



Padres Press Clips

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Padres spring training primer: Catchers

Jeff Sanders

Unofficially, the 2019 baseball season was put on the clock when the final seconds of Sunday's (not-so) Super Bowl ticked off. Officially, the Padres' pitchers and catchers report to Peoria, Ariz., for the start of spring training on Feb. 13, allowing us our first opportunity to dig into the roster (at least as it stands today).

First, the catchers:

2018 recap

Austin Hedges' second full season as the unquestioned starter behind the plate was interrupted by a near-two-month stay on the disabled list because of a bout of elbow tendinitis, the result of overwork in the cage as he tried to pull himself out of an early season funk. The Hedges who returned in June was an entirely different hitter. He compiled a .772 OPS with 12 homers and 27 RBIs in 67 games after returning from the disabled list, allowing the Padres' catchers to register a positive WAR (1.6) for the first time since **Derek Norris'** 2015 debut in San Diego.

While much of that value rested in Hedges' contributions on defense — he was top-5 in fielding runs saved and framing runs — his 32 homers over the last two years rank ninth among big league catchers. His batting average, on-base and slugging climbed also all climbed from 2017 to 2018 — .214/.262/.398 to .231/.282/.429 — suggesting that there is still plenty of growth still in the works for the 26-year-old Hedges.

Behind the Padres' starter, veteran **A.J. Ellis**, an outgoing free agent, provided a team-leading .378 on-base percentage until top prospect **Francisco Mejia**, the return in the **Brad Hand** trade, arrived in September. Ranked No. 32 in Baseball America's top-100, Mejia provided a handful of awe-inspiring moments — two

homers in his first two at-bats and a walk-off grand slam — despite having 19 strikeouts and a .185/.241/.389 batting line in his first 20 games with the Padres.

Current picture

With Mejia joining the organization in July and the Padres' interest in **J.T. Realmuto** this offseason, this position group is as clouded as any.

Hedges took tremendous strides after returning from the DL and could remain the starting catcher for the next several years. Or that mantle could shift to Realmuto if the Marlins' price aligns with the Padres' surplus in the outfield and on the farm. Or it could go to Mejia if the Padres decide to cash out on him.

The Padres could also let Hedges and Mejia decide the answer to that question in 2019. Or they could decide the organization is best served starting Hedges full-time behind the plate and rotating the ultra-athletic Mejia between catcher, third base and left field. Of course, that decision would require the Padres to begin unloading their surplus outfielders and give up on Mejia's development behind the plate, which the club is reluctant to do given Mejia's elite arm strength and quickness behind the plate.

In other words, watch this group closely as the spring unfolds.

On the farm

Under General Manager **A.J. Preller**, the Padres have transformed the organization's catching depth chart from a weakness to a strength. They've got two viable starters with All-Star potential in the majors. Behind Hedges and Mejia, the 25-year-old **Austin Allen**— from Preller's first draft class in 2015 — tied for the organization lead in homers (22) to force his way onto the 40-man roster, was an all-star in the Double-A Texas League and is poised to put up big numbers in 2019 in the hitter-friendly Pacific Coast League

In the Midwest League, 2017 second-rounder **Luis Campusano**, 20, held his own in his first full year of pro ball (.710 OPS) and former Rule 5-draftee **Luis Torrens**, still only 22, asserted his floor as a future big league backup with a .280/.320/.406 batting line in the California League, his first season surpassing 300 at-bats as a pro.

This is the Padres prospect to watch in camp

MLB.com

Feb. 4th, 2019

The countdown to **pitchers and catchers reporting** is down to single digits for all 30 MLB clubs, but as exciting as it is to see the return of Major League stars, it's also a time to dream about the next wave of baseball talent. With the help of MLB.com's beat writers, here's a prospect to keep an eye on for each and every team in 2019.

