



Padres Press Clips

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Padres make plans for seven-man bullpen, but only briefly

Kevin Acee, MLB.com, 2/26/18

The Padres are looking at an eight-man bullpen at the start of the season, though they will likely break camp with just seven relievers.

An unusual early off day, on Easter Sunday, following their opening series against the Milwaukee Brewers, might help the Padres avoid the need for an extra arm at first.

But they then play 17 straight days — including seven games against the Rockies, three at the defending World Champion Astros and three at home against the Dodgers.

“We run the gauntlet in April, especially if you look at the offenses we’re playing and their tendency to drive pitch counts up,” manager Andy Green said. “We’re probably looking at a time really early on where we go to eight guys. I’m not saying we’re starting with eight guys. Seven is where you want to start, and as soon as you need that eighth ... At some point then we’re probably going to be looking at an eighth guy in the bullpen.”

Left-hander Brad Hand and right-hander Kazuhisa Makita, Craig Stammen and Kirby Yates are virtual locks with lefty Matt Strahm also headed to the bullpen if he doesn’t end up starting. Righty Phil Maton might be considered a lock as well, and lefty Buddy Baumann has started the spring looking like he will be back as well.

Wingenter winning

Joey Lucchesi and Eric Lauer, two of the organization’s top starting pitching prospects and certainly among the closest to the majors, are scheduled to pitch Tuesday against the Mariners.

Neither those two nor Cal Quantrill or Jacob Nix, the other two prospects in camp with a chance to be called up during the season, are going to make the opening day roster.

But one of their teammates in Double-A last year could be in the Padres bullpen on March 29 (or soon thereafter).

Right-hander Trey Wingenter, who can touch 100 mph and features a biting slider he developed last year, came into camp with an outside shot and has only improved his standing.

“He’s got a chance right away,” Green said. “We’ll see how he handles being in the mix.”

If Wingenter wasn’t officially “in the mix” before his three-strikeout inning against the Angels, his performance therein vaulted him into contention.

Green was watching copious video of Wingenter last year, and the Padres felt then that the development of his slider along with the velocity and movement on his fastball would make him effective in the majors.

He justified that belief Sunday. After striking out the first two batters he faced, he issued a four-pitch walk and then threw a ball to Brennan Lund. He threw a slider past Lund on the next pitch and proceeded to strike him out.

“For a young guy that’s been able to just say, ‘Hey, here’s my fastball, you can’t hit it,’ you don’t get to do that in the big leagues,” Green said. “In certain hitter’s counts, you’re going to have to spin pitches, and that 1-0 slider strike was the best thing I saw from him. And then he came back with two fastballs after that and just absolutely blew it by him.

“It’s maturation. It’s being given a challenge and taking the challenge and going out and knowing you can win the challenge. You give the information to some guys, they tense up, they try to execute the pitch too finely. Some guys say, ‘Oh you want me to do this?’ They go on the mound and do it, and they do it really well. That’s what I saw yesterday.”

Target practice

The Padres held a “Target Practice BP” on Monday, with the team picked by Wil Myers defeating Freddy Galvis’ squad on one field and A.J. Ellis’ team beating Eric Hosmer’s team on another field.

The Myers vs. Ellis final is Tuesday.

Cardboard cutouts and cones (and occasionally a remote control car guided by Green) served as targets, and batters had to hit to certain spots in different rounds. The emphasis was gap-to-gap and situational hitting.

Players clearly enjoyed the diversion from the normal BP they take daily.

“It’s barrel manipulation,” Green said. “It’s the ability to move it around. We just tried to find a fun way to ask guys to hit the ball around the field. ... It just kind of refines the focus a little bit better and have some fun with it at the same time.”

Extra bases

- Third baseman Chase Headley, who took a grounder off the ring finger of his throwing hand Sunday, took grounders and swung a bat on the side but did not take batting practice Monday. Green is hopeful Headley will resume full activity Tuesday and play by the end of the week. Outfielders Alex Dickerson (elbow) and Matt Szczur (oblique) and infielder Allen Cordoba (concussion) are sitting out.
- Eric Hosmer could play Tuesday but also might not make his first start as a Padre until Wednesday.
- Basketball Hall of Famer Ralph Sampson took in part of Monday morning’s workout. Green met Sampson this off-season.

Homer barrage earns Padres their first victory of spring

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 2/26/18

Score: Padres 10, Angels 4

Batter's box: Hunter Renfroe and Christian Villanueva crushed back-to-back home runs in the second inning. Renfroe sent a pitch into the wind in center field; Villanueva hit a ball more than 400 feet, to the top of a grass berm beyond left field. Villanueva also singled home a run in the fifth. ... Outfielder Franchy Cordero showed his power with a home run in his first at-bat of the spring on Saturday. In Monday's sixth inning, he blasted a ball off the wall in left-center field and raced around the bases for a fairly easy inside-the-park home run. ... Outfielder Franmil Reyes, whose 25 home runs at Double-A San Antonio last season were most in the Padres' minor league system, also homered in the sixth. ... Dusty Coleman, who hit four homers in 71 plate appearances for the Padres but spent most of '17 at Triple-A El Paso, homered in the seventh.

