

Cincinnati Reds Press Clippings February 8, 2018

THIS DAY IN REDS HISTORY

1968-The Reds trade Johnny Edwards to the Cardinals for Pat Corrales and Jimmy Williams. Corrales will spend five seasons with the Reds, amassing a .231 batting average with 16 doubles and 27 RBI. Williams will not appear in a game for the Reds and will be drafted by the Expos in the expansion draft

MLB.COM

**Senzel to create plenty of buzz at Reds camp
Top prospect looking to swing his way onto big league roster
By Mark Sheldon MLB.com @m_sheldon
Feb. 7th, 2018**

CINCINNATI -- Perhaps not since Cuban flamethrower Aroldis Chapman in 2010, or outfielder Jay Bruce before that, have the Reds had someone with no Major League experience who will be as intriguing as top prospect Nick Senzel.

Senzel will be wearing No. 79 and is a non-roster invite to big league Spring Training for the first time. His chances of breaking camp with the team aren't great, but there should be buzz surrounding his every development.

First, everyone watching Senzel will want to see if he's ready for the big leagues. And if the 22-year-old third baseman is ready, where will he play?

"There are a couple of different opportunities at different positions," Senzel said on Jan. 25. "I'm excited to get out there, be with some of the big league guys, and kind of pick their brains and play some games and being in the lineup. It should be fun."

Ranked by MLB Pipeline as Cincinnati's No. 1 prospect and No. 7 overall in baseball, Senzel batted .321/.391/.514 with 14 home runs and 65 RBIs in 119 games during 2017 with Class A Advanced Daytona and Double-A Pensacola. Expectations are that Senzel will open the regular season at Triple-A Louisville, but of course, he will be aiming higher.

Senzel has been on the fast track since the Reds made him the second overall pick of the 2016 Draft out of the University of Tennessee. His advanced plate approach, skills and maturity have helped him move quickly.

The only thing Senzel doesn't have -- besides a roster spot on the Reds -- is a place to play in the field. Eugenio Suarez has developed into a superb third baseman, offensively and defensively, and the club views him as a fixture there. To expand their options, the Reds will have Senzel try other positions in camp.

Senzel has only played third base professionally but has amateur experience at shortstop and second base. The organization believes he's athletic enough to handle either spot. He will also get his first exposure to the outfield in the corner positions.

Of course, the Reds have players they like for all of those places too -- Scooter Gennett at second base, Jose Peraza at shortstop and Adam Duvall, Scott Schebler and prospect Jesse Winker as corner outfielders. Cincinnati views Senzel's situation as similar to what Todd Frazier experienced when he first came up. Frazier played multiple infield and outfield spots in 2011-12 before a regular position opened for him at third base in '13.

At some point, Senzel will have to force the Reds to find him a place to play. In the meantime, Reds general manager Dick Williams has tempered some of the high expectations.

"We know a lot about him and what we've got in this player. We're very optimistic," Williams said on Jan. 25. "We think he should sit back and use this as an opportunity to soak up and enjoy learning from the Major League players. That's how we've talked to him about approaching it.

"As far as positions, we've got one of the best young third baseman in the Minor Leagues. We think he can play other positions. We're not in a hurry to move him around the diamond. This is a great time to expose him to other opportunities and make sure he's getting instruction around the infield."

FANGRAPHS.COM

The Reds' Ace in the Making Is Already Made by Jeff Sullivan - February 7, 2018

Pitching is weird. Development commonly follows an uneven timeline, with progress being erratic, often unpredictable. One little change can mean the difference between life in Triple-A and 20 million dollars, so if there's one thing to try to accumulate, it's youth. Young pitchers come with the benefit of more time. It's hard to know what they'll do with it, but at least they have it to begin with. More time to find the adjustments that matter.

The Reds can sometimes be an easy team to forget. Their rebuild, admittedly, remains a work in progress. Yet one thing they've certainly done is collect young starting pitchers, which gives them that volatility and upside, even beyond the already volatile Homer Bailey and Anthony DeSclafani. Maybe this year will be the year for Cody Reed. Maybe it'll be the year for Amir Garrett, or Robert Stephenson. Not to leave out Sal Romano. Not to leave out Brandon Finnegan, or Tyler Mahle. Not to leave out all the other candidates. With a few new pitches, or with a few mechanical tweaks, the Reds could suddenly have something special on their hands.

What the Reds have desperately needed to do is develop quality pitching. There's plenty more development remaining to be achieved. Among the whole assortment, however, there's one shining light. There's not really anything left for Luis Castillo to do. He's an electrifying starter who already made his final adjustment on the fly.

It's not as if I'm the first person to give Castillo his due attention. He would've been a hard young pitcher to miss. But with a new season right ahead, I feel like it's important to re-establish just how good Castillo has already become. He's not even a guy who ought to be flying under the radar, since last year, among all starters, only Noah Syndergaard and Luis Severino threw harder average fastballs. Castillo has a hell of an arm. But the Cincinnati thing presumably works against him. So does his own professional history.

A number of years ago, Castillo was one of two players the Giants traded for Casey McGehee, on purpose. Later on, the Marlins tried to trade Castillo to the Padres in the big Andrew Cashner deal, and after Castillo was returned to the Marlins within days because of the Padres' playing games with medical records, the Marlins shipped him away again, as part of the package for Dan Straily. Castillo has technically been traded four times, and he's never been a Baseball America top-100 prospect. In fact, when the Giants first moved Castillo away, he'd been pitching as a reliever.