Padres: Fernando Tatis Jr., SS

Who else? Tatis is presumably the answer to the Padres' decade-long shortstop question, and there's a chance he answers it in a big way. MLB Pipeline rated him as the sport's No. 2 overall prospect, and he's the rare five-tool talent without a glaring flaw in his game. Tatis, who has only played a few months at Double-A, will have his work cut out for him to make the Opening Day roster. He's got service-time concerns working against him as well. But he's going to arrive in San Diego soon enough. And he'll bring **plenty of swagger** with him. -- *AJ Cassavell*

The Padres' Most Dangerous Hitter

by Jeff Sullivan

February 4, 2019

There was already plenty to like about what Matt Chapman did as a rookie in 2017. But his introduction to the majors looked all the more encouraging upon further and deeper review. It's long forgotten now, but Chapman got off to a miserable start. Through the middle of July, he had a wRC+ of 64, to go with nearly 40% strikeouts. The defense was there — the defense was always going to be there — but it was fair to wonder whether Chapman's bat had what it would take to succeed. It was early, yes, but Chapman had been exposed. He seemed to be overmatched.

And then, in a flash, he turned the tables. The rest of the way, he carried a wRC+ of 120, and he trimmed his strikeouts all the way to 26%. The way Chapman finished set him up for a breakout and breakthrough 2018, with a 137 wRC+ and a superstar WAR. The strikeout issues were nowhere to be found. Not that Chapman exactly qualifies as a traditional contact hitter, but he makes enough contact to tap consistently into his power. Chapman put the rough intro behind him, and he hasn't looked back.

With Chapman in mind, allow me to shift the conversation toward Franmil Reyes. Unlike Chapman, Reyes is never going to win a Platinum Glove. If he's going to have a career, it'll have to be a career in which he hits. But the good news is that he just made a strong impression. Like Chapman the season before, Reyes just used the final two months to set himself up for a dazzling campaign.

Last winter, I didn't even know who Franmil Reyes was. When I paid attention to the Padres, I was mostly enamored of Franchy Cordero. Reyes was coming off his age-21 season, in which he slugged .464 in Double-A. The Padres left him unprotected for the Rule 5 draft, in part because Reyes had just suffered a hand injury, deterring potential interest. It was a calculated gamble, and Reyes remained with the organization. This past season in Triple-A, he slugged .614, while improving his OBP by more than a hundred points.

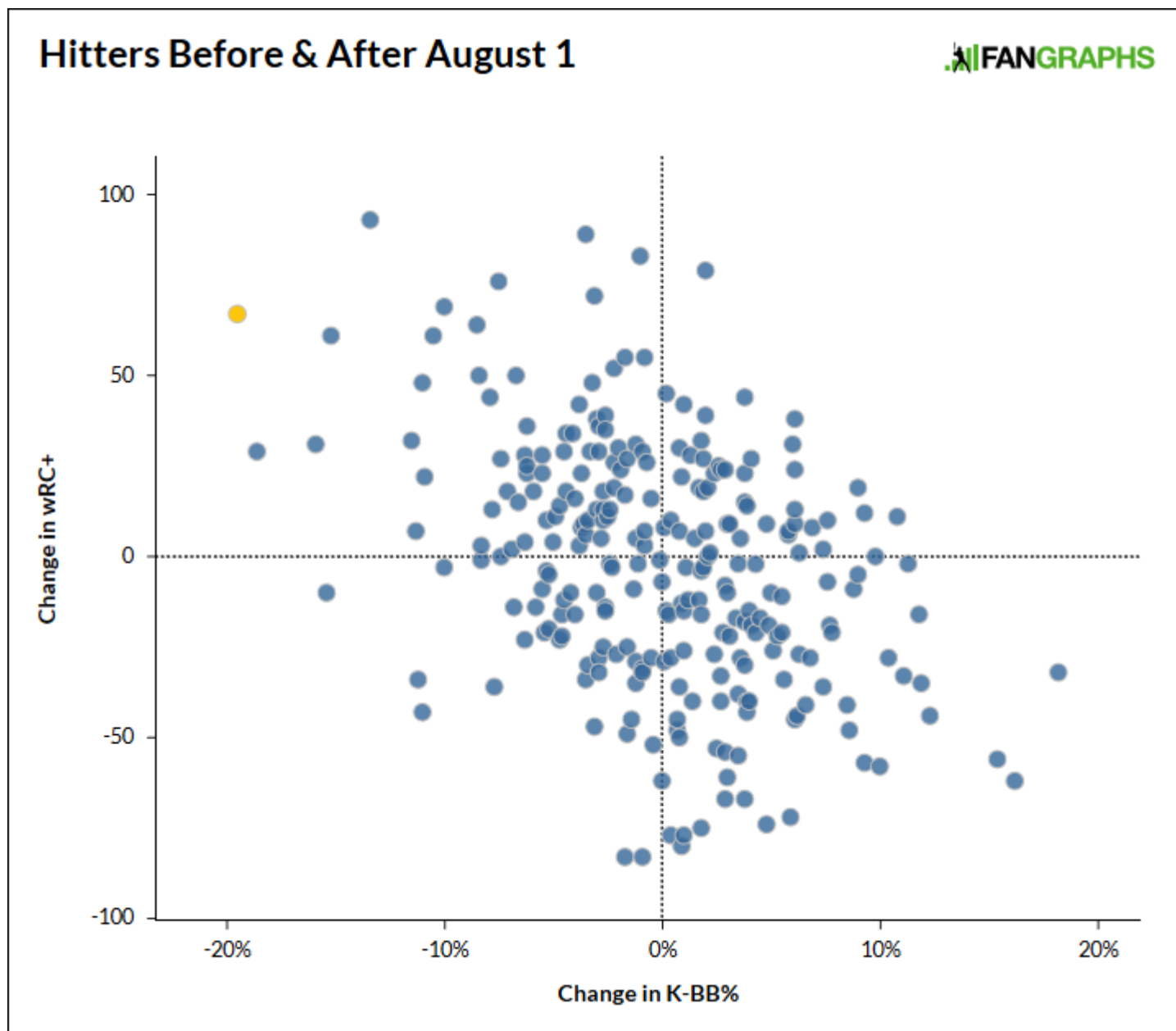
Reyes, in other words, planted himself firmly on the organizational radar. And he got himself up to the majors, after having begun the year as a borderline prospect. It wasn't all smooth sailing. Reyes was demoted for the last time near the end of July. At that point, he had an 87 wRC+, with 38% strikeouts. **The Padres wanted him to shorten up.**

