



Padres Press Clips

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ESPN rates Padres' farm system No. 3 in baseball

Jeff Sanders

Keith Law on Wednesday spoke at length of the Padres farm system as the deepest it's ever been. On Friday, ESPN's scouting guru unveiled A.J. Preller's stock as the game's third-best farm system behind the Braves and Yankees.

That's the precise position that Law put the Padres last year. He wrote in full (subscription required):

“The Padres remain thin at the top minor league levels, though they will have at least one top-50 prospect in Triple-A and Double-A this year. Their strength will be the ridiculous number of high-ceiling athletes running around from high-A Lake Elsinore down to extended spring training once the season starts. The Fort Wayne club might be so young that it needs a chaperone to take a road trip. There are shortstops growing from a tree just outside of the team's Peoria complex. Even when one big-money kid falters in his first year, two more step in to take his place on the depth chart. Plus, there are many people in the industry who think the Padres got the best player in the 2017 draft in Mackenzie Gore. It might be slow going in the majors, but the future remains extremely bright in San Diego (and dry and 75 degrees too).”

In order, the White Sox, Phillies, Reds, Rays, Brewers, Dodgers and Twins rounded out Law's top-10.

Click [here](#) for the full ranking. ESPN's upcoming coverage of the top-10 players in each farm system starts Jan. 29. The Padres will drop along with the rest of the NL West on Feb. 3.

Also, MLB.com will unveil its top-100 on Saturday (seven Padres sat in Law's top-100).

Stay tuned.

One of 7 Padres in MLB.com's top 100, Michel Baez quickly gaining notoriety

Jeff Sanders

MacKenzie Gore was on everyone's radar by the time the Padres selected him with the third overall pick last July. The White Sox invested in Fernando Tatis Jr. two years before his rapid ascent up prospect lists.

Michel Baez?

His climb to No. 42 in MLB.com's top-100 list is as notable as any of the Padres' prospects because he was relatively unknown when international scouting director Chris Kemp first laid eyes on him in spring of 2016.

You can catch up on that discovery in the story we published last July.

The gist of it is this:

The line for Baez's services wasn't especially long when the Padres' \$3 million bonus fended off, among others, the Astros and the Cardinals.

A little more than a year after signing, Baez – who fanned 89 over 63 2/3 innings (2.54 ERA) in his pro debut – is now rated among the best prospects in the game by Baseball America, ESPN's Keith Law and now MLB.com, which released its top-100 Saturday evening.

The latter's full scouting report is as follows:

“The Padres landed Baez during their international bonus-pool-shattering spending spree in 2016, signing the then-20-year-old Cuban righty for \$3 million in December. Though little was known about him at the time, Baez put himself on the radar during his dominant stateside debut, showing a combination of physicality and stuff that enabled him to quickly jump to Class A Fort Wayne after just one start in the Rookie Arizona League.

“A physically large and imposing presence on the mound who operates from a three-quarters slot, Baez generates easy plus-plus velocity in a fastball that bumps 98-99 mph and consistently sits in the mid-90s. His heater pairs nicely with an upper-80s slider that flashes

above-average potential with two-plane action, and club officials expect both his curveball and changeup to be at least average once fully developed.

“Though listed at 6-foot-8 and 220 pounds, Baez showed in 2017 that he could repeat his delivery and pound the strike zone better than most hurlers of comparable size. His command does lag behind his control, however, and he'll need to locate his fastball better to be effective at higher levels. If he can do so, the big right-hander could become a mid-rotation starter, if not more.”

Here are snippets of MLB.com’s notes on the other Padres in the top-100 (only the Braves had more than the Padres’ seven; the White Sox also had seven):

8 | SS Fernando Tatis Jr.

- “That larger frame doesn't currently impede Tatis Jr.'s abilities at shortstop, where he makes highlight-reel plays on a daily basis thanks to his athleticism, range and rocket arm, though further physical development could ultimately force him to third base. Even if that's case, Tatis Jr.'s bat gives him the ceiling of a perennial All-Star, possibly even an MVP candidate in his prime.”

19 | LHP MacKenzie Gore

- “Padres officials are quick to praise Gore's competitiveness and overall aptitude on the mound, believing that those qualities, along with his potential for four above-average-or-better offerings, could make the young lefty a future front-of-the-rotation piece. Already on his way toward achieving that projection, Gore stands to rise quickly through the Minors compared to his Draft-class peers.”

