

## Tribe selects Naylor at No. 29 to open Draft

By Jordan Bastian MLB.com @MLBastian

CLEVELAND -- Before the MLB Draft began on Monday night, Scott Barnsby's message to the Indians' army of scouts was a simple one. The team's new director of amateur scouting expressed appreciation for the countless hours spent in cars, on planes, in hotels and in bleacher seats behind home plate at fields around the country.

The hard part was done. The time to reel in potential Major League talent had arrived and -- with four picks on Day 1 of the Draft -- Cleveland was in prime position to cast a wide net, see how the big board developed throughout the night and nab some new prospects. Beginning with the selection of prep catcher Noah Naylor in the first round, the Indians enjoyed a promising haul.

"It was an exciting night for us," said Barnsby, who took over this year for Brad Grant after his extremely successful decade of Drafts for the Indians. "We're really excited about the four guys that we took."

In Naylor, who was taken with the 29th overall pick in the first round, Cleveland acquired a player deemed by some evaluators as the best high school bat in this Draft class. The Indians then took a pair of prep right-handers in Ethan Hankins (35th overall) and Lenny Torres Jr. (41st overall). Before a shoulder issue stalled his season, Hankins was viewed as having No. 1 pick potential.

Following those three prep selections, the Tribe wrapped up Day 1 by picking Southern Mississippi right-hander Nick Sandlin in the second round (67th overall). Sandlin throws from multiple arm angles, features as many as five pitches and turned in some of the best statistics of any Division I collegiate arm this year. Barnsby was jokingly asked if Indians manager Terry Francona had called yet to see if Sandlin was available for the big league bullpen.

"I think we're about to get that phone call tonight," Barnsby said with a laugh.

All in all, it was hard to see the Day 1 quartet as anything but promising for the Indians, who are trying to stock the farm in an effort to sustain the Major League team's successful run in recent seasons. That process will continue on Tuesday with Rounds 3-10. The MLB.com preview show begins at 12:30 p.m. ET, with exclusive coverage beginning at 1 p.m. ET.

A year ago, the Indians did not pick until No. 64 in the second round, when the franchise nabbed fleet-footed prep outfielder Quentin Holmes. The lack of a first-rounder was due to Cleveland signing free-agent slugger Edwin Encarnacion in the offseason prior to the 2017 campaign, in which the club captured its second consecutive American League Central crown.

Things were a little more hectic for Barnsby and the team's scouts on Day 1 this time around.

The 18-year-old Naylor -- the first catcher taken in the first round by the Indians since 1976 -- was selected out of St. Joan of Arc Catholic High School in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada. The lefty-hitting catcher is the younger brother of Padres first-base prospect Josh Naylor, and he comes with a similar offensive profile, according to MLB Pipeline.

In seven games for the Ontario Blue Jays (an elite 18-and-up team based in Canada) this spring, Naylor hit .421 in 26 at-bats, and he also toured Florida as a member of the Canadian Junior National Team during Spring Training. That included playing games against the staffs of the Red Sox and Blue Jays.

Naylor also took part in the High School Home Run Derby during the All-Star Game festivities at Marlins Park last July. While he has shown pop in those types of events, what really stood out to the Indians was Naylor's ability to control the bat through all regions of the strike zone. Cleveland was also intrigued by his positional versatility and plans on testing him out in the infield.

"We're excited about Noah's bat. He can really hit," Barnsby said. "Controls the strike zone. Really good hand-eye. Can drive the ball to all fields. There's power there. Defensively, [he's] a stay-behind-the-plate catcher with arm strength."

The 18-year-old Hankins dealt with shoulder issues in his senior season with Forsyth Central High School in Georgia, diminishing his Draft stock. When healthy -- and the Indians are confident he is now -- the 6-foot-6 Hankins can touch 97-98 mph with his fastball to go with a good changeup and developing curve. In helping USA Baseball's 18U National Team to a gold medal in the World Cup, the righty posted a 0.75 ERA with 27 strikeouts and three walks in 12 innings.

The Indians gained the 35th pick used on Hankins as compensation for Carlos Santana signing with the Phillies in free agency last offseason.

"Ethan is an impressive young man," Barnsby said. "It's a four-pitch mix and he throws a lot of strikes. He's an athletic kid. The arm works well, so we're absolutely looking at him as a starter."

During Competitive Balance Round A, the Indians doubled down on prep right-handers with the selection of Torres. During his senior year with Beacon (N.Y.) High School, the 17-year-old Torres had 85 strikeouts and a 0.68 ERA in 41 innings. The 6-foot-2, 185-pound pitcher can reach 96 mph with his fastball, impressed the Indians with his slider and has a developing changeup.

Naylor (Texas A&M), Hankins (Vanderbilt) and Torres (St. John's) are each committed to a college program, but Barnsby was optimistic that they would sign with the Indians. That confidence stems from the rapport built over the past several weeks and months by area scouts Mike Kanen (Naylor and Torres) and CT Bradford (Hankins).

"We're working through that," Barnsby said. "Our area scouts have done a great job building relationships with them. We're confident that these guys want to go out and play."

The Indians wrapped up Day 1 with the selection of Sandlin in the second round. After spending two seasons as a reliever, Sandlin moved up to the role of Friday night starter for Southern Miss and turned in a brilliant campaign. In 102 1/3 innings, the right-hander went 10-0 with 144 strikeouts and 18 walks, while leading all Division I pitchers in ERA (1.06) and WHIP (0.71).

"He's not a real big guy, but he's got now stuff out of the 'pen," Barnsby said. "He varies his slots. Unique. Deceptive. And he's able to throw strikes from all variations."

After a draining day, and while holding a conference call around midnight ET, Barnsby spoke with the energy of someone who wished he could see all four players in an Indians uniform by Tuesday morning.

"With four picks," he said, "we were looking forward to it coming in."

### **Encarnacion named week's top AL player**

By Chad Thornburg MLB.com

The Dodgers' Matt Kemp and the Indians' Edwin Encarnacion were recognized as National League and American League Players of the Week presented by W.B. Mason on Monday, MLB announced.

Kemp is enjoying a bounce-back season since rejoining the Dodgers in a five-player trade with Atlanta in December. He entered Monday leading the NL's batting race (.344), just ahead of Cincinnati's Scooter Gennett (.342).

Last week, Kemp hit .429 (9-for-21) with three homers, two doubles, eight RBIs and six runs scored. The 33-year-old has not only been the Dodgers' top offensive performer amid a slew of injuries to their lineup, he's also quieted concerns over his defense with his play in the outfield. Kemp added his first outfield assist of the season Saturday, launching a rocket from left field to throw out Colorado's Charlie Blackmon at home plate at Coors Field.

"Self-admittedly, he's learning some things in his 10th year, as far as approaching pitchers, talking to the hitters and coaches. Matt's really growing," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said last week. "You see his at-bat quality. He's always been a guy that can drive in runs and get a hit and slug a little bit, but to take the walk, stay out of the double play, stay on a slider down and away and use the whole field, I haven't seen that consistently, even at his best. There's a lot of good things going on with Matt."

Encarnacion punctuated a productive week with a two-homer, four-RBI showing for the Indians in a 7-5 loss to the Twins in Minneapolis on Sunday. The veteran slugger hit .407 (11-for-27) with five home runs, two doubles, 13 RBIs and nine runs scored last week.

"I thought [Sunday] was one of those days where he puts us on his shoulders and we won," Cleveland manager Terry Francona said. "Well, we didn't, and it kills you. But if he starts to heat up like that, like it looks like -- boy, that would be tremendous."

Encarnacion entered Monday batting .246/.317/.517 with 16 home runs and 40 RBIs in 53 games. He's the second Indians player to earn Player of the Week honors in 2018, joining shortstop Francisco Lindor (twice). Lindor was also named Player of the Month for May.

### **"Walking into the Draft room, it's an exciting moment"**

**by Jordan Bastian**

The results of the decade worth of Drafts under the supervision of Brad Grant has been seen on the field for the Indians.

It can be seen every time Francisco Lindor makes a spectacular defensive play or swats another home run. It can be seen when Bradley Zimmer sprints into an outfield gap, using a jaw-dropping dive to pluck a baseball from the air. It's there when Cody Allen fires a pitch to seal a save and can be heard when that pitch pops into the glove of Roberto Perez.

It was there when Tyler Naquin was a finalist for the American League Rookie of the Year Award two years ago or when Lonnie Chisenhall had one of the greatest offensive games in franchise history. It was there again when Jason Kipnis made two All-Star teams. It's present when Andrew Miller—acquired for four players drafted by Cleveland—unleashes his slider. And you saw it over the weekend when Greg Allen stole home.

Over the past five years, the Indians have won two division titles, one American League pennant, played in a Wild Card Game, had a 102-win season and rattled off an AL-record 22-game winning streak. The players get the spotlight and manager Terry Francona and his staff have earned a heap of the credit, but in many cases, it all began with area scouts and cross-checkers and Draft-day decisions.

The Indians are at a critical juncture in their franchise timeline. There is still hope that this year's team can capture another division crown and make a run in the playoffs. In order to sustain what has been one of the most successful runs of seasons in the team's long annals, though, Cleveland will need to continue to find building blocks for the future. That begins with the MLB Draft, which arrives again Monday night.

After 10 years as the director of amateur scouting, Grant has moved into a different role within the front office and handed the keys to the Draft to Scott Barnsby. MLB.com recently caught up with Barnsby, who took a quick trip home two weekends ago between weeks of meetings that have helped get the club organized ahead of Monday night's selections.

In Barnsby's first year in charge of the amateur scouting department, the Indians have picks №29, №35 (compensatory pick for Carlos Santana signing with the Phillies in free agency), №41 (Competitive Balance Round A) and №67 on Day 1. This year, Cleveland has a pool of \$9,145,200 (11th highest in MLB) to spend in the first 10 rounds, including \$2,332,700 to spend on their first selection.

MLB.com: You've been involved with the Draft in the past, but what has been the biggest difference for you since taking over the reigns from Brad Grant?