Balls and strikes: Jordan Lyles, perhaps the longest shot among contenders for the starting rotation, allowed three hits and a walk but no runs in two innings. ... Relievers Buddy Baumann, Miguel Diaz, Jonathan Aro, Adam Cimber, T.J. Weir and Tom Wilhelmsen all threw their second scoreless innings of the spring.

Extra bases: Wil Myers and Freddy Galvis made their spring debuts. ... Renfroe started in left field, Manuel Margot in center and Myers in right, which could be the Padres' opening day outfield. ... A Myers error coming in to field a single allowed a runner to score. ... The Padres won for the first time in four spring games.

On Deck: Seattle Mariners, 12:10 PT at Peoria Sports Complex. Clayton Richard, the expected opening day starter, makes his Cactus League debut and will be followed by highly touted prospects Joey Lucchesi and Eric Lauer.

Padres don't get Shohei Ohtani (out) again

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 2/26/18

The Padres missed out on signing Shohei Ohtani, but they got a taste of Ohtani-mania on Monday.

Especially starting pitcher Jordan Lyles.

“It was just one at-bat,” Lyles said in answer to one of the nearly dozen questions he fielded about facing the Japanese superstar in the first inning. “Obviously everyone knows of him. It’s everyone’s first time seeing him in person. He obviously looks the part.”

Ohtani, who made his pitching debut Saturday for the Angels, appeared as a designated hitter at the Peoria Sports Complex. He walked his first two times up and struck a hard single up the middle on the first pitch he saw (from Michael Mariot) in his final plate appearance.

“I was happy to get that first hit out of the way, but I was also happy with my first two at-bats,” Ohtani said. “I got to see a lot of pitches and I got to face a righty and a lefty. I felt like I put together pretty good at-bats the first two walks. . . . One of the reasons why I was able to see so many pitches in the first two at-bats was I just wanted to feel the difference in the strike zones between Japan and the States.”

Lyles, who started for the Padres and worked two scoreless innings, threw two quick strikes to Ohtani, who was batting second. Four straight balls followed to put Ohtani on base.

After he left the game, Japanese reporters asked Lyles about Ohtani’s swing and why he threw pitches to certain locations at certain times.

“I didn’t really pay attention to him too much,” Lyles said. “I was too worried about doing my own thing, trying to hit the glove as much as I can with my fastball. But I’m sure he has a bright future.”

A daily average of 80 additional media members — mostly Japanese but also Korean and Taiwanese — have followed Ohtani's every move this spring.

The Padres were among seven finalists to sign the 23-year-old, who was MVP of Japan's Pacific League in 2016. He chose the Angels on Dec. 8 and is expected to be in their starting rotation and also regularly serve as designated hitter.

Padres mailbag: Why Renfroe is targeted; why Fowler talks; minor league pitchers

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 2/26/18

Here is a belated mailbag. (Hey, it's spring training for everyone.)

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

Where is Chris Paddock in his recovery from surgery?

Chris Paddock is in minor league minicamp and being monitored — being kept at about 90 percent right now. They're being smart about his return from Tommy John, because they were extremely excited when they got this kid in the Andrew Cashner deal.

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

Ur prediction on the opening day starters in the OF?

Maybe it's my heart talking, but I go (right to left) Wil Myers, Manuel Margot and Hunter Renfroe. It sure seems like Jose Pirela started with the jump on Renfroe, but I have a feeling Renfroe makes a jump in his second spring training. (I don't know if I'm supposed to have feelings as a beat writer. But you asked, and they gave me this mailbag.)

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

Do you see Hunter Renfroe as a keystone player or trade bait by the all star break?

Interesting phrasing, because I think unless he really makes that jump I referred to and gets on base more, he won't be seen as a cornerstone.

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

Will you reveal your sources, Ace Man? Your Padres news breaking skills have far exceeded expectations.

Here's the thing about sources, once revealed they are no longer sources. And, um, thanks.

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

how do you think the late signing will affect Hosmers start if at all. Baseball players like routines and he hasn't even had a chance to be in SD , he went right to AZ for spring training. does he even have a house? does he plan on getting one etc. being comfortable is important

You're right about routine. But it's February, and with the schedule change this year (four more in-season off days means season starts early) he wouldn't be getting into games for a few days anyway in previous years. Right now, I'm going with the idea a man who played 162 games last season knows how to get ready for the season.

Did you know he was one of five players in all of MLB to play every game last year? Do you know the last Padres player to go 162? Answer.

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

How many more times does Ron Fowler have to comment publicly and negatively about a player before someone in the organization decides that it's best he just doesn't speak at all?

So Ron Fowler phrased his assessment of how Hosmer will help the Padres in a way that seemed like he was ripping Wil Myers. I think that's a really cynical interpretation. But even if Fowler erred in the phrasing, I am sort of confused at the continued critiques of Fowler's candor. I am fairly certain fans would be clamoring for an owner who was more forthright if the Padres' executive chairman didn't talk. All I can tell you is the man says what is on his mind and means what he says, and that should be valued — especially of someone in his position.

In this case — and this is important — Myers essentially validated what Fowler said.