36 | 2B/SS Luis Urias

- “Urias proved plenty capable at shortstop in 2017, first in Double-A and then in the Arizona Fall League, and should continue to see some time there moving forward. His ultimate defensive home, however, is likely second base, where he profiles as an above-average defender with good range and arm strength. Overall, Urias has the

ingredients to hit atop a lineup while manning a middle-infield position for a long, long time.”

40 | RHP Cal Quantrill

- “A healthy first full season in which Quantrill logged 116 innings and maintained his velocity deep into games helped lay to rest any lingering concerns about his health. While the Padres will likely manage his workload once again in 2018, it shouldn't stop Quantrill, with his impressive blend of size, stuff and pitchability, from continuing his quick rise through the Minor Leagues.”

50 | LHP Adrian Morejon

- “Morejon's delivery requires some cleaning up and he faces some concerns about his durability, but there are some evaluators who believe that the final product could be that of a frontline starter.”

89 | RHP Anderson Espinoza

- “Espinoza had progressed to throwing bullpen sessions in July before it was announced he would require season-ending surgery. He could potentially return to the mound at the end of the 2018 season if all goes as planned with his recovery and rehab, though it wouldn't come as a surprise if San Diego conservatively pushed that back to 2019.”

Padres roster review: Kirby Yates

Jeff Sanders

Sizing up the Padres' 40-man roster, from A to Z, heading into the 2018 season.

KIRBY YATES

- Position: Right-handed pitcher
- 2018 Opening Day age: 31
- Bats/throws: L/R
- Height/weight: 5-foot-10 / 210 pounds
- Acquired: Off waivers from the Angels in April 2017
- Contract status: Will make \$1.062 million in 2018; will be arbitration-eligible a second time in 2019; won't be a free agent until 2021
- Key stats: 4-5, 3.97 ERA, 1 save, 88 Ks, 19 BBs, 1.11 WHIP, .211 opponent avg., 56 2/3 innings (62 games)

STAT TO NOTE

- 17.4 – The percent of pitches that resulted in a swinging strike, third among relievers with at least 50 innings. Only Red Sox closer Craig Kimbrel (19.8) and Dodgers closer Kenley Jansen (18.2) were better in 2017. Also, Yates' 38.1 percent strikeout rate was seventh-best and his contact rate inside the strike zone (74.2 percent) was the fifth-lowest.

TRENDING

- Up – Two Aprils ago, Brad Hand arrived as a waiver claim who eventually became an All-Star. Yates also arrived as an April waiver claim, although his path to San Diego was far windier. Tommy John surgery cost him his draft-and-follow plans out of high school in Lihue, Hi. He climbed the ladder the majors with the Rays as an undrafted free agent and had bounced from Tampa Bay to Cleveland to New York to Anaheim

from 2014 to early 2017. Yates had fashioned a 5.25 ERA over his first three years in the majors and allowed two runs in his first game with the Angels when the Padres plucked him off waivers. In San Diego, the rebuilding Padres provided something that had eluded Yates to date: opportunity to stretch his legs. Utilizing a hard splitter as his chief secondary pitch, Yates fanned 18 batters in 12 2/3 innings in May (2.13 ERA), 20 in 10 2/3 innings in June (2.53 ERA) and 16 in 10 2/3 innings in July (0.84 ERA). Yates appeared to hit a wall in August (12.19 ERA), but finished September strong (1.80) in cementing a set-up role in front of Hand in the Padres' pen.

2018 OUTLOOK

- Yates owes his success in 2017 to a mid-90s fastball that limited opposing hitters to a career-low .218 batting average off the pitch, as well as the emergence a splitter that limited hitters to an .077 average. The stuff played up enough for the Padres to give Yates a shot to close after Brandon Maurer was traded away. The role ultimately went to Hand, but Yates could again emerge as a closer candidate if the Padres move Hand before the trade deadline. If not, look for Yates to serve as the Padres' primary set-up man.

Late MLB umpire Doug Harvey remembered as baseball character, caretaker

Bryce Miller

On Saturday afternoon in a quiet chapel, the stories about Doug Harvey started to flow and “somber” found itself getting the kind of heave-ho that would warm an old umpire’s heart.

There was the classic yarn about Harvey being informed that a group had labeled him the second-best arbiter of balls and strikes in baseball history, behind the late Bill Klem: “Dig him up. Let’s have a go at it.”