Barnsby: "The good thing about us is that we've had the same people in place for a long time. Brad really hasn't gone too far. He's obviously right there whenever we need anything. So, I would say it's very similar to what I've done the last few years. I guess as you get closer to the Draft, maybe it's a little more time preparing for meetings and making sure we have everything we need. But, honestly, that's kind of what I've done the last few years as well. So, it hasn't been a huge difference. We feel pretty good about our process over the last few years. We feel pretty good about the direction we're going. Obviously, every year we try to make it better. So, any tweaks we make, we're going to make as an entire group. That's really it, so I can't say it's been a huge difference for me."

MLB.com: How much has the stability within the scouting department made the transition to the new role easier for you?

Barnsby: "I think that's it. You know how it is. You start, you take on a new position, a new role and you're like, 'Oh man, where do I start?' Well, it starts by having a really good support system and that's what we have in place. These guys, not only is it a support system we have in place from the front office, and obviously Brad, but we've got a pretty good leadership out in the field, too. John Mirabelli's done this for a long time. We've got Donny Poplin, one of our special assistants. He goes out and sees guys. And Bo Hughes and Scott Meaney and our entire senior leadership group, it's been a seamless transition, because of the support out in the field, too. And actually, the one thing that I have done a little bit more is spend a little more time going back and forth to Cleveland and being in the office a little bit. But, I've actually enjoyed that part of it quite a bit, being around a little bit more. So, yeah, the support system makes it pretty easy."

Players drafted and signed under Grant  
Highest bWAR, all with Indians

.....  
19.8 Jason Kipnis  
19.6 Francisco Lindor  
9.3 Cody Allen  
8.6 Lonnie Chisenhall  
2.8 Roberto Perez  
2.0 Tyler Naquin  
1.6 Bradley Zimmer

MLB.com: How much time have you spent out in the field yourself to get another set of eyes on Draft prospects?

Barnsby: "Quite a bit. I was out quite a bit. So, part of my responsibility over the last few years was out seeing players, and then also helping coordinate scheduling for all our regional guys and our national guys. So, they do a great job of putting their schedule together, but if we're trying to prioritize guys over the last few months of the season, I would help do that. I did a little less of that this year. Some of that fell on Clint Longnecker. That guy takes on just about everything for us. I don't know how well you know Clint or not, but he doesn't sleep. He gets about an hour a night and just makes sure that everything keeps rolling. So, some of that has been taken off my plate. As far as myself, I would say I probably saw less players this year. And then I tried to do my best to prioritize some priority guys from the midseason to now. And then, the big difference right now is typically I'm locked into tournaments from the beginning of the week to the end of the week. And we've been in meetings the last seven days, so I think that's a little bit of an adjustment there."

MLB.com: How many players do you think you got out to see since last year's Draft?

Barnsby: "Typically, it's over 100. It's somewhere between that 100–150 range, depending on the year. And then this year it was less than a 100 guys."

MLB.com: If you're not seeing as many players yourself, how much does that speak to the level of trust that has been built within your army of scouts?

Barnsby: "That's so true. In all honesty, you think about, really, I know our guys do a really nice job at the ballpark. Obviously, they certainly know what they're looking at. And the comfort level, in all seriousness, I'd prefer to have them go see the guy, because they make a lot of sense when they break it down and that's helpful. There's a huge level of trust there."

MLB.com: Last year was a little different in that you guys didn't have a first-round pick. This time around, you have four picks within the first 100 selections. How does that alter the preparation leading up to the Draft?

Barnsby: "Last year, we didn't pick until 64. This year we've got 29, 35, 41, 67. So, we'll actually be picking four times on Day 1. I'm not sure [how much it changes the approach]. It doesn't adjust the organizational philosophy, which is take the best player. Be prepared. Work through the same process with everybody. And then, make sure that no stone is left unturned and make sure that we have plenty of information to really make a good decision. That doesn't change. But, we obviously have a bigger pool this year, so I think one of the things that we've always worked to do—and one thing that I know our organization does really well from the top down—is just maximize the dollars. We want to make sure we get value out of every pick and that's the goal. So, it hasn't really changed there. Sure, there might be a little more stress this year, just because we have four picks on the first day, but we're excited about it. It's a great opportunity to build on what we have in place right now. And having four picks on Day 1, let's hope that we get quite a bit of talent coming into the system. We feel pretty good with some of the results over the last few years and hopefully we can keep that trend going."

Top Draft picks under Grant.....

2017: OF Quentin Holmes (2nd round)

2016: OF Will Benson (14th overall)

2015: LHP Brady Aiken (17th overall)

2014: OF Bradley Zimmer (21st overall)

2013: OF Clint Frazier (5th overall)

2012: OF Tyler Naquin (15th overall)

2011: SS Francisco Lindor (8th overall)

2010: LHP Drew Pomeranz (5th overall)

2009: RHP Alex White (15th overall)

2008: INF Lonnie Chisenhall (29th overall)

MLB.com: What do you think of this Draft class? It looks like there are some great college players who could come off the board early. A lot of the mock Drafts show a lot of high school talent coming into play by the middle of the first round and then down where you're picking. Do you think that's a fair projection?

Barnsby: "It's tough, because it's really difficult to predict what is going to happen in front of you. I do think that there's actually depth in every area this year. There's some really good college position players, there's some really good college pitchers, high school pitchers and high school position players. All four. I think there's a pretty deep talent pool, so it's tough to say which one. Obviously, some of it's going to be dictated by what happens ahead of us. So, we'll see. But, I can't say for sure. There's potential for some of the college position players to go off the board at the front of the Draft. That's what it looks like in some of the mock drafts, but how that plays out, we're going to have to wait and see."

MLB.com: Does Nick Madrigal kind of feel like one that got away? You guys took him in the 17th round of the 2015 Draft, but the pool restrictions hindered your ability to sign him at the time. Now, he's projected to be an early-first-round prospect.

Barnsby: "Yeah. Absolutely. So, sure, we would love to be able to sign everybody, but there are obviously limitations with the dollars. Unfortunately, it didn't work out a few years ago, but we're really happy for Nick, because we know what a great kid he is. Donny Lyle, our scout in Northern California, spent an awful lot of time on him leading up to the Draft in high school and then Conor Glassey now. So, we know Nick really well. He's a really good person and obviously we wish him the best. Sure, you'd love to have talented guys in our organization, but we're hoping it works out for Nick."

MLB.com: That's where you probably miss the draft-and-follow system...

Barnsby: "I know. I know. A little more time and unlimited resources."

MLB.com: Your top pick last year, Quentin Holmes, hasn't played for an affiliate yet this year. Is he out in extended Spring Training?

Barnsby: "He is, yeah. Quentin's out there. He came back in great shape. Everybody feels really good about the progress he's made. He's gotten stronger. He's really working hard on his approach. We knew coming in, a guy from New England, he had some exposure with Team USA and everything, but it is a little bit of a longer road at times, just because of what he faces in the Northeast. So, we'll see. We're looking forward to some exciting things this summer from him, but he's in Arizona right now."

MLB.com: After all the hours spent at baseball fields around the country, all the miles put in on the road, all the nights at hotels, how rewarding is it to see the area scouts kind of get their moment in the spotlight on Draft day?

Barnsby: "Absolutely. That's probably the most rewarding thing out of the whole process, is just knowing that as soon as the Draft was over last year, these guys jump right back in the car, right back on the planes, and cover all the main events throughout the summer, worked through the fall, spent time developing relationships with players, seeing the guys early, middle and late, and then it all comes together at the end, and you listen to them sit in front of the group and present everything that we have. You definitely take a lot of pride in that, because we walked out of there, just like every other year, we felt really good with where we are thanks to all the work they've done."

MLB.com: The way your Draft process is designed now, it's a little more calculated in which player is the "best player available" when your pick rolls around. It seems to have removed the Draft room arguing between scouts that you used to hear about from many years ago. How much does it help to eliminate those types of things in the heat of the moment?

Barnsby: "Absolutely. It's a more, I don't know if rational is the fair word, but probably more of a rational process. You get in there and we want to make the best decision for the Indians. And its tough sometimes, because you have differing opinions on certain players. But, that's productive. We want to know the high, the low and anything in between on these guys. We feel like, and we hope, that their voice is heard throughout the entire year and not just in the Draft room. So, every day leading up tot he Draft, there's conversations, there's reports being read, there's anything that's documented in the system. We follow up with the guys and we know exactly how they feel coming in. So, I think trying to make sure we get that out throughout the entire year and not just having a free-for-all in the Draft room has been very productive and really helpful. We can kind of take a step back when we get to the Draft, have everything in place and be really consistent with how we select guys."

MLB.com: So much of the Draft is about enhancing probability. With four picks on Day 1, how hopeful are you that you guys have increased the chances of reeling in future Major League talent?

Barnsby: "Yeah. it's exciting. I think every year at this time, it's the time of year where there's some nerves, there's some stress. We want to make sure we haven't overlooked anything. So, every year walking into the Draft room, it's an exciting moment, because we know we have a chance to bring in some additional talent. But, yeah, this year in particular, having the additional picks, it's hard not to get excited about the potential outcomes and some of the players that are out there. Yeah, it gets exciting."

### **The Indians selected catcher Noah Naylor with the No. 29 pick in the amateur draft and right-handed pitcher Ethan Hankins at No. 35 overall as their first two of four picks to be made Monday night.**

By Ryan Lewis

In Round A of the competitive balance phase (41st overall pick), the Indians added right-hander Lenny Torres Jr.

Naylor, 18, attended St. Joan of Arc Catholic High School in Mississauga, Ontario. Naylor was ranked as the No. 20 overall prospect according to Baseball America and was No. 27 according to MLB Pipeline's rankings.

His primary position is as a catcher with a strong arm, but he does have experience in the infield and could eventually end up at third base.

Naylor, who hits left-handed, hit .421 with a home run, two doubles and six RBI in seven games with the Ontario Blue Jays, the elite 18U travel team in Ontario. He was also a member of the Canadian Junior National Team and during spring training logged at-bats against the Boston Red Sox and Toronto Blue Jays.

Last year, Naylor competed in the 2017 High School Home Run Derby at Marlins Park. Naylor showed off his arm in the 2017 Perfect Game All-American Classic by nailing a couple of base-runners.

Naylor has a commitment to play at Texas A&M and his older brother, Josh, is a former first-round selection and is in the San Diego Padres' organization.