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

Will the hype reach levels achieved a few years ago?

Not only do I think that would be impossible, it seems the majority of Padres fans have settled in for the next year or so of not expecting too much in the way of results.

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

Why are all the articles I've seen recently focused on Renfroe as a trade option? This seems extremely short sighted. Does the front office remember Anthony Rizzo?

Players get mentioned as trade possibilities privately between general managers way more often than we know. Sometimes it gets out.

So why Renfroe? First, he has value. He can hit the ball a mile when he hits it, and he plays a decent right field. I think it is the opinion of some baseball people that the arm far exceeds the other facets of defense. Second, the Padres have an abundance of outfielders and figure to use a platoon with Renfroe anyway, considering his difficulty with right-handers. Third, the Padres value a different kind of hitter – one that doesn't punch out so much because he chases pitches.

(Let's remember, I am not a columnist anymore. I'm working hard to stick to facts here. You asked, I answered.)

As for the Rizzo comparison, which many people have warned of, I think that's going to the extreme here. First, they haven't traded Renfroe yet. Second, Renfroe has had more time to show himself in the majors than Rizzo did when the Padres made the mistake of bringing him up too early and then giving up too early.

Replying to @sdutKevinAcee

Who are our best pitching prospects and when will they reach the majors?

In order of how the top starters are ranked by the "experts" (age in parentheses):

1. MacKenzie Gore (19);
2. Cal Quantrill (23);
3. Michel Baez (22);
4. Adrian Morejon (18);
5. Anderson Espinoza (19);
6. Logan Allen (20);
7. Joey Lucchesi (24);
8. Eric Lauer (22).

A few days ago, I would have bet a healthy sum Lucchesi would be the first one up. I still think that might be the case, but I watched a pretty stellar live BP from Quantrill yesterday. (Lauer and Lucchesi, by the way, go Tuesday against the Mariners. Quantrill might be Thursday.)

So in order of how they might/could/probably project to be in the big leagues:

1. Lucchesi;
2. Quantrill;
3. Lauer;
4. Baez;
5. Gore;
6. Allen;
7. Morejon;
8. Espinoza.

Before all of them could well be 23-year-old reliever Trey Wingenter, who learned a slider before the '17 season and was almost unhittable at times in Double-A. He struck out the side around a walk in his only inning Sunday, his first in a major-league spring game. He probably starts in Triple-A, but I bet he's a quick call-up when needed.

Austin Hedges rakes, takes in Padres spring debut

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 2/26/18

Austin Hedges continues to tinker with his approach at the plate.

He worked over the winter to limit his head movement and develop a two-handed follow-through. And just Saturday he made another adjustment in batting practice, staying back on pitches rather than attacking.

“It kind of allowed me to slow things down and see the ball better,” Hedges said.

In his first spring at-bat in the second inning of Sunday’s 2-1 loss the Los Angeles Angels, Hedges sent a 2-2 pitch from Garrett Richards the opposite way over the right field wall. Then, in his second-and-final time up, he drew a four-pitch walk.

It was the latter that might have been more impressive for the catcher who hit 18 home runs last season but also chased pitches outside the strike zone at a rate of 37.7 percent and struck out in almost 30 percent of his plate appearances.

“I thought the walk was probably just as exciting as the home run,” manager Andy Green said. “He’s worked hard. There’s a simplicity to it, less head movement, easier to see the baseball. Hopefully that carries on.”

Padres' spring bullpen crowded with hopefuls

By AJ Cassavell, MLB.com, 2/26/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- With a month remaining until the Padres break camp in Peoria, half of their bullpen is set. The other half? That's anyone's guess.

"Four guys are clearly in our bullpen," manager Andy Green said. "The next three or four guys will have an opportunity to make it, and there's a long list of guys that are in that mix. I don't think you cut anybody off, because relief pitchers can come from anywhere."

It's unclear whether the Padres will carry seven or eight relievers on Opening Day. For now, here's a breakdown of how the race might shake out.

The Padres enter the season with Hand as their closer, though they won't hesitate to use him before the ninth inning **if the situation calls for it**. Yates and Stammen, meanwhile, earned their places with impressive 2017 campaigns in San Diego. Makita signed a two-year deal during the offseason, and the Padres are eager to see how **his submarine delivery** plays against big league hitters.. 19th, 2017

Favorites: Phil Maton, Buddy Baumann

Maton is a prohibitive favorite here. He struggled with the long ball toward the end of his rookie campaign. But the Padres think he might be future closer material, and they expect him to take a step forward in 2018. Baumann's chances aren't quite so clear-cut. But the Padres need a left-handed middle-relief option, and Baumann currently sits atop that list. (His 2.55 ERA in 23 appearances last season won't hurt.). 21st, 2017

Rotation candidates, too: Matt Strahm, Jordan Lyles, Robbie Erlin, Chris Young

It's safe to assume the Padres carry at least one of these four as a long-man who would also serve as a spot starter. San Diego has a crowded rotation race, with eight pitchers -- including these four -- fighting for three spots. If Young, Erlin and Lyles miss out, they'll battle for that long-man role. Strahm, meanwhile, is a different case entirely. He's pitched out of the 'pen in the past, and some feel he might be best suited pitching high-leverage relief innings.