ADVERTISING

There was the one, told by Padres broadcaster Mark Grant, about former pitcher and current Rockies manager Bud Black being stopped five pitches into his warm-up at Candlestick Park by Harvey, known for his commitment to brisk games.

“He said, ‘Hey, don’t I get eight?’ ” Grant relayed.

The response from Harvey: “It ain’t going to get much better.”

For those at the First Presbyterian Church, the service for Harvey — who died in Visalia on Jan. 13 at 87 — offered a peek behind baseball’s quirky curtain. The gathering also revealed the bedrock character of someone who used a game to teach life lessons to so many about integrity, hard work and fairness.

What did one man’s involvement mean?

The impact was profound enough for MLB executive and four-time World Series winning manager Joe Torre to attend. The crowd included Cy Young winner Randy Jones, former umpire Ed Montague and Jeff Idelson — president of the National Baseball Hall of Fame who just days earlier informed the world that Padres closer Trevor Hoffman would be immortalized in Cooperstown.

The legacy, so lasting, that remembrances being read sprouted across baseball's rich landscape. The ultimate back-stop, Johnny Bench. The ultimate knuckleballer, Phil Niekro. The ultimate all-around player, Willie Mays.

An especially poignant reflection came from Mays, who in a letter read by Idelson talked about playing cards with Harvey in the umpires' room before games — and in the end learned so much more.

Mays told the family he knows Harvey watched over them, but wanted them to know, "In his way, he took care of me, too."

"Baseball," umpire Joe West said, "lost a true hero."

When the officiant asked if anyone else wanted to speak, a former neighbor said Harvey jumped in when his son had a medical emergency as a 10-year-old. He ended with, "He's the reason my son's alive today."

One of Harvey's cousins walked to the front and told the story about trying to break through at umpiring school. He asked how to buy a certain type of shoes umpires wore to impress instructors about his attention to detail.

Shortly after, a box arrived at the school. Inside rested the pair of shoes Harvey wore the season before, a set of famous footwear that had worked in every single National League park.

"I wore those shoes a long, long time," said the man, fighting tears.

The day, though, belonged to smiles generated by a baseball life well-lived. The cousin said to those in the church that he eventually drifted away from umpiring, beginning a career with the Department of Corrections.

"Pretty much the same job, right?" he said.

Just before the service, West chuckled at the memory of the time Harvey ejected former Reds manager Sparky Anderson. This time, the umpire wanted to add an emphatic exclamation point.

“Doug chased Sparky Anderson off the field,” West said. “Doug ran after him, down the foul line. He tapped him on the shoulder and said, ‘Keep going.’ ”

So many knew Harvey as an All-Star of a person who simply happened to have a well-known day job.

One Union-Tribune reader shared a story this week about Harvey coming into the old Price Club on Morena Boulevard for a set of tires. When an employee recognized him, Harvey parked on an old metal folding chair and regaled the group about the personalities that make up the fabric of baseball.

Harvey also shared thoughts on how to treat people and conduct yourself.

“Doug Harvey was class to a bunch of guys with their names sewn on their work shirts, with dirt under their nails,” the reader wrote.

Former Padres marketing executive Andy Strasberg, who became Harvey’s friend, recalled when San Diego hosted the All-Star Game in 1992.

“Whether it was President of the United States, the owner of a major corporation or a clubhouse attendant, he had as much time and respect for you as anyone else,” Strasberg said. “I witnessed it. I saw him talk to the first George Bush, Ted Williams and a clubhouse attendant that day. He treated them the same way.”

Legendary NFL referee Jim Tunney broke into basketball officiating with two of the best in sports — Harvey and late NBA Hall of Fame whistle-toter, Darell Garretson.

The trio paired with each other on two-man assignments for high schools and junior colleges in the 1950s. Each ascended to the top of officiating’s mountain, in three different sports.

The last game Tunney and Harvey worked together was West Virginia at USC when a slick-shooting Mountaineers guard named Jerry West played.

“The great thing about Doug, he knew the rules better than anybody,” Tunney said by phone Saturday. “If he got an Earl Weaver or a Tommy Lasorda arguing, he’d just say, ‘OK, look at Rule 4.6. If I’m wrong, I’ll buy you dinner.’ ”

“I told him once that I never did that with Lombardi or Shula or Walsh. I just walked away. I asked why he didn’t do that. He said, ‘In baseball, you’ve got to work with them the next day. I can’t be intimidated. I’ve just got to get it right.’ ”

Harvey’s wife, Joy, remembered the pair traveling back roads in the minor leagues, quizzing her husband about the rules as he drove.