Hankins, 18, is a 6-foot-6 right-handed pitcher with a mid-to-high-90s fastball with an 80 grade (the highest on the scouting scale) according to an MLB Pipeline draft profile. He attended Forsyth Central High School in Cumming, Ga., and was the No. 21 prospect according to MLB Pipeline.

Hankins put himself in the conversation to be the first overall selection last summer while pitching for Team USA en route to winning the 18-and-under World Cup.

He then experienced some shoulder issues and wasn't as sharp this spring, putting his draft status in question.

Hankins has a commitment to play for Vanderbilt. The Indians held the No. 35 pick as a revenue-sharing club that had a qualifying free agent (Carlos Santana) sign for more than \$50 million.

Torres, 17, posted a 0.68 ERA (3 ER/41 IP) for the Beacon (N.Y.) High School Bulldogs this spring, striking out 85 hitters during his senior season in the Lower Hudson Valley.

Torres (6-2, 185 pounds) posted strong showings last summer at Perfect Game National, the Tournament of Stars and by pitching in the Perfect Game All-American Classic Game. He is committed to play at St. John's University in New York City.

The Indians also hold a second-round pick (No. 67 overall).

Akron Beacon Journal LOADED: 06.05.2018

### **MLB 2018 draft: What kind of talent can the Cleveland Indians find with their top four picks?**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio - So what kind of talent can the Indians expect to land by having four of the first 67 picks in this year's MLB draft?

The draft goes 40 rounds and lasts three days, but the Indians will make their first four picks Monday night at No. 20, 35, 41 and 67. Those picks will come in the first two rounds, including compensation picks and competitive balance picks.

Reviewing the last 20 years of the draft, here are some of the players teams have selected with those picks.

No. 1: Notable players taken with the 29th pick in the first round from 1998-2017

In 2012 Texas took outfielder Lewis Brinson. They traded him to Milwaukee in August of 2016 for Jonathan Lucroy and Jeremy Jeffress after Lucroy balked at being traded to the Indians. In January, the Brewers sent Brinson to Miami as part of the Christian Yelich deal.

Brinson is currently playing center field for the Marlins.

In 2011 the Giants selected infielder Joe Panik. He's currently recovering from thumb surgery, but Panik has won a Gold Glove and gone to an All-Star Game for the Giants.

Joe Panik Delivers Back-To-Back HRs In 1-0 Victories

In 2009 the Angels drafted reliever Cam Bedrosian. He's spent parts of five seasons with the Angles. Bedrosian is 1-1 with a 4.81 ERA in 28 appearances this year.

In 2008 the Indians drafted a shortstop named Lonnie Chisenhall out of Pitt Junior College. He's now an outfielder and has played parts of eight seasons with the Indians. He' currently on the disabled list.

In 2003 Arizona drafted outfielder Carlos Quentin. He played from 2006 through 2014 with Arizona, the White Sox and San Diego. He hit 154 homers with an .831 OPS in his career.

In 2000 Atlanta drafted right-hander Adam Wainwright. They traded him to St. Louis in December of 2003. Wainwright, as a Cardinal, is 147-84. He's won 20 games twice.

No. 2: Notable players taken with the 35th overall pick in the draft 1993-2017.

In 2012 the Mets drafted catcher Kevin Plawecki. He's spent parts of the last four seasons with them.

In 2009 Arizona drafted third baseman Matt Davidson. They traded him to the White Sox for Addison Reed in December of 2013. Last year Davidson hit 26 homers for the White Sox. He's currently on the disabled list with back spasms.

Matt Davidson belts three home runs on Opening Day

In 2007 Texas drafted outfielder Julio Borbon. He played in the big leagues with the Rangers, Cubs and Baltimore. This year he was playing in the independent Atlantic League.

In 2005 San Diego drafted high school right-hander Cesar Ramos. He pitched in the big leagues from 2009 through 2016 for the Padres, Rays, Angels and Rangers. He appeared in 267 games.

In 2002 Oakland drafted college catcher Jeremy Brown. He became one of the central figures in the book Moneyball. Brown played only five games in the big leagues and retired after the 2007 season.

In 2001 the Indians took right-hander J.D. Martin out of Sherman E. Burroughs High School in Ridgecrest, Calif. He spent eight years in the minors with the Tribe before finally getting to the big leagues with Washington in 2009 and 2010. He's currently pitching for Class AA Memphis (Tampa Bay).

In 1998 the White Sox drafted outfielder Aaron Rowand. He played for 11 years in the big leagues with the White Sox, Phillies and Giants. He helped the White Sox win the World Series in 2005 and the Giants win it in 2010.

No. 3: Notable players taken with the 41st overall pick from 2017 through 1998.

In 2012 Houston drafted right-hander Lance McCullers. He's 7-3 with a 3.89 ERA this year for the Astros and helped them win the World Series last year.

Lance McCullers Jr. limits damage in the 3rd in Game 3 of the World Series

In 2009 Arizona drafted infielder Chris Ownings. He's spent parts of the last six years in the big leagues as a utility player for the Diamondbacks.

In 2008 the Cubs drafted infielder Ryan Flaherty. He's spent part of the last seven years in the big leagues with Baltimore and Atlanta as a utility player.

In 2007 Oakland drafted left-hander Sean Doolittle. He's 2-2 with a 1.71 ERA and 14 saves for Washington this season.

In 2006 the Yankees drafted right-hander Joba Chamberlain. He spent 10 years in the big leagues, mostly with the Yankees.

In 2002 the Indians drafted second baseman Micah Schilling out of Silliman Institue in Clinton, La. He never progressed beyond Class A.

No. 4: Notable players taken with the 67th overall pick from 2017 through 1998.

In 2011 the Indians drafted right-hander Dillon Howard out Searcy High School in Searcy, Ark. He pitched one year in the minors and was suspended for testing positive for an amphetamine.

In 2007 the Nationals drafted right-hander Jordan Zimmerman. He went 70-50 with the Nationals, but hasn't found that kind of success after signing with the Tigers as a free agent before the 2016 season.

In 2004 the A's drafted catcher Kurt Suzuki. He's played 12 years in the big leagues with the A's, Nationals, Twins and Braves.

Kurt Suzuki homers twice in win

In 2000 Houston drafted right-hander Chad Qualls. He's pitched 14 years in the big leagues and appeared in 844 games.

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### **Cleveland Indians' Edwin Encarnacion named AL Player of the Week**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Edwin Encarnacion, the parrot and opposing pitchers have been getting quite a workout over the last week.

Encarnacion, the Indians DH and first baseman, was named AL Player of the Week on Monday for the damage he did over the last week. Starting on May 28, Encarnacion led the American League in homers, extra base hits, RBI, total bases and slugging percentage.

In black and white numbers, he hit .407 (11-for-27) with nine runs, two doubles, five homers and 13 RBI. He totaled 28 bases and a slugging percentage of 1.037.

On Sunday he hit two long home with four RBI, but it wasn't enough to prevent the Indians from losing to the Twins, 7-5. The Indians lost three out of four games to the Twins over the weekend at Target Field. Encarnacion, however, hit three homers to make him the leading home-run hitter among visiting players at the Twins home grounds with 15.

The Indians open a two-game series against Milwaukee on Tuesday night at Progressive Field. Encarnacion will bring a 10-game hitting streak into the series in which he's batting .425 (17-for-40) with 14 runs, six homers and 15 RBI.

Encarnacion started the season hitting .160 (16-for-100) in March and April. When the weather warmed, so did he. Encarnacion hit .315 (29-for-92) in May as the Indians led the big leagues in runs. So far in June, he's hitting .455 (5-for-11) with three homers and six RBI.

When Encarnacion homers, he lifts his right elbow. When he played in Toronto, his teammates felt it made a perfect perch for an invisible parrot. This is Encarnacion's second year with the Indians and so far the parrot has been living large.

Encarnacion won the award over Minnesota's Eddie Rosario, who hit three homers against the Tribe on Sunday.

It was Encarnacion's second player of the week award. He won his first one for the week of Aug. 30, 2015 with the Blue Jays.

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### **The story of how Terry Francona met the Gundersons from Aberdeen, SD will get you right in the feels**

By Joe Noga

MINNEAPOLIS -- Indians manager Terry Francona didn't have a lot to smile about this weekend in Minnesota as his team was dropping three straight to the Twins, but Saturday's game came with a bit of a bright spot after he noticed some fans on the scoreboard at Target Field.

Ryan and Hailey Gunderson of Aberdeen, South Dakota, made the five-hour drive to catch the game. When the scoreboard pointed out where the brother and sister were from, Francona happened to be looking up from the dugout and took notice. He phoned the press box and asked a Twins representative to arrange a postgame meeting.

The Twins made an announcement over the public address system directing the Gundersons to report to guest services in order to claim a "special prize." Little did they know, their prize was none other than Francona himself.

"When I saw (the Gundersons on the scoreboard), it buckled me," Francona said. "They went to the same high school as my mom. The same college. I don't know, it was kind of funny."

Following his postgame media session, Francona greeted the Gundersons outside the Indians clubhouse.

Francona was born in Aberdeen, his mother's hometown, in 1959. His father "Tito" Francona has played minor league ball there for the Aberdeen Pheasants of the Northern League.

"It's a smallish town," Francona said. "I don't know what the population is now. I think it used to be 15,000-20,000. I don't know if it's gotten bigger or smaller. My guess is it probably got smaller."

It's where Tito Francona met Terry's mother, Roberta Jackson, whose sister was married to Zeke Strange, a coach with the Pheasants.

"I ended up being born there and (Tito) went back there for the first two winters and then they moved," Francona said. "They went back to South Dakota in 1959 and 1960 and then they moved to New Brighton, Pennsylvania, in 1961."

Francona said the Gundersons got a kick out of the fact that he knew bits of random trivia, such as the mascot from their high school, the Golden Eagles.

However, the sweetness of the moment came with just a hint of bitter for Francona, whose father passed away in February.

"It's funny, because the first thing I thought of was, 'I've got to tell my dad,'" Francona said. "But, on a day when the easiest thing to be was grumpy, it kind of was fun."

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 06.05.2018

### **Cleveland Indians, Milwaukee Brewers series preview, pitching matchups**

By Paul Hoynes

CLEVELAND, Ohio - Here is the preview and pitching matchups for the Indians' series against the Brewers.