On the fence: Colten Brewer, Carter Capps, Tom Wilhelmson

If you're doing the math, you've probably realized there's not much room left in the 'pen. It's hard to envision more than one of these three options being named on the Opening Day roster. Capps, who underwent thoracic outlet surgery in the offseason, has yet to pitch. Brewer and Wilhelmson have thrown a scoreless inning apiece. Brewer, who spent six seasons in the Yankees organization, signed a Major League deal, so his prospects seem positive. But Wilhelmson and Capps have Major League success to fall back on. It'll be a matter of them regaining their old form.

Outside chance: Kyle McGrath, Brad Wieck, Trey Wingenter

McGrath is **a legitimate dark-horse candidate** for a spot in the bullpen, given that he's a funky left-hander who had success against lefty hitters last year. Wieck -- a 6-foot-9, high-extension southpaw -- has a similar case, but he's yet to prove himself in the bigs. Wingenter, meanwhile, looked sharp in his spring debut and posted excellent numbers at Double-A San Antonio last season (2.45 ERA, 33 percent strikeout rate).

Long shots: Miguel Diaz, Michael Mariot, Jose Castillo, Robert Stock, Jonathan Aro, Eric Yardley, Adam Cimber, T.J. Weir, Rowan Wick

Diaz could have his own category here. He'd likely fall into the "outside chance" camp if he were actively competing for a bullpen spot. But the Padres are stretching their former Rule 5 pick **back into a starter's role**, and it's likeliest he opens the year in a Minor League rotation. If something changes on that front, he'd be thrust into the bullpen competition. As for the rest, Green made it clear he isn't ruling any of them out. But they'll have their work cut out for them.

Cordero displays power, pop in bid for roster spot

AJ Cassavell MLB.com 2/26/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Everything **Franchy Cordero** has to offer was on full display with one swing in the bottom of the sixth inning Monday afternoon.

First, the power: Cordero stayed with an outside fastball, driving it to the deepest part of the ballpark, right-center field. The ball caromed off the top of the wall.

Then, the speed: Cordero turned on the jets the moment the ball kicked away, and there was never a doubt whether he'd be complete his inside-the-park home run bid. Sure enough, he slid safely over the plate well ahead of the relay throw.

"He flies, and he's got pop," said Padres manager Andy Green following the Padres' 10-4 win over the Angels. "Those are two huge tools he has."

It's still early, but Cordero could be playing his way toward a roster spot. In three games this spring, he's 3-for-8 with a pair of homers and a walk. During the offseason, Cordero earned MVP honors in the Dominican Winter League. He raked at Triple-A last year, too, batting .325 with 22 home runs.

But he's yet to solve Major League pitching. Cordero, the Padres' **No. 12 prospect** according to MLB Pipeline, struck out 44 times in 99 big league plate appearances last season.

For now, the Padres must answer this: Is Cordero better served continuing his development at the Major League level -- where he could back up all three outfield spots while serving as a defensive replacement and pinch-runner? Or would regular Triple-A at-bats be more beneficial? They've got one month to solve that riddle.

New-look outfield?

Wil Myers made his first appearance in right field, with **Hunter Renfroe** moving to left for Monday's game against the Angels. Myers spent the past two seasons as a first baseman before the **Eric Hosmer** acquisition prompted his shift back to the outfield.

Myers looked rusty early, booting a ground-ball single that allowed an Angels runner to score. He also uncorked a solid throw to the plate that froze Angels first baseman **Chris Carter** at third. It one-hopped to catcher **A.J. Ellis**, though it tailed slightly up the third-base line.

Renfroe, meanwhile, made the routine plays look, well, routine. He also smashed a second-inning homer to straightaway center field, one of five Padres dingers on the day. Cordero, **Christian Villanueva**, **Franmil Reyes** and **Dusty Coleman** also went deep.

Camp battles

- **Jordan Lyles** is one of eight Padres starters competing for three places in the rotation. He made his spring debut Monday, allowing three hits and a walk over two innings. But he worked around that traffic to hold the Angels scoreless.

"Overall, it was a success," Lyles said. "Arm feels good, body feels good. Those were some stressful pitches for the first time out, but I'm not complaining. It went well."

- Fellow rotation candidate **Colin Rea** will make his first appearance of spring in a "B" game Thursday against Seattle. He hasn't pitched in a game setting since tearing his UCL with the Marlins in July 2016. Rea underwent Tommy John surgery later that year.

- Villanueva is eyeing a roster spot as a backup infielder this spring. He made an emphatic case Monday, smashing a tape-measure home run onto the left-field concourse at Peoria Stadium. Villanueva, who is out of options and sits squarely on the fence for a place on the roster, finished 2-for-3 with a pair of RBIs.

. 26th, 2018

Injury update

- **Chase Headley** took a ground ball off his throwing hand during Sunday's workout, sustaining a bruised middle finger in the process. The injury isn't considered serious, but Headley will be held out of game action for the next few days.