It was the Marlins who allowed Castillo to start. In 2015, he struck out nearly 20% of his opponents, against low-level competition. In 2016, he again struck out nearly 20% of his opponents, against low-level competition. In 2017, pitching as a member of the Reds, he struck out nearly 27% of his opponents, against some of the toughest competition in the world. Castillo earned a midseason promotion to the bigs, and he didn't slow down.

Even more, Castillo started to show off his durability, getting increasingly familiar with the starting role. Back in 2016, Castillo faced about 20 batters per start, and he made two starts in which he threw at least 90 pitches. This past year, Castillo faced about 23 batters per start, and he made 19 starts in which he threw at least 90 pitches. Castillo proved he could start, and he proved he could start without wearing down. In the majors, when Castillo faced an order the first time, he allowed a .260 wOBA, with a K-BB% of 16%. When he faced an order the third time, he allowed a .241 wOBA, with a K-BB% of 19%.

Earlier, I mentioned an adjustment Castillo made in the majors on the fly. Already, in the minors, Castillo had worked to improve both his changeup and his slider. That's what allowed his strikeout rate to surge forward. But after making some starts with the Reds, Castillo unveiled a fourth pitch. The following plot comes from Brooks Baseball. You're seeing Castillo's game-to-game pitch usage.

Suddenly, on July 25, Castillo went from throwing one kind of fastball to two. Zach Buchanan wrote at some length about the development on July 30. It all happened quickly, after Castillo toyed around with a sinker on the side. Castillo hadn't thrown a sinker. Apparently not in a game as a professional. And then, there it was, with Castillo offering a pair of fastballs in the upper 90s. What Castillo doesn't have is a rising four-seamer. He doesn't have one of those high-spin Justin Verlander heaters. The sinker, though — the sinker moves, and the two fastballs are distinct. They make each other better, to say nothing of the other two pitches.

Here's how Castillo threw his fastball in the majors, through July 20. This is from the catcher's perspective.

Mostly down, mostly arm-side. Compare that to what happened next. Beginning on July 25, here's how Castillo threw his two different fastball types.

The sinker was mostly lower, arm-side. That freed up the other fastball to do something else. Castillo raised his average four-seamer, and he used it more to attack the glove side. Castillo had different fastballs for different situations, and, even better, the new sinker made for a better pairing with the changeup Castillo already had established.

I completely understand that we're dealing with some limited samples here, but take a look at how Castillo closed out his season. Beginning on July 25, when Castillo started to use a sinker, here are his percentile rankings among starters in certain relevant categories.

Castillo didn't become completely unhittable. He didn't strike batters out like peak, healthy Syndergaard. But he managed to do three things at once: strike out a lot of guys, limit walks, and keep the ball on the ground. That launch-angle bar puts pitchers in ascending order, so what you're seeing is that Castillo was tremendously difficult to lift. There aren't really a lot of high-strikeout and high-grounder starters. Charlie Morton just blossomed into one. A pretty good comp here would be Carlos Martinez, except that Castillo probably has a better changeup. He might not struggle so much against lefties.

In the Buchanan article I linked earlier, he writes about a sinker Castillo threw to strike out Miguel Rojas. I'd like to show you a few other pitches from moments earlier in the same game. Here's Castillo throwing a first-pitch changeup to Ichiro.

Following consecutive balls, Castillo evened the count with a sinker Ichiro thought was going to drift up or inside.

That set up the putaway. Castillo came back with a different fastball, one with six inches less tail, and four inches more rise.

Ninety-eight miles per hour, in the bottom of the eighth. I'm not saying Ichiro struck out specifically because of Castillo's adjusted fastball mix. It's just hard to be ready for one pitch in the upper 90s. It's only harder to be ready for two, two pitches that move in different ways. Castillo's repertoire is as good as it needs to be.

Say what you will for the Reds' record of pitcher development, but Castillo has developed. Maybe it's something the Reds did, or maybe Castillo's progress was always going to be unstoppable, no matter where he was throwing. An arm like his might be destined to eventually find its level, no matter what. The answer isn't important to me. Might not even be important to the Reds. What is important to the Reds is that the only thing Luis Castillo has left to do is keep on staying healthy. He already has the arm. He already has all of the pitches. Eight months from now, it might not be very hard to identify the best starting pitcher in the NL Central. Castillo simply has to keep himself together.

Transactions

02/07/18

Texas Rangers traded 2B Russell Wilson to New York Yankees for Future Considerations.

New York Mets signed free agent 3B Todd Frazier.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster OF Jose Adolis Garcia to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster OF Randy Arozarena to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster 3B Patrick Wisdom to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster SS Wilfredo Tovar to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster 1B Rangel Ravelo to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster SS Tommy Edman to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster C Dennis Ortega to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster C Jeremy Martinez to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster C Andrew Knizner to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster RHP Jake Woodford to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster LHP Jordan Schafer to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster RHP Arturo Reyes to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster RHP Daniel Poncedeleon to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster RHP Hector Mendoza to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster RHP Dakota Hudson to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster RHP Jordan Hicks to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster RHP Ryan Helsley to spring training.

St. Louis Cardinals invited non-roster LHP Sean Gilmartin to spring training.