Where/when: Progressive Field, Tuesday and Wednesday.

TV/radio: SportsTime Ohio, WTAM and WMMS will carry the series.

Pitching matchups and starting times: RHP Junior Guerra (3-3, 2.65) vs. Corey Kluber (8-2, 2.02) Tuesday at 7:10 p.m. and RHP Chase Anderson (4-4, 4.45) vs. RHP Carlos Carrasco (6-4, 4.50) Wednesday at 1:10 p.m.

Series: The Indians and Brewers have split two games this season. The Brewers lead, 207-205, overall.

Team updates: The AL Central-leading Indians, after winning six straight, have lost three straight. The bullpen continues to give up leads and ties. Tribe relievers are 5-13 with the worst ERA in the league at 6.02. The NL Central-leading Brewers, 14 games over .500 at 37-23, have won nine of their last 13 games. Kluber lost to Milwaukee, 3-2, on May 8, while Carrasco threw a five-hitter in a 6-2 win on May 9. He struck out 14.

Disabled list: Brewers -- RHP Zach Davies (right rotator cuff), 2B Nick Franklin (right quad), LHP Wade Miley (right oblique), RHP Jimmy Nelson (right shoulder), SS Tyler Saladino (left ankle), 1B Eric Thames (left thumb) and C Stephen Vogt (right shoulder) are on the disabled list. Indians - LHP Andrew Miller (right knee), OF Brandon Guyer (neck), OF Tyler Naquin (right hamstring), RHP Nick Goody (right elbow), OF

Lonnie Chisenhall (right calf), LHP Ryan Merritt (left shoulder), RHP Danny Salazar (right shoulder) and RHP Cody Anderson (right elbow) are on the disabled list.

Next: The Indians open a three-game series against the Tigers at Comerica Park on Friday.

Cleveland Plain Dealer LOADED: 06.05.2018

### **Cleveland Indians draft 2018: Canadian high school catcher Noah Naylor headlines four top picks**

By Paul Hoynes, cleveland.com | Posted June 04, 2018 at 07:17 PM | Updated June 05, 2018 at 12:52 AM

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- The MLB amateur draft begins Monday night. The Indians will select their top four picks tonight in the 29th, 35th, 41st and 67th positions.

Scott Barnsby will be conducting his first draft as director of scouting for the Indians. He replaced Brad Grant, whose 10-year run in the job helped revitalize the organization, during the offseason.

The Tigers, Giants, Phillies, White Sox and Reds own the first five picks in the first round. The Indians have the 29th pick in the first round.

Noah Naylor, Indians first round pick (29th overall)

The Indians selected high school catcher Noah Naylor on Monday night with the 29th pick in the first round. Naylor, 18, attended St. Joan of Arc Catholic School in Mississauga, Ontario.

Naylor, a left-handed hitter, played with Toronto's 18 and under national team, the Ontario Blue Jays, this spring. His brother Josh was a No. 1 pick of the Marlins in 2015 and is now one of San Diego's top prospects.

Besides playing on Toronto's 18 and under team, he toured spring training with the Canadian Junior National team and got to face big-league pitchers from the Red Sox and Blue Jays.

At the All-Star Game last year at Marlins Park in Miami, he participated in the high school home run derby. He is committed to play college at Texas A&M.

Naylor's slot value is \$2,333,700.

Catcher Noah Naylor

The Indians took Canadian high school catcher Noah Naylor with their first round pick -- 29th overall -- in Monday night's MLB draft. Scott Barnsby says should be able to stay at catcher and is athletic enough to play third base so he can offer some defensive versatility. But what the Indians really like about Naylor is his bat.

Prospect Pipeline

RHP Ethan Hankins, Indians second pick (35th overall)

The Indians selected right-hander Ethan Hankins with their second pick in Monday's amateur draft. They selected Hankins with the 35th pick overall.

The Tribe acquired the 35th pick as compensation for losing catcher Carlos Santana to the Phillies last winter.

Hankins, 6-6 and 215 pounds, throws between 93 mph and 96 mph. He injured his shoulder in February, but seemed to throw better as the draft neared. He's topped out at 97 mph to 98 mph.

He's committed to Vanderbilt University. The slot value for Hankins is \$2,016,400.

Hankins helped USA Baseball's 18 and under team win the gold medal in the World Cup last fall. He went 1-0 with an 0.75 ERA with 27 strikeouts in 12 innings. Against Korea, he struck out 14 batters in six innings against Korea.

WBSC

RHP Ethan Hankins

The Indians drafted high school right-hander Ethan Hankins with the 35th pick overall in Monday night's draft. Scott Barnsby, Indians scouting director, said Hankins missed four or five weeks early in the season with a right shoulder problem, but Barnsby said he's been checked out by the Indians' medical staff and they believe he's healthy.

The Tribe has been scouting Hankins for the last few years.

RHP Lenny Torres, Indians third pick (41st overall)

The Indians, with the 41st pick overall, selected high school right-hander Lenny Torres. The 17-year-old Torres goes to Beacon High School in Beacon, N.Y. and is committed to playing college baseball at St. John's.

The 41st pick came to the Indians as part of the Competitive Balance Round A phase of the draft.



Torres posted a 0.68 ERA (3ER/41.0IP) during his senior year. He struck out 85 batters. The 6-2, 185-pound converted shortstop pitched well last summer in several showcase events last summer for Perfect Game.

The slot value for Torres is \$1,744,800.

Torres throws between 94 mph and 96 mph.

RHP Lenny Torres

The Indians will look at Torres, as they will with Ethan Hankins, as a starter. He's been up to 96 mph and the Indians scouted him heavily last summer during show case events. His slider is developing and the Indians feel it could turn into a solid to above average pitch.

RHP Nick Sandlin, Indians fourth pick (67th overall)

The Indians, with the 67th pick overall in Monday's draft, selected right-hander Nick Sandlin from Southern Mississippi. Sandlin is 5-11 and 170 pounds. His slot value is \$939,700.

Sandlin moved from the bullpen to the rotation this year and his numbers popped. He went 10-0 with a 1.06 ERA. He struck out 144 batters in 102 1/3 innings for Southern Mississippi.

Scott Barnsby, Indians director of scouting, said the Indians will probably look at him as a reliever.

RHP Nick Sandlin

Southern Mississippi's Nick Sandlin, the Indians second round pick in Monday night's draft, threw 102 1/3 innings last year with 144 strikeouts. Scott Barnsby, Indians director of scouting, says if they can sign him, they'll probably make sure he's well rested before having him pitch in the minors this season.

Scott Barnsby, in his first year conducting the Indians draft, is excited about having four picks in the first two rounds of the draft. Barnsby is in his 19th year with the Indians. For the last three years he was Brad Grant's assistant in the scouting department.

### **Starting 9: How long does history suggest the Indians' contention window will be open? Thoughts on Shane Bieber, bullpen struggles and more**

**Travis Sawchik Jun 4, 2018 2**

1: Brian Reinhart authored a relevant and interesting study for The Hardball Times last week as it relates to the Indians' short- and long-term planning purposes. Reinhart investigated what constitutes a modern playoff window and how long one typically lasts. While some executives are opposed to the idea of building around windows, the fact is the game works in cycles, and the chance of having an Atlanta Braves-like, decade-plus playoff run is exceedingly unlikely.

Wrote Reinhart:

THE 36 TRADITIONAL PLAYOFF WINDOWS WERE OPEN FOR AN AVERAGE OF 4.69 YEARS EACH. ADD THE MEGA-DYNASTIES BACK IN, AND THAT AVERAGE SWELLS TO 5.95 YEARS. SO, BASICALLY, THE TYPICAL PLAYOFF WINDOW IS ABOUT FIVE YEARS LONG.

Reinhart considered seven playoff windows "on-going," including a window for the Indians that began in 2013, according to his criteria, which means we are in the sixth year of that window. If history is a guide, the clock is ticking. The Indians' other playoff window that was part of the study (1994-2001) lasted eight years.

2: While drafting and developing homegrown talent will always be helpful in extending windows, ultimately Reinhart found it was large-market clubs that most often extended windows thanks to larger payrolls. That will work against the Indians as ownership has been unwilling or unable to push payroll into the top half of the sport. However, that José Ramírez, Francisco Lindor, Corey Kluber, Carlos Carrasco and Trevor Bauer are under control for multiple years, coupled with what is on track to be a historically weak AL Central, suggests the Indians might be able to better the average playoff window. On the other hand, before the trade deadline passes, this might be a team worth bolstering by trading some tomorrow for today because history tells us the window won't be open forever. (And next year an embattled bullpen could be down its best two arms, who are impending free agents.)

3: Yes, Shane Bieber missed some locations in his major-league debut Thursday, but there was much more good than bad. He, at times, showcased his elite-level command, a skill for which some evaluators have projected future grades of 80, which would reside at the top of the 20-to-80 scale.

He also demonstrated a swing-and-miss slider here against Miguel Sanó:

The changeup came out flat on occasion, including on the home run allowed to Eduardo Escobar, but he has four pitches, and plus command, and the floor looks like that of a back-end starter with the ceiling of something much greater.

4: As the Twins clawed back from an 8-0 deficit to tie the score before falling Thursday, it was yet another reminder of the talent deficit in the bullpen as Zach McAllister allowed a game-tying, three-run homer. McAllister's ERA has ballooned to 6.65. The Indians need to find some external help. On Sunday, the bullpen allowed three more runs and two homers, with Cody Allen faltering late. On top of this, there is more bad

news in regard to seeking improvement. With the Astros' recent bullpen issues and their deep farm system, there will be even more competition on the trade market for relief help.

5: Bieber is an important development story because as good as the Indians' starting staff has been, it has been acquired almost entirely through trade, including Kluber, Carrasco, Bauer and Mike Clevinger. To sustain success, the Indians need more draft-and-development stories, and that's certainly what Bieber's rise from a fourth-round pick in 2016 appears to be.

As for the short term, could Bieber carve out a large 2018 role? That Danny Salazar was in town this week for an evaluation of his shoulder and to mull treatment options was not encouraging after he was shut down again when he tried to ramp up his throwing to 120 feet. Bieber is the club's most talented option for the No. 5 rotation spot at the moment — above options like Adam Plutko. He has been sent back to Triple-A Columbus, but he could very well be back this season.

