the team's final series of the 2018 season. Hoffman was joined by fans, Mayor Kevin Faulconer, San Diego City Council members Chris Ward and Mark Kersey, and Padres executive chairman Ron Fowler for a ceremony at the intersection prior to the Padres' matchup against the D-backs.

Two days after the closer's Hall of Fame induction, the Padres organization submitted an application to the city asking that the stretch of Park Boulevard that ran parallel to the stadium be renamed in Hoffman's honor. The city approved the request unanimously Monday, with the Padres agreeing to pay all costs associated with the signage.

"[Naming a street] is reserved for a very special few," Fowler said. "Trevor is one of those few, not only because of his induction into the Hall of Fame, but also because of his steadfast commitment to his team and, most importantly, this community. We are thrilled that Petco Park will forever be located at the historic intersection of Tony Gwynn Drive and Trevor Hoffman Way."

The street naming concluded a season-long celebration of Hoffman; Padres fans this season were treated to Hoffman-themed giveaways throughout the season, fireworks celebrations in honor of his Hall of Fame induction and the unveiling of a Hoffman statue inside the stadium.

"Each [honor] in its own right has been equally special," Hoffman said. "The statue, obviously, the Hall of Fame ceremony and the parties surrounding it. ... Being able to drive down the street I come in every day and where I finished some of my runs when I was a player, and is now named after you is pretty cool."

Asked how next season could top the year-long celebration this season, Hoffman replied with a laugh.

"Well, I turn 51 next year," he said. "Maybe we'll throw a year-long party."

Worth nothing

- [Kirby Yates](#) will pitch in the MLB Japan All-Star Series this year, a tournament between members of Major League Baseball and Japan's national team, Samurai Japan. The best-of-six tournament is scheduled for Nov. 9-15 and has featured notable players such as Barry Bonds, Ichiro Suzuki, David Ortiz, [David Wright](#) and [Jose Altuve](#).

- **Brett Kennedy** underwent left knee surgery to clean up the area surrounding his patellar tendon. Manager Andy Green said the surgery was nothing major and expects Kennedy to be ready for Spring Training. Expected recovery time is about six weeks.

A game of inches, a seismic shift: How Kirby Yates' adjustments helped him become a top-tier reliever

By Dustin Palmateer

When the Padres acquired Kirby Yates off waivers last April, his baseball career was on life support.

After struggling in parts of two seasons with the Rays, Yates had posted some deceptively good numbers with the Yankees in 2016, recording then-career bests in K/9 (10.9) and groundball rate (44 percent). The under-the-hood improvements weren't enough to overcome a 5.23 ERA, though, as permanent spots in the perpetually-crowded Yankees bullpen are always tenuous. Yates was designated for assignment after the season but claimed by the Angels, where he'd presumably fight for a bullpen spot in 2017.

Yates' Angels career lasted for five batters: In an April 22 game against the Blue Jays, a strikeout and two fly outs were bookended by solo home runs. L.A. had seen enough, unceremoniously DFA'ing Yates the next day. For a 30-year-old reliever without a run of sustained big-league success, the opportunities can dry up quickly. Right-handed relief pitching is never in short supply, with most teams having an ample stash in the minors.

Luckily for Yates, last year's Padres — much like this season's squad — were working through the doldrums of a multi-year rebuild. Their bullpen featured pitchers like Jarred Cosart and Rule 5-er Miguel Díaz; in other words, they had room to spare for an early season addition, and Yates would have the freedom to experiment far away from a pennant race.