Upon his most recent demotion, Reyes watched old videos of his swings and compared them to his current one. He noticed he'd inadvertently increased his leg kick and the length of his swing.

"When I was in Triple-A, everything was quiet, and I was good," Reyes said. "When I got here, maybe there was something in me that was trying to show the people, trying to show the fans, the power I have. I tried too much. It was about trying to slow down my game a little bit and be quieter, react."

Reyes' demotion didn't last very long. He was back up near the start of August, and that's when it all fell into place. Down the stretch, over two months of action, Reyes posted a wRC+ of 155. Just as importantly, he trimmed his strikeouts to 22%, while drawing a few more walks. **By expected wOBA**, he ranked in the 87th percentile. He was just below Robinson Cano, Brandon Nimmo, and Juan Soto.

Here's a plot for players through July, and then after the start of August. To qualify, players had to have at least 100 plate appearances for each split. On one axis here, you're seeing each player's change in wRC+. On the other axis, you're seeing each player's change in K-BB%. Remember that, for pitchers, a positive change in K-BB% is good. Which means, for hitters, a *negative* change in K-BB% is good. Reyes is the point in yellow.



No one improved his K-BB% as much as Reyes did. Few players showed so improved a wRC+. This is what Reyes has in common with 2017 Matt Chapman. Late-season improvements in peripherals don't always stick, but they're more believable when you're dealing with rookies. They're also more believable when you're dealing with young players who seem to understand what it takes to get better. Reyes is a thoughtful and dedicated hitter, and he's proven himself able to make rapid adjustments. It was the last adjustment that made so much of the difference.

Let me shed some light on the other thing that makes Reyes so dangerous. Hitting isn't just about optimizing one's K-BB%. Reyes is officially listed at 6'5, 275. He's a big boy. This is something he did in his first game back up from Triple-A:

Now, on the one hand, that's still a pretty aggressive leg kick. That's still a loud swing. Maybe not what the Padres were looking for Reyes to do. But if you'll notice, the count was 3-and-0 when Reyes took that hack, so you can forgive him. You can also forgive him on account of the result. What makes the peripheral improvements so exciting is the fact that Reyes has always had plus-plus power.