6: If you saw Lindor early in his professional career, you would have never projected 30-plus home run potential. But he's on pace to break his remarkable 33-homer season of a year ago, launching two more home runs Thursday en route to AL Player of the Month honors.

There is the old scouting adage that you cannot teach a player to hit but you can teach power. While Lindor has added strength, he continues to become more and more of a fly-ball hitter, and he's become better at knowing and zeroing in on which pitches he can drive in becoming more selective. Lindor is evidence players can make remarkable power gains.

His average launch angle has increased each season speaking to changes in approach:

2015: 4.4 degrees (12 HR)

2016: 9.6 degrees (15 HR)

2017: 13.7 degrees (33 HR)

2018: 14.0 degrees (14 HR)

What Lindor is proving is last year's power spike was not anomalous. And with the added power, it takes Lindor from status as a great player to a truly elite one.

7: José Ramírez? He's also cementing superstar status. What's remarkable about Ramírez, in addition to the power surge, is he continues to walk more and strike out less. In fact, he's walking more than he's striking out (12 percent to 9 percent of plate appearances). The contract Ramírez signed before last season could keep him in Cleveland through 2023 at seven years and \$40 million. The contract looks like one of the great club-friendly deals of all time.

8: The Indians are going to have to break up their outfield logjam in the near future, but Greg Allen is making a case to stick on the roster with some highlight catches and a league-average bat. Bradley Zimmer has legit in-house competition for the long-term, center-field role.

9: The Astros have let go a number of their scouts and have replaced those positions with more in-house video and data analysts as The Athletic's Jake Kaplan reported last week.

THOSE IN THE PRO AND AMATEUR ANALYSIS GROUPS — ROUGHLY 10 PEOPLE IN ALL — WORK OUT OF ADJACENT GLASS-ENCLOSED COLLABORATIVE SPACES THE ASTROS INSTALLED IN THEIR UNION STATION OFFICE OVER THE WINTER. (GENERAL MANAGER JEFF) LUHNOW SAID IN MARCH THE TEAM PLANNED TO CONTINUE TO BUILD THE GROUP OVER THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS. ...

"IT'S ALLOWING US TO HAVE WHAT WE THINK IS THE BEST BALANCE FOR US OF FIELD SCOUTING VERSUS INFORMATION SCOUTING," LUHNOW SAID OF THE CONFIGURATION. "BECAUSE WE'RE CAPTURING A LOT OF INFORMATION OUT IN THE FIELD FROM TECHNOLOGY, FROM VIDEO, FROM OTHER THINGS, AND WE HAVE TO SPEND A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF TIME REVIEWING THAT INFORMATION."

The risk is the Astros will learn less about prospects' mental makeup, work ethic and intangible skills, etc. But it will be interesting to see if more teams follow the Astros and reduce the number of "field" scouts they employ versus pure analysts. It's not so much a stats vs. scouts debate today threatening scouts, especially at the pro level, rather it's the technology advancements — like TrackMan and high-speed cameras — that are threatening to make some traditional scouting roles redundant.

HE SAID IT

"Once you get the first couple outs under your belt, I think you definitely start settling in and saying, 'OK, I'm supposed to be here, this is where I'm meant to be.'" — Bieber to reporters on his major-league debut.

STAT OF THE WEEK: 93.8%

The Indians' forecast odds of winning the AL Central per FanGraphs. Despite all the bullpen issues to date, despite losing a series to the Twins, the Indians are still the overwhelming favorite to win their division.

## STAT OF THE WEEK II: 41-1

Corey Kluber's strikeout-to-walk ratio in May. Kluber is having his best command year to date this season, walking just 10 in 84 1/3 innings. Is arguably the AL's best starting pitcher improving?

### **Meisel: The Indians, with a division race now on their hands, can't get out of their own way**

By Zack Meisel Jun 4, 2018 4

MINNEAPOLIS — The only evidence on the field was an abandoned orange water cooler, resting in the infield grass, and a small pond near home plate.

The Indians had vanished from the diamond, Cody Allen the first to retreat to the dugout after Eddie Rosario notched his hat trick. The first team bus wouldn't bolt for the airport for another 44 minutes, but they couldn't escape Target Field fast enough.

There was plenty of evidence in the Indians' clubhouse, of course. Players gorged on postgame grub in silence. They changed into dress shirts, tipped the clubhouse attendants and zipped out of sight.

Another aggravating, bullpen-aided loss for a team that can't seem to get out of its own way.

The Indians boast four of the hottest hitters in the solar system and four (overworked) horses in the starting rotation. They govern the sorriest division in baseball. Asking for anything more almost seems greedy. But the team's faults — namely, a blazing wildfire of a bullpen — have undermined the influence of the cogs that are functioning at an elite level.

The Indians' 2 1/2-game lead represents the largest of any of the sport's six divisions. Given that the second-place, rebuilding, first-pick-holding Tigers sit three games beneath the .500 mark, that isn't exactly a fact to print on a T-shirt. (Even in Cleveland, where no sports T-shirt is left behind.)

Other factors contributed to the Indians' lackluster weekend in Minneapolis. Carlos Carrasco wasn't crisp Friday. The club played sloppy defense Saturday. Rosario deserves a tip of the cap for swatting pitches a foot off the plate into the outfield seats. But this still boils down to the bullpen.

It's no shocking revelation that a group mostly composed of castoffs from other teams and call-ups from Class AAA Columbus isn't fit to protect leads and preserve small deficits for a World Series hopeful. Occasionally, a team will discover a diamond in the rough. The Indians unearthed Jeff Manship, Scott Atchison, Tyler Olson and Dan Otero in recent years. But when nearly every entity in a bullpen is a work in progress, it's hard to progress.

There are things to like about Neil Ramirez and Evan Marshall, but they're difficult to evaluate when they leap from Class AAA to the eighth inning of a one-run game. There's no gradual ascension with this bullpen. Terry Francona praised newcomer Oliver Perez on Sunday, which probably means he'll be the new setup man come Tuesday. There's no safety net, no reliable source who can pave a path to Allen and Andrew Miller (who threw off the mound Sunday) and allow other struggling relievers to work out the kinks during lopsided affairs.

Rosario tagged Olson and Allen for momentum-shifting home runs Sunday. Earlier in the series, the Indians coughed up an 8-0 advantage before Francisco Lindor salvaged the only victory the team registered in four tries at Target Field.

"We're just not getting people out right now," Allen said. "We're not getting people out consistently enough to give our offense a chance to win ballgames for us. Our offense was the best in baseball in the month of May. But the month of May was tough, if you think about how many runs we scored and how many games we lost. It's hard to win games when you're constantly losing leads or not giving them a chance to get back in the game. It's been a struggle."

The Indians scored 35 more runs in May than any other major-league team. They produced a league-leading 127 wRC+, a league-leading .283 batting average and a league-leading .499 slugging percentage. Yet, the club managed just a 15-13 record. They went 14-11 in April, despite scoring 84 fewer runs.

And it's no secret that Tribe starting pitchers have remained on the mound longer than usual. Brian Dozier smacked Mike Clevinger's 106th and final pitch — what Clevinger termed "a lazy heater" — beyond the left-field fence Sunday afternoon. Clevinger has tossed at least 105 pitches in each of his past seven outings. Trevor Bauer, whose right arm is composed of rubber, troll powder and a pinch of pine tar, has thrown 100 or more pitches in all 12 of his starts, including a career-high 127 last week against the Astros.

Francona conceded Sunday that it's fair to suggest the starters have pitched deeper into games because of the lack of dependable solutions in the bullpen. He did caution that the team has not "ever left somebody in longer than (they could handle), like, where it's (risking) health or they're tired."

"Those guys are carrying the load right now," Allen said. "We're trying to ease the burden on them a little bit. Some nights we do the job and some nights we don't. We've just got to get some consistency going."

Well, technically, they've been consistent. Just not in the way they would desire. The Indians' bullpen owns a 6.02 ERA, far and away the worst mark in the league. The tide keeps bringing new options to shore — Hey, George Kontos is available? Sign him up! — but those arms are available for one reason or another.

The Twins have navigated their own bumpy path to June, but they should feel fortunate that the Indians have yet to solve their relief woes. Minnesota was considered the only threat to the Indians' division title hopes. That's likely still the case, and the projection systems still strongly favor the Indians. But despite a strong rotation and a sizzling lineup, the Indians bypassed an opportunity to create some separation.

Now, they have a division race on their hands.

### **Indians minor-league analysis: Early 2018, who are the top-10 prospects**

By Michael Hattery 2h ago 1

This is a stand-in for the weekly "Trip Around the Farm" column, which will return next week in its regularly scheduled time slot.

Before diving into the list itself, it is important to discuss the inputs, nature and context of prospect lists. My eye test is a portion of the input into this list because I have seen everyone I listed in the top 10. However, my eye test is limited in terms of efficacy and influence, which is why the predominant influence is from three categories:

conversations I have had with those inside the Indians' organization

information I have received from external scouts

analytical inputs guided by research published by Chris Mitchell, formerly of FanGraphs

As for context, there is often an incorrect assumption of equivalency in top-10 prospect lists, that the No. 5 prospect in one system is similar in value to the No. 5 prospect in another system. This is not the case. Further, inside a list there can be a chasm between a spot, which is why a tiered approach or acknowledgement of prospect value tiers is important. This Indians list is separated into tiers. It's curbed at 10 for the sake of efficiency, but prospects No. 11-15 are in a similar tier, and the names included as honorable mentions were seriously considered for the bottom of the top 10.

You will notice two things about the profiles:

The 90th percentile outcome, which is the best available outcome for the player's projected ceiling. This acknowledges that a player can follow Charlie Morton's footsteps and completely distort our entire understanding of their ceiling by randomly adding 4 mph out of nowhere.

The risk number, on a 1-10 scale, one being low-risk and 10 being high-risk. Of course, a one carries some risk, too, as even proven major leaguers carry a risk of not repeating.

Any player with 20 big-league innings pitched or 50 big-league plate appearances is excluded. Thus, Greg Allen and Yandy Díaz were not considered for this list.