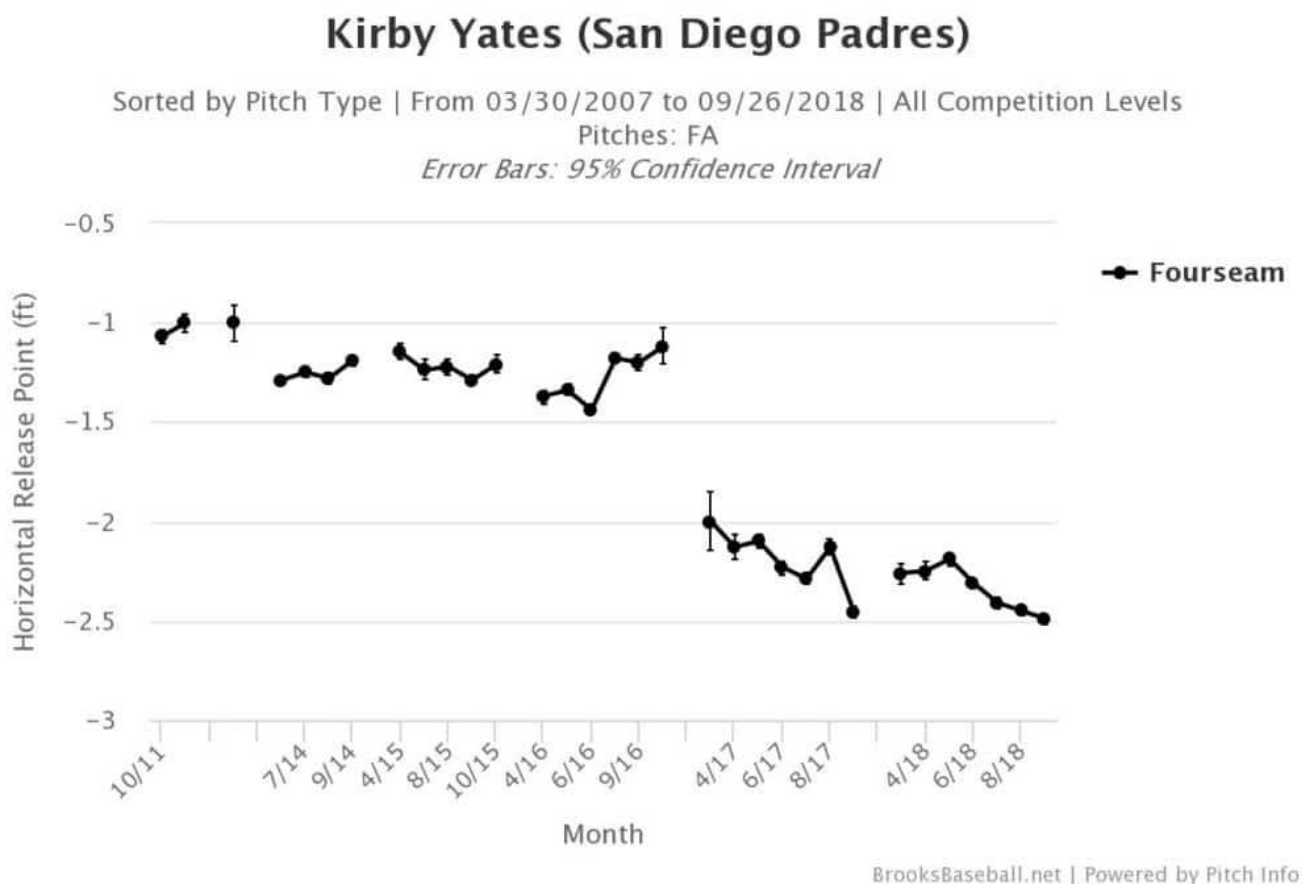
Yates, of course, wasn't without some upside. With the Rays organization in 2013 and 2014, he struck out 128 and allowed just two home runs in 86 2/3 innings at Triple-A Durham. Despite lackluster control, he'd largely conquered the minors by the time the Padres acquired him. Further, he had already proven that he could run the fastball up there in the mid-90s, showing spurts of success with New York. Like just about any pitcher good enough to make it to the majors, Yates, in theory, was just a few adjustments away from breaking through.

Since joining the Padres, Yates has not only ascended to the closer's role in San Diego, he's turned into one of the best relievers in baseball.

With San Diego, Yates has struck out more than 13 batters per nine while taming walk and gopherball issues along the way. According to both *Baseball Prospectus*' [DRA and cFIP](#), Yates has been a top-five pitcher in 2018, trailing only the likes of Edwin Díaz, Ryan Pressly and Josh Hader. He's outpitched bigger names like Craig Kimbrel and Aroldis Chapman, he's been better than former teammate Brad Hand and inning-for-inning, Yates has pitched as well or better than starters like Jacob deGrom and Chris Sale.

Yates has been a model of success at his position, crafted seemingly out of thin air. How has he gotten so good?

It started in 2017, before he was discarded by the Angels, with a [seemingly innocuous change](#).



The above graph from [Brooks Baseball](#) shows the average horizontal release point for Yates' four-seam fastball in each month of his career. Notice the abrupt dip in April of 2017 — Yates moved to his right on the mound when he joined the Angels, a change that carried over with the Padres.