Last season, Reyes was one of just 33 hitters to hit at least one batted ball 115+ miles per hour. It's an uncommon level to reach, and Reyes also demonstrated his consistency. In peak exit velocity, he ranked in the 94th percentile. In average exit velocity, he ranked in the 95th percentile. In rate of batted balls hit at least 95 miles per hour, he ranked in the 94th percentile. Reyes can hit the ball awfully hard. He hit his average fly ball as hard as **Bryce Harper**.

It's one thing when you can hit the ball hard, but you strike out more than 30% of the time. It's quite another when you can hit the ball hard, and you strike out 20 – 25% of the time. Additionally, to Reyes' credit, he showed the ability to draw some walks, which was something he'd also improved in the PCL. Walks could help Reyes become more than just the next **Mark Trumbo** or **C.J. Cron**. Reyes has power *and* an idea, which allowed him to have the second half that he had. He willingly made some tweaks to his swing. He started to lay off more outside pitches, while turning his focus in. Reyes fixed himself on the fly after a difficult start, and right now **he leads the Padres in projected wOBA**.

The big difference, again, is that Matt Chapman has a good enough glove to carry him through offensive slumps. Reyes is unlikely to become a plus defender in the corner outfield, so he's going to need to lean on his stick. He might need to make further adjustments, in case pitchers find a new vulnerability. Stretch-run improvements aren't always forever, because randomness happens, and the offseason is long. Plus, opponents are looking for every last edge. The better Reyes performs, the more he'll find himself under scrutiny. There is most certainly more there to prove.

But as the Padres get linked to guys like Harper and **Manny Machado**, it's important not to forget about what they already have in-house. This is a young team, an exciting team, an improving team. You know about most of the prominent names. Franmil Reyes has worked to be counted among them.

50 Moments—Garvey’s Series-tying, Walk-off Homer in 1984 NLCS



[FriarWire](#)

Feb 4

By Bill Center

It remains the single-greatest swing in Padres’ history.

On Oct. 6, 1984, first baseman **Steve Garvey** hit an opposite-field, two-run, walk-off homer off Cubs closer **Lee Smith** in the bottom of the ninth at San Diego Jack Murphy Stadium to give the Padres a 7–5 win and force a decisive fifth game in the National League Championship Series.

A day later, the Padres would rally from a 3–0 deficit to defeat the Cubs and win their first National League title.

But the most memorable single moment in the playoffs—and Padres history—was Garvey’s homer on Saturday afternoon . . . and the sight of Garvey circling the bases while pumping his clenched fist toward the heavens.

The spot where Garvey’s cleared the wall in right at the 370-foot sign was memorialized with the N^o6. That was Garvey’s number and on April 16, 1988, N^o6 was the first number to be retired by the Padres. Why? Largely because of his homer on Oct. 6, 1984.

“People still tell me where they were when I hit that homer,” Garvey recalled years later. “I am remembered mostly as a Dodger. But I loved my time as a Padre. And hitting that homer . . . it created a lot of memories for Padres fans as well as myself.”

Before hitting that homer, Garvey was already 3-for-4 with three RBIs in Game Four. A day later, when the Padres won the title, Garvey was named the NLCS for going 8-for-20 with seven RBIs.

Garvey signed as a free agent with the Padres on Dec. 21, 1982, after spending the first 14 seasons of his Major League career with the rival Los Angeles Dodgers.

On July 29, 1983, Garvey dislocated his left thumb in a collision while sliding into home at Jack Murphy Stadium to end his streak of 1,027 straight games played, which was then the third-longest streak in Major League history.

In five seasons with the Padres from 1983–1987, Garvey hit .275 with a .309 on-base percentage and a .409 slugging percentage. He had 107 doubles, eight triples, 61 homers, 316 RBIs and 291 runs scored.

Garvey was a National League All-Star with the Padres in both 1984 and 1985 and finished 20th in the 1984 voting for the National League Most Valuable Player Award. He hit .284 in 1984 with eight homers and 86 RBIs and was voted to the National League's starting lineup for the All-Star Game.

Before joining the Padres, Garvey was an eight-time All-Star with the Dodgers and the National League Most Valuable Player in 1974.

Top 50 Moments (in chronological order):

1. National League votes to expand into Montreal and San Diego (May 27, 1968);
2. Padres stocked with players in National League expansion draft (Oct. 14, 1968).