Tier One:

No. 1 Francisco Mejía

90th Percentile: All-Star, 3-4 WAR

Risk: 6

Mejía remains the Indians' premier prospect solely because of his hit tool, and while this sounds like hyperbole if you are scouting the surface-level stat line, the hit tool is plus. Mejía has elite barrel control and an ability to find the barrel despite a swing that is not traditionally beautiful. His plane and weight transition look mechanically similar to Shin-Soo Choo from the left side. Further, outside of a month and a half in Columbus, Mejía has raked at every level, despite being two to three years younger than his competition. However, the risk with the profile comes from two different and distinct pieces; plate discipline and defense. Mejía's bat-to-ball skills have been so good at points that it can be a detriment. Mejía has run substandard walk rates and often mutes contact by making it outside the zone. He has to make plate discipline gains to allow his hit tool to play up.

There are still significant questions as to whether Mejía will stick at catcher. Despite his plus arm, there is concern about both his blocking and receiving skills reaching the level the Indians require for him to be a full-time catcher. (A few of these concerns were outlined previously here.) If Mejía cannot stick behind the plate, his offensive tools will be less valuable as he moves down the defensive spectrum. Still, the plus hit tool and solid chance to stick at catcher create a high ceiling.

No. 2 Shane Bieber

90th Percentile: No. 3 starter, 2.5-3.5 WAR

Risk: 1

Bieber slides in at two because he is about as safe a prospect as a pitching prospect can be. Bieber features a four-pitch mix, which he commands at plus-plus. Bieber leads with a fastball running 90-94, higher than the 88-91 that he ran out of UC Santa Barbara. Bieber has an above-average curveball and slider, though he leaned heavily on the slider during his time in Akron. Finally, Bieber has a raw changeup that still flashes above-average potential. Because of clean command and exquisite feel, each pitch plays above its movement-velocity gap grade. Bieber has the best command in minor-league baseball and, upon promotion, perhaps some of the best in big-league baseball. Further, Bieber's command manifests itself in contact management, where he is able to use his fastball-slider specifically to induce ground balls. Three interesting comparisons — ignoring handedness — are Alex Wood, Sean Manaea and Milos Mikolas. Think 7-8 K/9, around 1 BB/9 and 45%+ ground balls. This is a road map to a productive mid-rotation starter.

No. 3 Triston McKenzie

90th Percentile: No. 2 starter, 3-4 WAR

Risk: 8

McKenzie is a string bean with above-average pitchability for a 20-year-old who totes two above-average offerings. However, despite a high ceiling, McKenzie is probably the riskiest prospect in the top 10 for one reason: arm health risk. McKenzie has been on the disabled list since March 31 with forearm tightness, and scouts worry this is a foreshadowing of things to come. He's scheduled to make his season debut for Akron later this week.

McKenzie has what can be described as a delicate frame at 6-foot-5 and 170 pounds. Here is what you can dream on: McKenzie has dominated the lower levels despite being young for his age. His fastball sits 92-95 with solid command/control, and his curveball, his best pitch, flashes plus and shows nice depth. With this combo and a developing changeup, McKenzie has a strong arsenal that looks to play in the rotation. The upside is sizable if McKenzie can build healthy mass over the coming years and protect his arm.

Tier Two:

No. 4 Yu Chang

90th Percentile: Starting infielder, 2-3 WAR

Risk: 4

At 22 years old, Chang is, on average, four years younger than his competition in Columbus. So far, he has more than held his own. While scouts were concerned about Chang's ability to stick at shortstop when he was first signed more than five years ago, he has impressed the organization with his ability to improve there. Scouts have admired his lateral movements and, while he is not plus up the middle, he has become an adequate defender with nice offensive tools. Chang has above-average raw power, which he has been able to showcase by pulling the ball in the air. He is pull-heavy, which can sap a batting average but produce nice power production, especially for a middle infielder. Finally, the hit tool and discipline have seen some polish. He has improved his contact rate while facing pitchers with advanced game plans. Chang might be blocked at shortstop in Cleveland, but he has the potential to fit as a 120-game super-utility type with power. Long term, he could fit well at second or third.

No. 5 Nolan Jones

90th Percentile: Starting 3B, 2-3 WAR

Risk: 7

Jones is 6-foot-4, 190 pounds, with an improving feel for leveraging his long limbs for power. With an average hit tool and plus command of the strike zone, Jones looks to have an above-average offensive profile. He uses an all-fields approach and will lean on using the opposite field heavily from time to time. The big question for Jones is whether he can make the improvements necessary to stick at third base. While he's a former shortstop, Jones does not wow athletically and has had significant struggles adjusting to the shorter reaction time. The risk with Jones is he does not tap into the raw power enough and does not wield enough athleticism to stick at third base.

No. 6 Willi Castro

90th Percentile: Starting shortstop, 2-3 WAR

Risk: 6

At 21 years old, Castro is one of the youngest players in the Eastern League, and the youngest player in Akron. Castro has an average to above-average hit tool with excellent contact skills. Castro shows below-average power in games, though that could eventually develop to average. Most of Castro's upside is tied to his potential to be a plus defender. Castro has fluid movements, a strong arm and soft hands. The developmental staff in Akron, including manager Tony Mansolino, has been impressed with Castro's defense. Castro is a shortstop in the mold of Orlando Arcia or Freddy Galvis, with contact-reliant offense, some speed and average to above-average defense at shortstop.

No. 7 Bobby Bradley

90th Percentile: Starting 1B, 2-3 WAR

Risk: 5

Bradley is relying on plus raw power as a carrying tool at a position that does not provide much leeway for offensive flaws. The past year has seen Bradley polish his swing-and-miss issues to a certain extent, and scouts have noted an increased ability to use the opposite field. Still, Bradley has a risky profile because he is locked in at first base and the offensive standards to be successful there are elevated. Bradley still has significant swing-and-miss issues, which are the result of a pretty but long swing that has holes. Positively, Bradley has continued to improve defensively and shows the hands and mobility to be above-average defensively, though at a non-impact position.

No. 8 Will Benson

90th Percentile: Impact right fielder 2.5-4 WAR

Risk: 8

Benson is a personal favorite, so I relied on others to hold me back from ranking him higher. Benson has absurd physical tools, including plus raw power, and a demonstrated ability to showcase his power in games. Benson will show a howitzer in right field and has the athleticism to be an above-average defender out there. He's noted inside the organization as a tireless worker. Benson does carry significant risk. While he has shown a great feel for the strike zone and power, the swing-and-miss is still problematic. Improving his contact skills is the major key to his development. At just 19 years old in Lake County, Benson has shown everything you would want to see from his raw tools so far. Benson may have the most pure upside in the system with plus-plus raw power, a plus-plus arm and above-average athleticism.

Tier Three:

No. 9 Conner Capel

90th Percentile: Starting right fielder, 1.5-2.5 WAR

Risk: 6

Capel is an air-ball revolution prospect who pulls balls in the air frequently and has nearly maxed out the power production one can expect from his 6-foot, 190-pound frame. With average speed and an above-average arm, Capel has the instincts to play average to above average in the corners defensively. Capel has made major plate discipline gains while being consistently young for his level, which could improve his overall offensive profile. A concern about Capel is his pull-heavy approach, as it adversely impacts his hit tool. While it serves to max out his game power, it serves to sap batting average due to defensive shifts. A Capel big-league season could include 15 homers, 10 steals and solid corner defense.

No. 10 Sam Hentges

90th Percentile: Back-end starter, 1.5-2.5 WAR

Risk: 5

Finally fully healthy, Hentges has shown the upside that caused the Indians to draft the northern prep prospect. He sits at 93-95 mph with an occasional 97. At 6-foot-6, 240 pounds, Hentges leverages his long frame to get good extension, creating higher perceived velocity and creating the downward plane that aids in inducing ground balls. His curveball flashes plus and pairs well off his fastball release point. The big developmental hurdle for Hentges is improving his changeup/off-speed to give him a comprehensive, three-pitch arsenal. Still, his floor is that of a dynamite lefty specialist and the ceiling is quality mid/back-end starter.

### **Indians draft catcher Noah Naylor, three pitchers on first day of MLB draft**

By Jeff Schudel, The News-Herald & The Morning Journal

The Indians used their first pick in the 2018 MLB draft, pick 29 overall, on catcher Noah Naylor from St. Joan of Arc High School in Ontario, Canada.

The Indians used their next three picks on right-handed pitchers.

With their second pick, No. 35 overall, they picked 18-year-old right-handed pitcher Ethan Hankins from Forsyth High School in Cumming, Ga. According to MLB.com., Hankins has the best fastball in the draft. He has been clocked as high as 96 mph.

The Tribe used the 41st overall pick on 17-year-old right-handed pitcher Lenny Torres from Beacon, New York. Torres, who doesn't turn 18 until October, also throws a fastball in the mid-90s.

When it was the Indians' turn again, they selected right-hander Nick Sandlin from Southern Mississippi.

Naylor, 6-foot, 195 pounds, can also play first base and third base, according to the scouting report from CBSSports.com.

Perfectgame.com offered this scouting report on the 18-year-old Canadian:

"Strong athletic build, good present strength with room for more. Very high level athleticism for a catcher, 6.62 in the 60, low and flexible behind the plate, very quick shifting and blocked, high level arm strength with a loose and fast arm, 1.78 best pop time.

"Also played the middle infield with surprisingly good actions and tools, can develop this part of his game further. Left-handed hitter, slightly open stance, clean shift into contact and swing, has lots of strength at contact and can drive the ball hard, tends to stay open but can go the other way effectively. Has always performed at high level events against top pitching."

Lastwordonbaseball.com praised Naylor's power at the plate.

"The biggest thing that stands out with Naylor is an impressive power bat," the scouting report said. "He is arguably the best high school hitter in the draft and captured the High School Home Run Derby in Miami last season. It is the power and the bat that draws people in, but it is his potential behind the plate that puts him over the top. Naylor's physical build and athletic ability behind the plate are very similar to that of star Chicago Cubs catcher Willson Contreras. His arm will play at any level, and his bat should help him along as he continues to work on his receiving skills."

Naylor played in seven games with the Ontario Blue Jays, an elite 18-and-under travel team in Ontario, this spring. He was 8-for-26, (.421) with two doubles, a home run, and six RBI).