Up next

Hosmer is nearing his Padres debut. It could come as early as Tuesday against the Mariners at 12:10 p.m. PT. Hosmer, the most lucrative free-agent signing in franchise history, is being eased into action after arriving early last week. If he doesn't start on Tuesday, he'll likely do so Wednesday against the Dodgers.

Clayton Richard is poised to make his first appearance on the mound this spring. He'll throw two innings, followed by two innings apiece from lefty pitching prospects **Eric Lauer** and **Joey Lucchesi**.

Sarris: Pitcher Matt Strahm is the Padres' secret weapon

Eno Sarris , Athletic, 2/27/18

You know the Padres have Mr. Big Stuff Dinelson Lamet at the top of the rotation. They've got Super Sinker Luis Perdomo, and Brad Hand at the back of the bullpen. There are some good prospects coming. The rest of the staff is a potential void—a void that Matt Strahm is stepping into.

Strahm could end up in the bullpen, or he might land in the rotation. But the buzz around camp is that he'll help, significantly, in one of those two roles.

“He has the potential to be successful in both places,” manager Andy Green told *The Athletic*, after mentioning that Strahm's bullpen session this weekend was outstanding. “I think we'll continue to try to extend him out in a starter's capacity. He's definitely still in the competition.”

Because of injury and youth, we only have around 50 innings of major league work from Strahm that we can use as we try to determine how good he could be. In those innings, he's struck out a lot of batters but walked quite a few, too, and shown uneven results.

If we look at his movement, velocity, and spin results instead of looking just at those innings, we might better understand Strahm's potential. He's thrown 1342 pitches, after all, and velocity and movement and spin become meaningful quickly.

Here are Strahm's percentiles in each of the relevant movement and spin numbers. If you'd like to read more about the research behind these percentiles, check out the best pieces about changeups, curveballs, sliders, fastball movement, and the impact of spin. In each case below, a higher percentile is better—for example, changeup velocity is actually defined off of the fastball, so a bigger gap is preferable.

The most intriguing thing about these numbers for Strahm is that the things that we've traditionally associated with whiffs—velocity and drop—are not necessarily his strengths. And yet... he's struck out a lot of batters.

What could we be missing?

For one, Strahm's curve is a high-spin curveball, which has been shown to elicit more swings and misses. Despite being of average velocity and drop, maybe the spin is what makes his curve produce reactions like this:

Let's give him an average curve.

His slider is 5 mph faster on average, but has a similar sweeping shape that makes it effective on the back foot of righties.

The changeup also lacks the movement difference that usually makes for elite changeups, but he has a relatively large 9.2 mph gap between his fastball and changeup velocity. And he uses it well to induce strikeouts like this, at least when he's going well.

So Strahm has his weapons, even if none of them are no-doubt pitches that make you sit up and take notice. His slider's horizontality, his curve's spin, and his changeup's low velocity all combine to give him three solid pitches. Though none of the three had plus whiff rates last year, all three at least got whiffs more than 10% of the time, and he used them almost equally as often.

Does all of this matter if he has a minus-movement, average-velocity four-seam fastball? Remember that a large portion of these numbers were put together as a reliever, where his fastball should have played up.

Still, when you look at that tiny percentile for four-seam movement, you have to wonder. Is this a four-seamer?

That looks like a straight fastball, no matter what seams he's using. Maybe it's just weird looking, because his fastball has been counted as a strength by some. Even his manager mentioned it.

“He has the kind of explosion, life to the fastball,” Green said. “He can pitch leverage innings.”

Maybe he has poor movement, or maybe he has unique movement. Maybe, like the curveball, the good spin makes up for the other iffy aspects. Either way, Strahm has gotten twice the average number of whiffs on his four-seamer.

It's amazing that Strahm's 93-94 mph is just middling velocity these days, but for a reliever, it is. One reason for his excellent results with that pitch is *where* Strahm throws it. He likes to live in one part of the zone in particular with the four-seamer.

That's decent command up in the zone. By staying at the top and in on righties' hands, he's set himself up to get a lot of whiffs without giving up too much hard contact. That, and good spin, has served Strahm well so far.

When we look for the next big pitcher, we use all sorts of tools. We might look at fastball velocity, or pitch movement, for one. We might look at his recent results. With middling velocity, mostly only horizontal movement, and an ERA over five, Strahm fails many of these tests. Maybe that's why the Padres were able to score him in last year's deadline deal.

But when you drill deeper, you find that he has figured out how to use his fastball best, and combined it with three secondary pitches that have their own positive aspects.

Matt Strahm may never be an ace, but he has enough going for him that he can easily be the Padres' secret weapon this year, whether it's out of the pen or in the rotation.

Lin: After an intriguing rookie year, Dinelson Lamet could be a third pitch away from a breakout

[Dennis Lin, Athletic, 2/27/18](#)

PEORIA, Ariz. — Dinelson Lamet is in need of a change. Or, maybe he isn't.

The Padres right-hander threw his fastball 55.2 percent of the time as a rookie last season, according to Statcast data. He threw his slider 38.9 percent of the time. Unsurprisingly, both pitches rate as plus. Changeups, meanwhile, accounted for just 5.2 percent of Lamet's deliveries.