3. Padres win their Major League debut (April 8, 1969).
4. Clay Kirby removed from a no-hitter (July 21, 1970).
5. Nate Colbert's five-homer, 13-RBI doubleheader in Atlanta (Aug. 1, 1972).
6. 1973, the year San Diego nearly lost the Padres.
7. Ray Kroc buys the Padres (Jan. 25, 1974).
8. Ray Kroc grabs the microphone during his first home game as the Padres owner (April 9, 1974).
9. Randy Jones National League Cy Young Award (1976).
10. Shortstop Ozzie Smith's greatest defensive play in Padres' history (April 20, 1978).
11. Padres host 1978 All-Star Game (July 11, 1978).
12. Gaylord Perry wins 1978 National League Cy Young Award.
13. The "re-hatching" of the San Diego Chicken (June 29, 1979).
14. 1984 Padres-Braves brawl in Atlanta (Aug. 12, 1984).
15. More than 12,000 fans greet Padres as they return home from two losses in Chicago in 1984 National League Championship Series (Oct. 3, 1984).
16. Steve Garvey's series-tying, walk-off homer in Game 4 of the 1984 National League Championship Series.

Padres Chase Free Agents While Relying on The Process

San Diego is looking to add major names while home-grown talent matures

By [Derek Togerson](#)

The Padres are talking in earnest with free agent outfielder Bryce Harper. Do they have a legitimate shot at landing the superstar? Well Harper did get married in San Diego and during the 2016 All-Star Game at Petco Park when Wil Myers was mic'd up Harper was heard saying he "loves this place."

Take from that what you will but what is impossible to argue is the fact Harper ... or Manny Machado ... would no doubt receive the largest free agent contract in Padres history. The guy who currently owns that is Eric Hosmer, who signed on right around this time last year and saw his offensive numbers dip near his career lows.

The 1st baseman saw his run production and OPS drop while his strikeout rate rose but he vows to do better in 2019.

"That's kind of what I told myself; don't even think about what happened last year," said Hosmer. "I'm just moving on to this next season. At the end of the day I don't really know what happened. I just ... it didn't go the way I planned and there's really no excuse for that."

Hosmer says he rededicated himself this off-season and he's "in a good place." But the Padres didn't bring him in to be a slugger. They need him to be a leader. The top-ranked minor league system in baseball is about to start bearing fruit so long-suffering Padres fans ... just hang in there.

"Just trust in what we're going. We're getting things going in the right direction here with the talent they've acquired at the minor league level and the big

league talent that's coming along, as well," said Hosmer. "I think it's going to be a good mesh and it's going to be a lot of good baseball to come here."

Hosmer knows what he's talking about here. In 2011 he was part of the Royals' top-ranked farm system (Hosmer was #1 in the system according to Baseball America, just ahead of Wil Myers and Mike Moustakas). In 2015 that group, which also included Salvador Perez, Alcides Escobar, and Lorenzo Cain, won the World Series. Hosmer has seen how the process is supposed to play out so he knows there's no real way to predict when guys like Fernando Tatis Jr. and Chris Paddack will start winning games at Petco Park but thinks it'll be sooner than later.

"The player kind of lets you know when he's ready," said Hosmer. "These guys all have the talent to be here, for sure. Right now it's about going to minor leagues and doing it on a consistent basis, showing you can be that player day in and day out."

That's what starting pitchers Eric Lauer and Joey Lucchesi did in the minor leagues. With a few large bumps in the road they were able to translate that to success as Major League rookies. Ditto outfielder Franmil Reyes, who had a rocky first trip to The Show, was sent down to Triple-A to work on a slight swing adjustment, then came back up and started ripping balls all over the yard.

And don't even get me started on Luis Urias, in a very short time put a charge into an entire fan base with his play at 2nd base. Aside from Urias not one of those players was a top-10 Padres prospect. If the guys ranked ahead of them are even better then things really are on the right track for the Friars.

Which brings us back to Harper and Machado. Adding either of those guys as a free agent doesn't make the Padres dip into the best farm system on earth and part with assets in a trade. Signing one of these big-ticket items can only accelerate The Process.