“He memorized the rule book,” she said, “down to the punctuation marks.”

As the service wrapped up, “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” played. Those exiting, including Joy Harvey, sang along.

Hit the showers, somber.

Tatis tops list of 7 Friars in MLB's Top 100

Gore, Urias, Quantrill, Baez, Morejon, Espinoza also ranked as best prospects

AJ Cassavell

SAN DIEGO -- Best farm system in baseball? The Padres once again find themselves squarely in the discussion -- if not at the forefront.

MLB Pipeline unveiled its Top 100 Prospects list Saturday, with seven Padres among the group. Six checked in among the top 50, easily the most of any club.

Headlining the San Diego contingent is shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr., who jumped 44 spots and is ranked No. 8 overall and No. 2 among shortstops. He's followed by left-hander MacKenzie Gore (No. 19), second baseman Luis Urias (No. 36), right-handers Cal Quantrill (No. 40) and Michel Baez (No. 42), lefty Adrian Morejon (No. 50) and righty Anderson Espinoza (No. 89).

Those seven players combined to give San Diego 423 prospect points according to MLB Pipeline. That's the best total of any club, 16 points ahead of Atlanta -- the only organization with more prospects (8) on the overall list. (For basic reference, prospect points show how each club fares in its representation on the Top 100 list, with each prospect assigned a value. The No. 1 player receives 100, No. 2 receives 99, and so forth.)0th, 2018

The annual ranking of MLB's Top 100 prospects is assembled by MLB Pipeline Draft and prospect experts Jim Callis, Jonathan Mayo and Mike Rosenbaum, who compile input from industry sources, including scouts and scouting directors. It is based on analysis of players' skill sets, upsides, proximity to the Majors and potential immediate impact to their teams. Only players with rookie status entering the 2018 season are eligible for the list. Players who were at least 25 years old when they signed and played in leagues deemed to be professional (Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Cuba) are not eligible.an. 11th, 2018

The current strength of the Padres' prospect group is a testament to A.J. Preller's coup in talent acquisition over the past 18 months. The Padres' general manager has used three avenues to revamp a once-depleted farm system in San Diego: trades, international signings and the Draft.

Tatis and Espinoza joined the club during the 2016 season via trade (Tatis from the White Sox for James Shields and Espinoza from the Red Sox for Drew Pomeranz). Morejon and Baez were part of the club's unprecedented investment in the international market during the '16-17 signing period. Quantrill and Gore were the club's top selections in each of the past two Drafts. Only Urias was with the organization prior to June '16.9th, 2018

Among the group, Urias and Quantrill are closest to big league readiness. Both received invites to Major League Spring Training, and both could earn their way to a midseason callup this year. Urias, ranked as the game's No. 2 second-base prospect, slashed .296/.398/.380 for Double-A San Antonio last season. Quantrill, meanwhile, split time between San Antonio and Class A Advanced Lake Elsinore, posting a 3.80 ERA.

Tatis also received an invite to Major League camp, though he'll probably only spend a few weeks there before moving to Minor League camp. Tatis has skyrocketed up the prospect leaderboards since joining the Padres in 2016. He slashed .281/.390/.520 while setting a franchise record with 21 homers for Class A Fort Wayne before a late-season promotion to San Antonio.th, 2018

A pair of 18-year-olds in Gore and Morejon also ranked among the top 10 at their position. Gore was rated the top lefty pitching prospect, while Morejon finished sixth. Baez, a hard-throwing 22-year-old righty, joins that duo in the lower levels of the system.

If all goes according to plan, the Padres have the makings of a formidable rotation on the horizon. In the near future, current big leaguers Dinelson Lamet and Luis Perdomo will be joined by upper-level prospects like Quantrill, Eric Lauer and Joey Lucchesi.an. 10th, 2018

The organization's goal is to add a few more elite arms -- namely Gore, Baez and Morejon -- into the mix shortly after. Preller often speaks of bringing "waves of talent" to San Diego, where one group of youngsters is complemented by the next. The club's long-term rotation plan is Exhibit A.

The biggest question mark of the group is the 89th-ranked Espinoza, who underwent Tommy John surgery in July and missed the 2017 season. He fell 64 spots from last year's preseason rankings but the Padres remain bullish on Espinoza's potential. At 19, he has time to bounce back.. 19th, 2018

The Padres' system certainly has. In a big way.