Few starters were more reliant on two pitches in 2017, and Lamet posted a 4.57 ERA indicative of the predictability of his approach. However, he also struck out 10.9 batters per nine innings, ninth-best among starters who recorded at least 100 innings. In major league history, only four rookie starters, all of some repute—Kerry Wood, Dwight Gooden, Mark Prior and Hideo Nomo—cleared 100 innings with a higher punchout rate.

At the end of last season, Lamet identified the development of a third pitch as a critical objective. He had devastated numerous opponents, limiting right-handed batters to a .155 average and a .537 OPS. But left-handers painted a different picture, hitting .263 with an .867 OPS.

Lamet's changeup, a logical attempt to combat lefties, sits around 90 mph and shows late movement. "It's nasty," Padres catcher Austin Hedges said.

Last season, though, Lamet never gained confidence in the pitch. He ended just 22 at-bats with a changeup, resulting in nine hits, including two home runs. Left-handed batters went 8 for 18 with five extra-base hits. One key complication: Two hundred thirty-one pitchers threw a changeup at least 50 times last season; the differential between Lamet's fastball and changeup velocities ranked 222nd.

"You have to be careful when you use it," Hedges said. "If it's not thrown perfectly to a not-super-advanced hitter, it might speed up his bat speed a little bit, because it can be 90, 91 miles an hour."

Pitching coach Darren Balsley remarked that Lamet has the arsenal to be effective against left-handers. "The problem with Dinelson last year against lefties," Balsley explained, "was he fell behind in the count too often. ... It just too often was ball one. When you get behind major league hitters, when you're constantly behind in the count, they're going to get you, no matter what your stuff is like."

More conviction in a tertiary pitch would aid Lamet's efforts. To that end, he has spent considerable time this spring working on two newer options: the changeup and a low-80s curveball.

While Lamet said he has focused on varying the speed of his changeup, Balsley and Hedges both described the other offering as potentially plus. It has yet to see more than minimal game action; Statcast says Lamet threw a total of 10 curveballs in 2017. The possibilities are intriguing.

“I can throw the curveball a little harder, and that makes it blend into the slider,” Lamet said through an interpreter. “If I do speed up that curveball, then it ends up changing shape in terms of high to low and side to side.”

In September, Balsley suggested that Lamet’s changeup usage might double in 2018. On Monday, the pitching coach hinted that the curveball is developing into a sharper weapon. He predicted that observers will see more curveballs than changeups this spring.

“I think we may be leaning towards the curveball, but he’s still capable of doing both,” Balsley said. “And we don’t really want to give him too many pitches where all of a sudden he has five different pitches, because he was pretty dominant last year with just fastball-slider.”

“I’m not saying he’s not going to throw changeups during the season, because it’s good. The curveball is working really well right now. He’s got really good hands, he can do a lot of things with his hands. Usually, guys with good sliders can manipulate a baseball and do a lot of things.”

That ability extends to Lamet’s slider, which he can toggle between 80 and 90 mph, effectively giving the appearance of two different pitches. The Padres have contemplated introducing separate signs for each end of the spectrum. At present, Lamet is a bit like a freewheeling DJ on the mound.

“As he learns to throttle his breaking pitch, it should feel like a curveball on the lower end and a slider at the other end,” manager Andy Green said. “And understanding when to use that and how to use that is probably as imperative to his success as learning how to throw a changeup.”

“I think his ability to throttle the spin (of the slider) probably liberates him from having to go to a changeup to be successful. In that sense, he’s not the traditional two-pitch pitcher.”

If it weren’t already clear, the Padres do not envision drastic alterations to Lamet’s pitch usage. His four-seam fastball can be described as blistering, and he figures to grow more comfortable deploying his two-seamer. FanGraphs rated his slider among the majors’ most valuable, despite the frequency with which he threw it.

“He’s got four plus pitches,” Hedges said. “It just so happens that the fastball and the slider are plus-plus pitches. ... We’re trying to figure out right now the best way to use (the changeup), because it is a good pitch. It just might not be a necessary pitch.”

So, does Lamet need a third pitch at all?

“That’s a very good question,” Balsley said. “There have been a lot of very good pitchers who were two-pitch pitchers. Does he really need one to be successful? No. But to be a frontline, top-of-the-rotation pitcher, you would rather someone have a three-pitch mix.”

Notes

- The Padres notched their first Cactus League victory, Monday’s 10-4 result against the Angels and Shohei Ohtani. With several big-league regulars in the lineup for the first time, San Diego pounded five home runs. Hunter Renfroe, Christian Villanueva, Franchy Cordero, Franmil Reyes and Dusty Coleman all homered, with Cordero doing so in inside-the-park fashion.

- Wil Myers made his spring debut in right field, where he booted a ground-ball single. “He’s going to be fine,” Green said. “He made a really nice throw to the plate, and it looked like he was trying to turn a double play on the ball that bounced off him. He’s going to be good out there.”

Tatis Jr., Potts played beyond years for TinCaps

Alex Kraft , MiLB.com , February 26, 2018

Since their professional baseball careers began, Fernando Tatis Jr. and Hudson Potts have been difficult to separate.