Here's what it looks like in GIF form (left is from 2016, right is from 2017):

A minor change in appearance, Yates' set position moved by a foot or more, from one side of the pitcher's plate to the other. In a game of inches, it qualified as a seismic shift. It also gave Yates a better angle of attack against right-handers. The numbers followed:

| Year | Righties Faced | Strikeout % | Walk % | OPS Against |
|------|----------------|-------------|--------|-------------|
| 2016 | 121 | 25.6 | 10.7 | .829 |
| 2017 | 133 | 39.1 | 6.8 | .594 |
| 2018 | 131 | 40.5 | 3.8 | .412 |

From 2016 to 2017, Yates improved his strikeout percentage against same-sided hitters by 13.5 percentage points, from an already solid 25.6 percent to an otherworldly 39.1 percent. His walk rate also fell significantly; not surprisingly, Yates' OPS against nosedived more than 200 points. This season, he's gotten even better, inching his strikeout rate over 40 percent while cutting the free passes nearly in half.

In 2017, Yates [posted the seventh-highest](#) strikeout percentage among relievers in all of baseball. It was a certifiable break out, as he transformed from bullpen also-ran to shutdown reliever in one season.

But Yates wasn't a finished product. Last season, he allowed 12 home runs in just 56 2/3 innings, double the amount any manager would be comfortable with for a high-leverage relief arm. He also struggled against left-handers; southpaws tagged him for seven of those homers in just 98 plate appearances. For Yates to evolve into a true relief ace, he'd have to get even better.

Back to the drawing board.

In 2017, Yates worked primarily with a fastball and slider. According to [Brooks Baseball](#), those two offerings comprised 86.5 percent of his pitch mix. His third pitch was a splitter that he sprinkled it in sparingly, just one in 10 pitches. Yates had [workshopped the splitter](#) back with the Yankees, unveiling it officially in his brief but eventful Angels tenure.

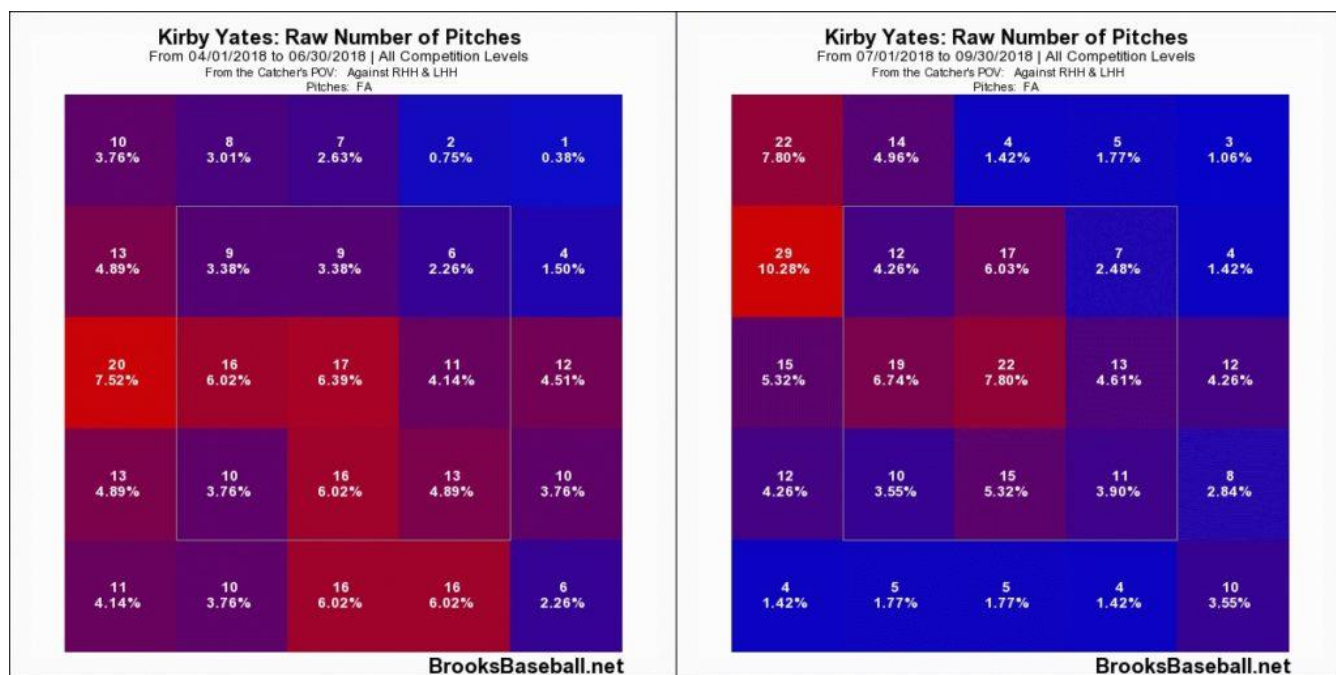
Searching to cure the hiccups against lefties, Yates has made the splitter his second pitch in 2018. In turn, he's all but shelved the slider, instead using the splitter 36.9 percent of the time. Against lefties, that number jumps to 42.2