Pirela poised to maintain dominance in left

Dickerson, Szczur, Jankowski, Cordero, Spangenberg could also see time in OF corner

AJ Cassavell

With Spring Training on the horizon, MLB.com is taking an in-depth look at the 2018 Padres, breaking the team down position by position. Today, we preview the San Diego left fielders.

SAN DIEGO -- Last spring, a breakout offensive performer entered Padres camp looking to solidify his place in left field. Alex Dickerson had been promoted in the middle of the previous season, and he quickly established himself as one of the club's best all-around hitters, while proving serviceable in left field.

All of those same qualifiers hold true again this spring -- only now it's Jose Pirela entering camp, looking to re-establish his place as the club's premier left fielder.

Dickerson's injury nightmare in 2017 cleared the way for Pirela's emergence. When Dickerson went down in Spring Training with a bulging disk in his lower back, the Padres spent the season's first two months looking for an answer in left field.

On June 6, that answer arrived in the form of Pirela. The 28-year-old entered the season with 137 career at-bats split over three years, mostly as a utility man. The Padres liked the potential in his bat, so they brought him back to the club on a Minor League deal.

Everything came together for Pirela when manager Andy Green handed him the keys to the job in left field. He had an everyday position for this first time in his career, and his defensive improvement was palpable.ep. 5th, 2017

Far more noteworthy, however, was Pirela's bat. He started hot upon his early-June callup and never cooled off. Pirela finished the year with a .288/.347/.490 slash line. From the time he joined the club to the end of the season, he was unquestionably the Padres' best offensive performer.

That performance has given Pirela the first shot at the left-field job in 2018.

"Based on what he did last year, I'm a fool if I don't find a way to get him opportunity," Green said. "He was our most consistent offensive performer. He plays with passion and energy. He's a hard guy not to love when you watch him play. I love cheering for the guys that didn't get the opportunity and weren't the marquee prospects, then you look up, and this guy's turned himself into a real big leaguer."3rd, 2017

Meanwhile, Dickerson is a clear favorite for a roster spot, if healthy. Green often labeled him the club's "most professional" hitter in 2016, when he batted .257/.333/.455 in 84 games. But "if healthy" is a tricky proposition with the oft-injured lefty slugger.

Dickerson was in and out of the lineup during the final two months of 2016 after a hard collision with center fielder Travis Jankowski. Then, on the first day of full-squad workouts in '17, his back began to bark. He was diagnosed with a bulging disk, and after multiple setbacks, Dickerson opted for season-ending surgery in June.

Let's say Dickerson is healthy in 2018. It's easy to envision a five-man outfield with him, Pirela and Hunter Renfroe splitting at-bats at the corner spots.23rd, 2016

If he's not healthy? Then a four-man outfield group is probably likelier (with infielder Cory Spangenbergable to provide help in left field, too). That list includes Renfroe, Pirela, center fielder Manuel Margot and a backup center fielder from among Jankowski, Matt Szczur and No. 12 prospect Franchy Cordero. All three would also be expected to be able to slot into right and left field when needed.

"You've got Jose Pirela, who was great in the outfield last year," said Green, "You've got Alex Dickerson, who was our most professional at-bat two years ago, missed all of last year, coming back. Cordero [dominated] in the Dominican Winter League. There's going to be real competition out there."

Projected starter: Pirela

Potential backups: Dickerson, Szczur, Jankowski, Cordero, Spangenberg

Top 30 prospects: No. 11 Jorge Ona, No. 12 Cordero, No. 17 Jeisson Rosario, No. 21 Michael Gettys, No. 22 Mason House, No. 24 Edward Olivares

Petco to feature Hoffman giveaways, events

Newly-minted Hall of Famer will receive bronze statue at stadium

AJ Cassavell

SAN DIEGO -- Trevor Hoffman is headed to the Hall of Fame, and the Padres are pulling out all the stops to salute him at Petco Park this summer.

That includes a statue of Hoffman's likeness to be unveiled at the ballpark, though the location has not yet been determined. And a number of fan giveaways commemorating Hoffman will occur throughout the year, including a trio of Hoffman bobbleheads.

Hoffman, who was elected to the Hall of Fame on Wednesday, will be formally inducted in a ceremony on July 29. Sometime shortly thereafter, the Padres will unveil Hoffman's statue. A date has yet to be announced.