Naylor has committed to Texas A&M.

Indians director of amateur scouting Scott Barnsby said he is confident Naylor can be persuaded to sign with the Indians and forego the college commitment. Likewise, Barnsby expects Hankins to forego a commitment to Vanderbilt and Torres to choose the Indians over St. John's.

Naylor would start out in the Indians organization as a catcher, Barnsby said. The Indians are looking at Hankins and Torres as starters. Sandlin projects as a relief pitcher.

Hankins had a right shoulder injury that shut him down for five weeks, but the Indians are confident he is recovering.

“Obviously it will take time to get back to full strength, but we spent a lot of time with him and our medical staff with him making sure we feel comfortable with the health, and we do,” Barnsby said on a conference call. “He did have an issue, but we feel he’s back to full health and ready to go. He has life to the fast ball, two different breaking balls and an advanced feel for his change-up.”

The Indians scouted Torres when he was 16 years old. Barnsby said Torres has “a quick arm” and is developing a slider to go with his 96 mph fastball.

### **Karaoke helps keep Indians' Danny Salazar from singing a sad tune during slow rehab process**

**Ryan Lewis | Akron Beacon Journal (TNS) Published on June 5, 2018 | Updated 6:39 a. m.**

CLEVELAND — Perhaps the most logical — and simplest — answer for the fifth spot in the Indians rotation remains trapped in Arizona, sometimes singing karaoke tunes to try to make the time pass when he’s not on a mound in the sweltering heat.

Danny Salazar has primarily remained at the club’s facility in Goodyear, Ariz., since spring training, throwing on back fields in 100-degree temperatures day after day, hoping the pain in his shoulder will subside. He was diagnosed with right shoulder impingement tendinitis, and the progress has been slow. And there isn’t much to do out there when the vast majority of your teammates are all in Cleveland, and the your injured shoulder will only allow you to do so much.

Salazar also received a platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injection last month.

The hope was that it would alleviate the condition enough to allow Salazar to begin letting it go again. There was hope, but it didn’t last.

“I was feeling better for the first few days after,” Salazar said last week while in Cleveland. “I got 10 days of rest, not throwing, just icing and stretching. After that, for the first few days, I was playing catch and I was feeling good. Then when I went to throw from 120 feet, it started bothering me.”

Salazar received a cortisone injection this week after meeting with Cleveland Clinic’s Dr. Mark Schickendantz, Indians manager Terry Francona told reporters in Minneapolis. Salazar will be shut down for five to seven days, according to MLB.com.

That’s been the brutal part of this process for Salazar. There have been stretches during which he has felt good, but then the shoulder starts bothering him again.

“It’s frustrating,” Salazar said. “I’ve been playing catch, feeling good one week. Then this week, it’s like the same thing (comes) back. It’s just been like that all the time. So I came here for like a week or so, see the doctor and see what the next step is.”

Thus far, it has been a fight, but there isn’t an end in sight. The team never really put a timetable on Salazar’s return, and the situation hasn’t gotten any clearer.

“That’s been more frustrating for me, because I haven’t been able to do what I want to do, which is throw the way I want to throw,” he said. “There’s no need for surgery or something like that. It’s just something that is there that has to go away.”

It’s been a mental grind as much as a physical one. For several months, Salazar has had to go into each day hoping for an improvement from the previous day, waiting for the time he can rejoin the major league club. He’s endured an extended search for answers, as well as the ups and downs of one positive day followed by pain the next.

In search of normalcy, or at least a bit of enjoyment through a long process, karaoke has been Salazar’s answer. He has a karaoke machine, and he and Michael Martinez — who ruptured his Achilles tendon before the season — have broken up the monotony of their rehab by singing into the night. Sometimes, the results of these nights have made their way onto Instagram.

“It’s actually pretty good, singing salsa,” Salazar said of Martinez’s abilities. “... I have the karaoke thing in my house, so he comes there and I think he feels the same thing. He’s like, ‘Damn, I want to one day wake up and just walk like normal and I can’t.’ That’s something we’ve been doing, and I think he keeps my mind away from what’s happening, even though after that, we come back to rehab.”

The Indians have been searching for an answer for the No. 5 spot in their rotation since Josh Tomlin struggled to start the season and was sent to the bullpen. Adam Plutko is an option but hasn’t yet established himself.

Salazar, a former All-Star, has the better track record and an electric arm, with a career 3.82 ERA and a 10.5 strikeout rate per nine innings. On paper, he has the highest ceiling. He just hasn’t been able to stay healthy and was virtually a nonfactor during the Indians’ postseason runs the last two years.

The team is still trying to wait, because it has seen what Salazar can do when he’s at his best.

“I think everybody would like it to happen more quick, for him to get back healthy and pitching the way he’s capable of,” president of baseball operations Chris Antonetti said in May. “It just hasn’t happened yet. But he could be a big part of our team in the second half.”

## **Rosenthal: Arrieta's big impact on Phils; deGrom keeps tweaking; the next Tony Oliva?; more notes**

By Ken Rosenthal 13m ago

Yeah, he said it. Maybe he shouldn't have said it. Maybe he should have just spoken privately with manager Gabe Kapler. Maybe he should not have singled out the decision-making of Scott Kingery, a rookie who is not a natural shortstop.

Yet, even before Jake Arrieta's biting criticism of the Philadelphia Phillies' "horse—" series in San Francisco, there was little question the right-hander's impact on his new club extended beyond pitching.

Arrieta's agent, Scott Boras, talked all off-season about his client's leadership and post-season experience, in part because it deflected attention from the fact Arrieta was turning 32 on March 6, as well as the pitcher's declining velocity and rocky first half in 2017.

Three months into a three-year, \$75 million contract is too early to assess whether a signing is good or bad, just as it's too early to assess Yu Darvish's six-year, \$126 deal with the Chicago Cubs. Boras, though, believes Arrieta was underestimated in the open market. And if Arrieta continues performing at a high level, the agent's argument only will become stronger.

"This is where analytics become a problem, and why analytics are incomplete," Boras said. "They're valued, but they're certainly not the (complete) answer. And they have become compulsory for many clubs, to where you've excluded from the process the evaluation of durability rates and you've excluded from the process the postseason impact.

"The effect of a player being in the postseason two and three years running, like Jake was coming into his free-agent season — that was not included. It was not included that he was fatigued for the first month of the season. The ability to win big postseason games (Arrieta has a 3.08 ERA in nine postseason starts) is not included. Leadership is not included.

"Look how Vince Velasquez is pitching now that he understands the use of secondary pitches in his performance. Look how much better (Aaron) Nola has gotten, how much better (Nick) Pivetta has gotten. The (Phillies) are winning because of starting pitching."

Boras is largely correct in that assessment — the Phillies are fourth in the majors with a 3.40 rotation ERA, with Nola ranking fifth individually at 2.18 and Arrieta 14th at 2.66. Arrieta's performance is all the more impressive considering he did not sign until March 12. Two other free-agent pitchers who agreed to deals in March, right-handers Lance Lynn and Alex Cobb, struggled initially.

The positive influence of Arrieta on his teammates is less tangible, and it's possible some players did not take kindly to his blunt assessments after he allowed five runs in six innings in Sunday's 6-1 defeat in San Francisco. Before that, however, Phillies officials had spoken glowingly of The Arrieta Effect.

"Obviously Jake's track record spoke for itself. We had watched Jake perform on the biggest of stages over the last few years with the Cubs. Prior to that, we had some history with Jake as a young pitcher in Baltimore," said general manager Matt Klentak, who along with team president Andy MacPhail, assistant GM Ned Rice and farm director Joe Jordan had been with the Orioles for part or all of Arrieta's tenure with the club from 2010 to '13.

"For our young team, we felt that the competitiveness Jake brings to the field every day, the intensity with which he does his work and the learning experiences he had as a young player were all going to be really impactful. Scott represented all of that to us during negotiations. But Jake has really meant a lot to this team. The moment he walked through the clubhouse doors in spring training, people noticed. He has that aura about him that gives us all confidence every day he takes the mound."

The narrative will continue to resonate as long as Arrieta keeps pitching well, and so far, so good. Arrieta's strikeout rate is an alarmingly low 6.16 per nine innings, down from 8.71 last season. But his velocity actually is up slightly from a year ago, and his groundball rate of 56.3 percent ranks third in the majors. His expected weighted on-base average — based upon his quality of contact, strikeouts and walks — ranks 19th according to StatCast; Nola is 6th, Velasquez 11th.

Even if Arrieta reverts to a fourth- or fifth-starter type, it will not undo his impact in the clubhouse and role in restoring the team to prominence. The Phillies — who also signed first baseman Carlos Santana and relievers Tommy Hunter and Pat Neshek as free agents last off-season — are relevant again. Arrieta is determined to keep them relevant, even if it means occasional turbulence along the way.

### **DeGrom tweaking while shining**

New York Mets right-hander Jacob deGrom leads the National League with a 1.49 ERA, but you wouldn't know it from talking to him. DeGrom, who turns 30 on June 19, will not be satisfied until he regains the mechanics he had in his first two seasons, 2014 and '15.

The question obviously is not one of performance; it's more about deGrom reducing the stress on his arm. DeGrom said when he stays over his front side, it leaves him less sore after starts. Mets pitching coach Dave Eiland described deGrom as a "drifter" who leaves the rubber early, causing him to become rotational and get under the ball.



DeGrom's mechanics first went awry in '16 when his elbow started hurting and he began flying open in his delivery; he underwent surgery that September to reposition his ulnar nerve. Ideally, he wants to be more north-south than rotational, and he said his May 18 start against the Diamondbacks was the closest he has come to where he wants to be.

Eiland, previously with the New York Yankees and Kansas City, and new Mets manager Mickey Callaway, previously with Cleveland, both worked with great pitchers in the past, yet Eiland calls deGrom "as fierce a competitor as anyone I've been around." The proof: Opponents are 0-for-12 against deGrom with the bases loaded this season and 6-for-50 with runners in scoring position.

"You can see it in his face. Something changes," Callaway said. "His stuff ticks up. His slider is sharper. His fastball is even better. It's the opposite of what most guys do. He is at another level when those situations come up."