percent. It's not just an ordinary splitter, of course; Yates throws it harder than most, and it picks up [whiffs and ground balls](#) at an above-average clip.

As Travis Sawchik noted back in June [at FanGraphs](#), the change has made Yates a different pitcher. Through June 19 — when Sawchik wrote his article — he had gained a staggering 23.4 percentage points on his groundball rate. Through the end of July, Yates allowed just *one* home run in 42 1/3 innings. Lefties no longer feasted off him.

Yates had somehow gotten better still, beating the odds on reliever volatility and small-sample success. But something was amiss. Ditching the slider for the splitter had taken a toll on his K rate. In the first half, Yates' 32.4 percent strikeout rate ranked [25th in the league](#) among relievers, down 18 spots from his 2017 standing.

There was time for one more adjustment.



Left: April through June, Right: July through September

In the second half, Yates flipped how he was working with his fastball, using it almost exclusively up in the strike zone (and above). The alteration led to a brief uptick in home runs, as Yates allowed four dingers in a 7 2/3 innings stretch in August. He's surrendered just one in the 11 innings since, however, and returned toward the top of the [strikeout leaderboard](#), surging back to seventh in K rate and third in K%-BB%.

| Time Frame | Strikeout % | GB % | Splitter % | ERA |
|------------|-------------|------|------------|-----|
|------------|-------------|------|------------|-----|

| | | | | |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|
| 2017 | 38.1 | 28.9 | 10.5 | 3.97 |
| 2018, First half | 32.4 | 50.0 | 35.7 | 1.43 |
| 2018, Second half | 40.4 | 28.6 | 38.1 | 3.09 |

Yates has returned to something closer to what he was last season, but he's continued to use the splitter at a heavy rate. In any form, the latest versions of Yates make him one of the game's most unheralded (and best) relief pitchers, a far cry from where he was two seasons ago.

With a sharp eye for underlying talent and impending improvements — and the expert guidance of longtime pitching coach Darren Balsley — the Padres have specialized in [reliever reclamation projects](#) in recent years and beyond. Yates, once DFA'ed twice in half a year, was smartly plucked off the waiver wire and allowed to try new things. Quietly, he was converted into a bullpen ace.

Yates will enter this offseason as the best reliever in a good bullpen. Signed through 2020, like Hand a year ago, it wouldn't be surprising if the Padres signed him to a small extension over the winter. It also wouldn't be surprising if Yates — three years older than Hand — was placed on the trade block, used to improve glaring holes elsewhere.

For Yates and the Padres alike, the union has already paid dividends. Now it's time to see what's next.

Third base not likely to be the final position in Wil Myers' nomadic career

By Dennis Lin

Wil Myers on Friday collected his 35th start at third base, a position he has played exclusively since returning from the disabled list last month. The Padres probably will start him there again Saturday and then again in Sunday's season finale. Yet it is unknown whether he will be stationed in that particular corner when the San Francisco Giants visit Petco Park next March 28.

Myers presumably will enter the offseason with the following totals in his Padres career: 37 starts at third, 321 at first, 34 in left field, 33 in center and 15 in right. For all his uneven play at a new position, these last six weeks have represented a snapshot of continuity amid a larger, jumbled picture.

Since debuting with San Diego in 2015, Myers has crisscrossed the field without finding a stable home. This season has been particularly maddening for fans skeptical of the organization's rebuild. Myers was moved off first base, his assignment of the last two years, with Eric Hosmer's signing. He drew favorable reviews in left field, sat through a spate of injuries and took on a significantly more difficult challenge at third, allowing the Padres greater opportunity to evaluate corner outfielders Hunter Renfroe and Franmil Reyes.