Hoffman joins two other franchise icons -- right fielder Tony Gwynn and broadcaster Jerry Coleman -- in having his likeness in bronze at Petco Park. n. 25th, 2018

Gwynn's statue currently resides beyond the right-center-field seating on the grassy area known as "Park at the Park." Padres executive chairman Ron Fowler told the San Diego Union-Tribune that the statue "will be consistent in character with the Tony Gwynn statue."

In fact, sculptor William Behrends -- who was tasked with creating Gwynn's statue in 2007 -- has been given the same job 11 years later for Hoffman. The statue of Hoffman will feature the right-hander at the apex of his leg kick.

Along with the statue, the Padres will celebrate Hoffman's induction in August during a weekend series against Arizona. Four all-fan giveaways are as follows:

Aug. 16: Replica Hoffman jersey

Aug. 17: "Hoffy" table book

Aug. 18: Cooperstown replica plaque

Aug. 19: Replica statue

The first bobblehead giveaway comes May 12, as part of a series commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 1998 National League pennant-winning club. (Also in the series are Gwynn, Ken Caminiti and Greg Vaughn.) Then, on June 30, fans at Petco Park will receive a bobblehead commemorating Hoffman's 500th save. And on July 28, the day before Hoffman's induction, a separate bobblehead giveaway will look back on his number retirement ceremony.

On the day of Hoffman's induction, the Padres have plans to open Petco Park early, allowing fans to watch the ceremony on the videoboard at Petco Park. The first 15,000 fans that day

will receive a flag featuring his number 51 -- which is already emblazoned among the club's retired numbers on the facing of the upper deck behind home plate.

Old family photo shows Stephen Strasburg was the biggest Tony Gwynn fan

Scott Allen

On Tuesday, MLB Network will premiere an hour-long documentary about San Diego Padres legend and Hall of Famer Tony Gwynn, who died at 54 in 2014 after a four-year battle with salivary gland cancer. “Mr. Padre” includes interviews with Gwynn’s family, former teammates and opponents. It also features commentary from Nationals pitcher and San Diego native Stephen Strasburg, who grew up idolizing Gwynn and later played for him at San Diego State.

“As a young kid, I wanted to be just like Tony Gwynn,” Strasburg says in the latest installment of the MLB Network Presents series, which airs Tuesday at 8 p.m. ET. “I wanted to be a professional baseball player, I wanted to play for the Padres. Tony always made extra effort to be a role model.”

In the documentary, Strasburg describes a photo from one of his first birthday parties that shows just how big a Gwynn fan he was from an early age.

“I remember this birthday specifically because that was the big highlight for that birthday was getting the Tony Gwynn poster and the Tony Gwynn wristbands with his face on there,” Strasburg says. “I was decked out. The impact it had on me is priceless.”

Strasburg’s mother gave a copy of the photo to Gwynn, who kept it on the shelf behind his desk at San Diego State, where he managed for 12 seasons after his playing career ended in 2001. Strasburg was recruited by Yale, Harvard and Stanford, but he decided to remain close to home to play for Gwynn after throwing seven complete games and finishing with a 1.68 ERA as a senior at West Hills High in the San Diego suburb of Santee.

“When I got there and I saw my childhood idol, he kind of halfheartedly said, ‘You know, you guys got to get over it. It’s not Tony Gwynn or Mr. Padre, it’s Coach Gwynn,’ ” Strasburg recalls. “It wasn’t like I was coming in as a top prospect, I wasn’t on any prospect sheets. I thought I bit off more than I could chew. I remember Tony just kind of pulling me aside. I was

definitely, like, shocked. This is Tony Gwynn, this is a guy I watched on the TV my whole life. To get that encouragement from him was huge. If it wasn't for Coach Gwynn, would I have gone on to get drafted my junior year and yadda yadda yadda? Probably not. He was like a second father to me.”

Strasburg was the Aztecs' closer for much of his freshman season and earned second-team all-Mountain West Conference honors. He blossomed as a starter during his sophomore year and went 13-1 with a 1.32 ERA as a junior, including a no-hitter in the final home start of his college career. The Nationals selected Strasburg with the No. 1 pick in the 2009 MLB draft. Gwynn watched Strasburg's 14-strikeout major league debut in a suite with Strasburg's family.

“This is a guy who put other people before himself,” Strasburg said after Gwynn's death in 2014. “There's so many things I'm never going to forget. He's impacted so many players over the years. I'm so blessed to be one of them.”