For Mariners, a brave new (pitching) world

The Seattle Mariners did the math. If teams often carry 13 pitchers on their 25-man roster, how does it make sense to devote only two of seven coaching slots to that group of players?

Seeking greater balance, the Mariners hired two assistants last off-season to work under pitching coach Mel Stottlemyre Jr. — assistant coach Jim Brower, who previously was the Cubs' minor league pitching coordinator, and bullpen coach Brian DeLunas, who previously was director of pitching development for CSE Talent in St. Louis.

The Mariners are not the only club to expand their pitching infra-structure — the Cubs, for example, complement pitching coach Jim Hickey with catching and strategy coach Mike Borzello and coordinator of advance scouting and run prevention Tommy Hottovy. DeLunas, though, represents something of a departure; this is his first major league coaching job.

Mariners assistant GM Jeff Kingston came upon DeLunas last off-season while helping build the team's high-performance department. DeLunas, fluent in pitch-tracking technology, takes a holistic approach. Operating as almost a hybrid between a strength coach and pitching coach, he connects the dots with how each pitcher's body moves to help him achieve an optimal delivery, improved command and better finish on his pitches.

Based upon the performance of the Mariners' bullpen, which ranks fourth in the AL in opponents' OPS, DeLunas seems to be getting results. Lefty James Pazos' 21-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio is the second-best among major league relievers. Righty Juan Nicasio, after a rough stretch, has pitched 8 2/3 consecutive scoreless innings. Lefty Wade LeBlanc, released by the Yankees on March 23, has a 2.60 ERA in 45 innings, including a 1.72 ERA in six starts since moving to the rotation.

The Mariners' pitching overall is a surprise; the team has won 13 of its last 16 games with an ERA of 2.24. Brower, coming from the Cubs, is well-versed in data, while Stottlemyre is strong on mechanics and connects well with pitchers. Club officials also credit manager Scott Servais with being open-minded and embracing new ideas.

All but one of the Mariners' opponents during this recent hot streak was below .500, and the exception was the Oakland Athletics, who are 31-29. The next four series, against the Los Angeles Angels, Boston Red Sox, Yankees and Red Sox again, will be more challenging. But perhaps the M's have turned a corner behind their three-headed pitching council.

"Each guy has a different style and comes at it from a different angle," general manager Jerry Dipoto said. "In addition, we have a trio of analysts/scouting assistants (Emmanuel Sifuentes, Joel Firman and Andrew Herrera) who work closely with the staff in providing valuable information.

"We believe the diversity in skills and areas of expertise allows us to tackle pitching from a variety of angles ranging from traditional to progressive. I think it's made a real difference for us already and anticipate that we'll continue to evolve in positive ways."

Braves' Winkler elbowing his way to success

For a pitcher, returning from Tommy John surgery is a difficult enough test. Braves reliever Dan Winkler completed it, undergoing the surgery in July 2014 and missing most of the 2015 season. Yet his journey was only beginning.

Winkler, 28, changed teams during his recovery, with the Braves selecting him from the Colorado Rockies in the Rule 5 draft. And then, just as he appeared poised to settle into a major league career, he broke his elbow throwing a pitch against the St. Louis Cardinals on April 10, 2016.

Needless to say, he was devastated.

"Crushing is a great word," Winkler said. "I remember feeling something in my elbow. I don't know why, but I knew I broke my arm. I thought I broke it higher actually. It didn't hurt that bad. I just remember walking off and that's when it hit me that I was going to have another major surgery.

"I just kind of collapsed with everything running through my mind. No. Not again. I remember walking from the field all the way to the tunnel to get the X-ray, saying, 'Not again. Not again. Not again.'"

Winkler missed the rest of the 2016 season and did not return to the majors until Aug. 21, 2017. He performed well over the final six weeks, but that was only a preview of what was to come. Though the season is barely more than one-third complete, Winkler's performance ranks among the best relievers in the game.

His 0.74 ERA ranks second to Jeremy Jeffress' 0.60. His .383 opponents' OPS ranks third to Adam Ottavino's .340 and Josh Hader's .342. His strikeout-to-walk ratio of nearly 6-to-1 also is in the top 25 among relievers.

All major leaguers earn their positions, but Winkler took a more difficult path than most.

"I wouldn't want it any other way," he said. "That's the way God planned it out for me. It has not been an easy ride, but it's been worth it, that's for sure."

Zobrist: An old dog finding new tricks

When I asked Chili Davis, the Cubs' new hitting coach, to name the Cubs hitter who surprised him most, he responded by mentioning the team's oldest player, Ben Zobrist, 37. Davis said Zobrist impressed him with how he studies not just the opposing starter, but also opposing relievers.

Zobrist said he began examining relievers only this season, sensing pitchers were benefiting more than hitters from the increase in available information. He took it upon himself to become a "guinea pig," studying not just pitchers' tendencies through video and data, but also his own.

Rather than simply ask a coach or teammate to tell him what a reliever throws, Zobrist is formulating game plans for each pitcher he might face. The extra work is making a difference, albeit in a small sample. According to STATS LLC, Zobrist is batting .344 with a .941 OPS in 64 at-bats against relievers this season, compared to .266 with a .793 OPS previously in his career.

Kris Bryant, Kyle Schwarber and Javier Báez are the only Cubs with a higher OPS than Zobrist's overall .860 mark for the season. Not bad for a guy who dipped to a career-low .693 last season and appeared to be in decline.

Heady comparisons for the Nationals' Soto

Former Minnesota Twins star Tony Oliva was one of the first comps I heard from a scout on Washington Nationals left fielder Juan Soto. Both are left-handed hitters, and Soto, 6-foot-1 and 185 pounds, is built similar to Oliva, who was listed at 6-1, 175.

The Nationals would be thrilled if Soto, 19, accomplished as much as Oliva, an eight-time All-Star and three-time batting champion. But another scout, after a recent look at Soto, offered an even more enticing comparison: Dave Parker.

Wait, wasn't Parker 6-foot-5, 230?

Yes, but here is what the scout said:

"Parker was a lean athlete, strong with speed. He grew into his power. Soto is similar to me — he shows the same quickness with his bat and his feet. There is an obvious difference in arm strength; Parker had one of the best arms of his time. But it should be fun watching this kid grow into this game."

Again, we're talking heady company: Parker finished his career with 339 homers and 2,712 hits, making seven All-Star teams and winning three Gold Gloves.

Through 53 plate appearances, Soto is batting .326 with two homers and a .937 OPS

Sorry, Matt!

I did Los Angeles Dodgers left fielder Matt Kemp a disservice last Saturday on Fox's broadcast of the Cubs-Mets game when I questioned whether anyone in the Dodgers' lineup truly evoked fear in opposing pitchers.

Kemp, the reigning NL Player of the Week, has returned to that level this season, and it's no fluke.

At first glance, Kemp's resurgence would appear to stem partly from luck, as evidenced by his .402 batting average on balls in play, second in the majors only to Nicholas Castellanos' .407. A closer look, however, indicates that Kemp has been less lucky than good.

His expected weighted on-base average — based upon his quality of contact, strikeouts and walks — ranks 13th in the majors according to StatCast (minimum 150 plate appearances).

The top five: Mookie Betts, Mike Trout, J.D. Martinez, Freddie Freeman and Aaron Judge.

Around the horn

\*The Astros talked about pursuing Royals closer Kelvin Herrera last season, and it stands to reason that Herrera again will be on their wish list, though their bigger need might be a late-inning left-hander such as the Baltimore Orioles' Zach Britton or San Diego Padres' Brad Hand.

Herrera, however, throws 65 percent fastballs, and the Astros generally prefer pitchers who rely less heavily on their heaters; the team throws 50.8 percent fastballs, the sixth-lowest percentage in the majors. Perhaps Herrera, 28, would incorporate more sliders (18 percent) and changeups (17 percent) if the Astros acquired him.

\*Renewed health probably is the biggest reason for right-hander Clay Buchholz's 1.50 ERA in three starts with the Arizona Diamondbacks, but the 20-second pitch clock in the minor leagues might also be a contributing factor.

Buchholz, 33, made five starts in the minors this season before joining the D-Backs, who signed him to a minor league deal on May 4, two days after the Royals released him. The clock, he told D-Backs officials, forced him to increase his notoriously slow pace.

Though the sample remains small, Buchholz is averaging 24.2 seconds between pitches, just above the major league average of 23.9. If he continues at this rate, he will beat his previous career-low by nearly two seconds.

\*Ah, the wonders of guaranteed contracts: Hanley Ramirez, recently released by the Red Sox, can take the rest of the season off and still collect termination pay amounting to almost all of what remains of his \$22 million salary.

The only way Ramirez would lose any money would be if he refused to accept what is described in the collective bargaining agreement as a "reasonable" offer from another club. An offer for the pro-rated portion of the minimum \$545,000 would qualify, and if Ramirez chose not to play, he would forfeit that amount of money, but nothing more.

\*The Cubs lead the majors in defensive efficiency, and Anthony Rizzo again rates as one of the top defensive first basemen. New third base coach and infield instructor Brian Butterfield, who previously worked for the Yankees, Diamondbacks, Toronto Blue Jays and Red Sox, said Rizzo's pre-game routine at first is the best he has seen.

Once or twice a series, Rizzo works on moving his feet, practices his throws to and from various spots and takes fungoes from second base to practice picking balls out of the dirt. He works quickly, staying in a good rhythm. Butterfield said he wants to make a video of the routine to show young first basemen in the Cubs' organization.

\*The Brewers' rotation ranks 10th in the National League with a 4.13 ERA, reinforcing the notion they need another starting pitcher. Right-hander Zach Davies is on the disabled list a second time with rotator-cuff inflammation. Lefty Wade Miley will not be eligible to return from a strained oblique until early July, and righty Jimmy Nelson is not expected to return from shoulder surgery before that time.

Righties Junior Guerra and Jhoulys Chacín have been the Brewers' best starters, but neither is the type of pitcher who would start Game 1 of a postseason series. Third-year pitching coach Derek Johnson seems to get the most he can out of his starters; Cubs left fielder Kyle Schwarber said the Milwaukee pitchers excel at executing their game plans. They will need to continue that trend, considering the dearth of quality starting pitching available in the trade market.