While Renfroe and Reyes have taken measurable strides forward, Myers remains more enigmatic than productive. General manager A.J. Preller at some point will have to assemble a contending roster, and the Padres' experience with a player signed to an \$84 million extension has gone less than smoothly.

So, where will Myers fit in 2019? Will he play one position or more? What is his preference?

"It's one of those things where I think you just take what they give you," Myers said before Friday's game against Arizona. "I would like to play one position and really focus on one of them. ... Obviously, I've had my struggles at certain positions, but I have enjoyed bouncing around the field. I also would like to nail down one position. Like, hey, this is where I am going forward, I'm not really moving off of this. If there's a situation in the game that we have to

double-switch, sure, but this is where I'm playing every day, this is what I'm going to do, and kind of go from there.

“Honestly, I did really enjoy left field. I thought that was a position that was a lot of fun. And I've also enjoyed third base. I'm pretty sure we'll have a meeting soon about where the best position is for me going forward. Either one of them, I'm fine with. I feel like I learned to play left field really well, and I feel like right now I'm learning to play third base as well. So whatever they decide, whatever we decide going forward, I think will be great. But as far as nailing down one position, I feel like that can help.”

The easiest solution may appear to be keeping Myers at third. Renfroe and Reyes have been the Padres' most effective hitters in the second half, and both possess vast power potential. Franchy Cordero, another outfielder with tantalizing gifts, is expected to return next season after requiring bone-spur surgery. Third baseman Christian Villanueva, whose own campaign was cut short by a finger fracture, cranked 20 home runs but also posted a .299 on-base percentage.

But the early returns from Myers' hot-corner introduction — he hadn't played there since 2012, when he was with Kansas City's Triple-A affiliate — have been lukewarm. The intricacies of the position have presented a steep learning curve. Myers began Friday sporting a .930 fielding percentage at third. In the seventh inning, a hard-hit grounder shot by him and into left field. He was initially tagged with an error; the official scorer later changed the ruling to a single.

Before the game, Padres executive chairman Ron Fowler alluded to a potential end to Myers' fledgling third-base career, at least in San Diego. Fowler, who was responding to questions about the team's outlook, added that the verdict did not rest with him.

“I still think we need someone to lead the staff next year, a No. 1 or No. 2, and hopefully we can find that,” Fowler said. “And we also need a third baseman who plays like we think a typical third baseman should play. And I don't think we have that, even though it was nice of Wil to step in when Villanueva was hurt.”

Fowler was asked if he thought Myers could become a viable option in time.

“That’s going to be for the baseball guys to decide,” Fowler replied. “For me? I think he’s probably a better corner outfielder than he is a third baseman.”

The same question had been posed to Myers earlier in the afternoon. Did he believe he could develop into an above-average third baseman?

“I definitely think so,” Myers said. “I’ve had moments that have not been very good. ... But the more I’ve played it, the more I’ve worked at it, the more comfortable I’ve gotten.

“I know I’ve made some good strides at third base, I like where I’m at right now, and I know there’s still a lot for me to learn, more so than just ground balls.”

Myers referred to his 2016 experience with first base as an instance in which he acclimated to a previously unfamiliar task. It helped, he said, that he spent an entire offseason knowing he would play there.

This upcoming winter, of course, is rife with possibilities. The Padres could seek to ease their outfield logjam by trading Renfroe or Reyes. They could attempt to add a proven third baseman. They could entertain deals involving Myers, though his contract would complicate discussions. Much is unknown.

For now, it seems the third-base experiment is not quite over.

“I think in his heart of hearts he’d love to have one spot designated to him,” Padres manager Andy Green said of Myers. “That probably goes for a lot of players on championship clubs, too. (Chicago Cubs third baseman/outfielder) Kris Bryant doesn’t necessarily have that right now, either. So what I’ve appreciated about (Myers) all the way through is the willingness to do whatever we need to win and the willingness to move based on that. ... He’s versatile, and I think there’s probably a very good chance that we ask him to continue to be versatile for us.

“We’ll step back in three days, after the games are over, and we’ll talk to him about what he feels like he needs to be consistent (at third base) on an everyday basis for a playoff-contending team, because that should be our bar. And if we feel like we can get there, we’ll continue to work him there.”