After the White Sox signed Tatis out of the Dominican Republic in 2015, the Padres acquired him in June 2016 in a trade for James Shields. Five days later, San Diego selected Potts, a third baseman, with the 24th overall pick in the Draft out of Southlake Carroll High School in Texas.

The two players took the field together for the first time on June 22 of that season for the Padres' Rookie-level Arizona League affiliate. Potts -- who changed his last name from Sanchez to his stepfather's last name after being drafted -- was the designated hitter; Tatis, the son of a former big league third baseman, started at shortstop.

After thriving at the complex level, both players moved up to Class A Short Season Tri-City for the final month of the summer. As the 2017 season began, it came as no surprise to either man when they were assigned to Class A Fort Wayne.

"We've always moved around to leagues together," Tatis said. "We're close in the lineup, close in the field and then close off the field at the same time."

"We were just kind of always together," Potts agreed.

At 18 years old, Tatis and Potts not only were two of the youngest players on the TinCaps roster but were among the youngest in the Midwest League. They were hardly alone in the Fort Wayne locker room, however.

Four other teenagers began the year with the club: second baseman Reinaldo Ibarra, outfielder Jack Suwinski and infielder Eguo Rosario were 18, while right-hander Logan Allen was 19. That number grew to seven when 18-year-old left-hander Adrian Morejon joined the team in late July. Teenagers comprised 75 percent of the infield, with Potts at third, Tatis at shortstop, Ibarra at second and 22-year-old Brad Zunica the elder statesman at first.

"There were a lot of younger guys, but we were able to be serious when we needed," Potts said. "But with younger guys and younger personalities, it was a lot of fun. You could tell a difference throughout the year. I think it kept our energy levels up throughout the season."

"Seeing all those guys my age around, I knew it was going to be fun," Tatis added. "But at the same time, I knew it was going to be a process of adaptation."

The young shortstop's words rang true as he hit .230 through the first 23 games of the Midwest League season. Potts did not fare much better, batting .224 with one homer at the end of April. By the All-Star break, Tatis had gotten his average up to .260 with nine homers; Potts, however, stood at .226 with six long balls.

Potts said he never lost confidence. Rather, he looked to his teammates for a lift.

"I just tried to stay strong mentally and I knew I'd be able to pull out of it," he said. "I think each one of us, when we did struggle, we were able to see what everyone else on the team was doing, and I think our chemistry started to build. We were really playing for each other."

Both players took off after the break. Potts clubbed 14 homers in his final 65 games, more than doubling his first-half total, while batting .346 over 27 games in August. Tatis hit .311 and swatted 12 second-half homers in 14 fewer games.

"It was scary when pitchers were seeing us," Tatis said.

The stretch propelled the duo higher and higher in the Midwest League home run race. Tatis eventually settled into fourth with 21 -- eclipsing the TinCaps record of 20 set by Jake Patterson in 1997 -- while Potts tied the record and finished one spot back. Not only did the two make team history, they were the first 18-year-olds to hit at least 20 homers in the Midwest League since Derek Parks clubbed 24 for the Kenosha Twins in 1987.

While striving toward history, they also silently competed with each other.

"We never put it on the table," Tatis said with a laugh. "But everyone knew it was there and we were competing."

The contest didn't keep him and Potts from helping each other whenever possible.

"I'd ask him different stuff at different times," Potts said. "We definitely tried bouncing ideas off each other and picking up different things that happened in the game or that could happen in the future. We were always trying to learn."

Tatis and Potts became one of two sets of Midwest League teammates to belt 20 homers, joining Lake County's Emmanuel Tapia (29) and Conner Capel (22). But their run of dominance came to an abrupt end in late August. The Padres promoted Tatis to Double-A San Antonio for the final two weeks, bypassing Class A Advanced. The move surprised the Dominican youngster, who had expected to be with Fort Wayne through the playoffs.

Instead, the duo was split up for the first time. Potts understood the hole his friend's departure would leave in the lineup.

"He was a huge part of us and our success throughout the year," Potts said. "Him getting moved up, I mean, that was awesome. He deserved all of that. But we knew as a team that was a hole. We needed to come together and just play how we knew each one of us could play."

The TinCaps did just that, riding a late surge to the Midwest League Championship Series where they were defeated by Quad Cities. Tatis' replacement, 17-year-old Gabriel Arias, filled in nicely with a .276 average in eight postseason contests.

Tatis also finished strongly, collecting hits in each of his last nine games with the Missions after a slow start in the Texas League.

"The pitching was better. It was a challenge," MLB.com's No. 8 overall prospect said. "But at the end, I think I got how to read them and by then I had a good time."

With training camps open, both players are ready to resume their journeys. Potts spent the winter honing his speed with an eye toward becoming a better baserunner, while Tatis drilled himself in a number of areas. They've reported to Arizona, with Tatis checking in as the youngest player in any big league camp. He's already asserted himself, homering in the Padres' Cactus League opener on Friday.

This season may be the first that Tatis and Potts don't start in the same infield. But neither is ruling out a reunion.

"Hopefully," Tatis said. "Huddy's a great guy and I love playing with him. It would be great to be next to him again."

"We'll just let it all play out," Potts said.