Myers indicated an openness to a scenario in which he would remain at third. He attributed his lack of offensive production since his positional change to the normal struggles of returning from the disabled list. He acknowledged this has

been a season full of disappointment. He entered Friday's game hitting .258/.320/.457, having missed roughly half the season because of various injuries.

He also was asked if he thought too much had been asked of him.

"I never want to say that, as far as too much," Myers said. "I feel like I can do anything that anybody asks of me on the field, and yeah, I want to embrace those types of things. But there is something to be said about sticking to one position and focusing on one position, knowing your job going forward. I think that can also help as well."

Galvis' double lifts Padres over Diamondbacks 3-2 in 15

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO -- [Javy Guerra](#) raced around the bases with one thought in mind. And even if third base coach Glenn Hoffman had held up his hands, Guerra was going to ignore them.

[Freddy Galvis](#) doubled home Guerra from first base with the winning run in the 15th inning Friday night to give the [San Diego Padres](#) a 3-2 victory over the [Arizona Diamondbacks](#) in a game that lasted 5 hours, 2 minutes.

"Even if I get the stop sign, I wasn't to going stop," Guerra said. "Right away I was going to home plate."

[Hunter Renfroe](#)'s pinch-hit homer for the Padres with two outs in the 12th tied the score at 2. Renfroe was a late scratch from the starting lineup because he was ill.

"He wasn't feeling good at all today," manager Andy Green said. "I kept asking if he had a Kirk Gibson moment in him or a Michael Jordan flu game. He said he had a swing in him, and that's what he had in him. He was able to go out there and gut it out in the outfield. That was gutsy from him."

[Archie Bradley](#) gave up Renfroe's tying drive.

"He was fairly upset about it walking back into the dugout," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said. "I know that Renfroe is a very capable hitter and if you make a mistake to him in the middle of the zone, he's going to punish the ball. Archie's been very effective as of late ... and felt like it was the right situation. He just made one mistake."

Guerra drew a pinch-hit walk from [Matt Andriese](#) (0-3) leading off the 15th and scored on Galvis' double to right field.

[Colten Brewer](#) (1-0) worked two innings for his first major league win.

"It's something that I will remember for a long time," Brewer said. "I couldn't be happier and it's especially gratifying when it came in a long game like that. I just wanted to pitch in the big leagues and to get a win feels even better than I imagined."

[Nick Ahmed](#)'s sacrifice fly put the Diamondbacks ahead 2-1 in the top of the 12th. Ahmed sent a shallow fly ball toward [Franmil Reyes](#) in right and initially [Ketel Marte](#) wasn't going to try to advance from third base. But when Reyes was tardy in throwing the ball in, Marte took off and was safe on a close play at the plate.

[Jose Pirela](#)'s home run off Diamondbacks reliever [Silvino Bracho](#) in the seventh tied it 1-all. Arizona had taken the lead in the top of the inning when [Chris Owings](#) scored on a passed ball.

Padres rookie starter [Eric Lauer](#) allowed singles to the first two batters he faced -- after limiting the Dodgers to one run over five innings in his previous outing. But the lefty tiptoed out of trouble in the first two innings.

From there, Lauer settled down. He gave up an unearned run and seven hits with six strikeouts in 6 1/3 innings.

Owings opened the seventh with a single and [John Ryan Murphy](#) followed with a double. With the infield in, Galvis made a spectacular, over-the-shoulder catch in short center field on pinch-hitter [Patrick Kivlehan](#)'s popup to hold the runners.

Marte drew a walk to load the bases and then rookie catcher [Francisco Mejia](#) let [Robert Stock](#)'s outside pitch bounce off his glove. Owings scored to make it 1-0.

Arizona starter [Patrick Corbin](#) went five scoreless innings. He allowed three hits and a walk while striking out four but remained winless since Sept. 7.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Padres: RHP [Brett Kennedy](#) (left knee) had surgery and is expected to be healthy for spring training.

UP NEXT

Diamondbacks: RHP [Zack Godley](#) (14-11, 4.75 ERA) starts the middle game of the series Saturday looking to snap a four-start losing streak. His last win came on Aug. 29 against the Giants. Godley is 3-4 with a 5.40 ERA in his career against the Padres.

Padres: RHP [Jacob Nix](#) (2-4, 6.81) makes his second career start versus Arizona, with both outings coming at Petco Park. He was charged with five runs and five hits while getting only two outs when facing the Diamondbacks on Aug. 16.