Chris Young back with the Padres- and trying to earn a roster spot

Wilson, AP, 2/26/18

PEORIA, Ariz. (AP) — There's some living history in the San Diego Padres' clubhouse this spring.

Chris Young is back with the Padres and trying to earn a spot on the staff, whether it's in the rotation or in the bullpen.

"Archaic, maybe, but I don't know about historic," the 38-year-old said with a laugh.

Actually, he is historic. Young is the last Padres pitcher to win a playoff game. On Oct. 7, 2006, the 6-foot-10 right-hander threw 6 2-3 scoreless innings of four-hit ball in the Padres' 3-1 victory at St. Louis in Game 3 of their NL Division Series.

"I don't know if that's known throughout the clubhouse," Young said. "We'll see who figures it out."

That's how long it's been since the Padres won a playoff game.

The guy who got the save that day, Trevor Hoffman, is going into the Hall of Fame this summer. The Padres' catcher in that game, Mike Piazza, went into the Hall of Fame in 2016. The left fielder, Dave Roberts, is going into his third season as manager of the rival Los Angeles Dodgers after spending five seasons on San Diego's staff.

The day after Young's victory, the Padres were eliminated. They haven't been back to the postseason since, although they came close the following season when they lost a wild-card tiebreaker at Colorado. That win remains San Diego's only playoff victory since 1998.

Young is back with the Padres after seven years away, including missing all of 2013 with arm problems. He spent the last three seasons with the Kansas City Royals, earning the victory in Game 1 of the 2015 World Series, a 14-inning epic that sent the Royals on their way to their first title in 30 years.

"I feel good," said Young, who's in camp as a non-roster invitee. "I feel healthy, excited about the way the ball's coming out right now. If I can come in and help this team win and be a veteran presence, San Diego has a very special place in my heart, some unbelievable memories. I was here when this team was good. The last winning season here I was part of, and I want to be part of the next, and the next playoff team as well."

Young's last season in San Diego, 2010, was the Padres' last winning season.

“So I’ve been there. I remember the good times for this organization. I know how great the fans of San Diego are and how much it would mean to them to get back there. I would love to be part of it.”

Young agreed to a minor league contract on Dec. 22 and if added to the 40-man roster would get a \$1 million, one-year deal with the chance to earn \$6 million in performance bonuses: \$4 million based on starts through 29 and \$200,000 based on innings through 120. He is the oldest player in camp, with the most service time on a team that’s rebuilding and isn’t expected to contend for a season or two.

Manager Andy Green said Young’s chances to make the team are “real.” Young rejoined the Padres a day before Tyson Ross signed a similar deal. Ross appeared in just 12 games for Texas last season after recovering from surgery for a shoulder ailment in October 2016. He was San Diego’s opening day starter in 2016 but didn’t pitch again due to the shoulder ailment.

“Those guys are competing for rotation spots. And C.Y. has the ability to bounce to the bullpen; Tyson really hasn’t done that,” Green said. “But C.Y. could potentially find himself in that mix, but right now we’re looking at him specifically as a starter.”

Young pitched two hitless, scoreless innings Saturday in his spring debut.

“I’m not focused on the external, ‘Who else is in the room,’ or anything like that,” Young said. “What I’m focused on is me and going out and I know what I have to do to be a successful major league player. I’ve done it for a long time now and I know when I’m right that I belong in the big leagues, and when I’m not right, the results haven’t been good. If I’m pitching to my capabilities, I feel like I can help any club in the big leagues and I certainly want it to be here.”

Young was released by the Royals in mid-June with a 7.50 ERA in 14 appearances, including two starts.

Young has been reunited with former Royals teammate Eric Hosmer, who signed a \$144 million, eight-year deal last week.

“He’s probably one of the most intelligent, brilliant teammates I’ve had,” Hosmer said. “What’s amazing to me is, C.Y., you talk to him off the field, he’s as polite as they come, but once that game starts, I don’t think there’s anybody who competes more than he does. It’s little things like that, when he’s on the mound, it drives you to do what you can to win a ballgame.”

Padres slug their way to first spring training win

John Horvath, FSSD, 2/26/18

Powered by five home runs, the San Diego Padres beat the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim 10-4 on Monday afternoon at Peoria Stadium.

Hunter Renfroe, Christian Villanueva, Franchy Cordero, Franmil Reyes, and Dusty Coleman all circled the bases for San Diego in what was their first win in Cactus League play. Renfroe and Villanueva went back-to-back in what was a four-run second inning for the Friars. Cordero and Reyes hit homers in the sixth inning, and Dusty Coleman went yard in the seventh.

Of the five home runs, only Cordero's was not of the over-the-fence variety. With one out in the sixth, the 23-year-old launched a high fly ball that ricocheted off the top of the left-center field wall. As the Angels chased after it, Cardero scampered all the way around the bases and beat the throw home for the first inside-the-park home run this year in spring training.

Jordan Lyles started the game for the Padres and threw two scoreless innings. The rotation candidate did give up three hits and walked a batter.

Making his spring debut at the plate for the Angels, Japanese phenom Shohei Ohtani walked twice and hit an RBI single.