



Padres Press Clips

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Padres mailbag: On the sleepy offseason, Fernando Tatis Jr. and more

By Dennis Lin

The annual meet-and-greet known as FanFest is five days away, and the Padres' most extravagant winter purchases have been a pitcher who probably won't pitch for them in 2019 and a second baseman who isn't much younger than Andy Green. While baseball waits for Bryce Harper's and Manny Machado's decisions, the Padres front office must balance a desire to accelerate the rebuilding process with the need for further restraint after 96 losses. Restraint, of course, isn't sexy. Reliable talent is, and the Padres, for all their abundance of minor-league riches, remain deprived. Let's get to your rants, er, questions.

What on earth are the Padres doing? They're in on everyone (supposedly) and they have a gaping hole at third and holes in the rotation. Are the Padres going to make any moves to improve this team or are we going to be stuck with another 90-loss team and watch ownership move the goalposts a little further? —Ian H.

General manager A.J. Preller is very aggressive in talking with other clubs and sussing out all possibilities, even remote ones. Since he almost never confirms or denies the veracity of any rumor, the viral nature of social media often goes unchecked, at least where the Padres are concerned. A lot of the reports you see contain only morsels of truth, and sometimes none at all.

Yet it's true that the Padres have been "in" on a lot of players over the last several months. Preller has said multiple times that the depth of the farm system allows them to at least hang on the periphery in discussions for top targets.

One of the complicating factors is that some of those targets will reach free agency a bit too soon for San Diego's purposes. The Padres have genuine interest in J.T. Realmuto, but, setting aside the massive price tag, the Marlins catcher is under control for just two more seasons; if acquired, he'd be in San Diego for, presumably, only one playoff push. You don't sell off a significant portion of the farm for that.

From what I understand, the Padres are reluctant to acquire a player with two years of control unless they feel comfortable knowing they could sign that player for at least two more years. Obviously, it's not easy to gauge someone's willingness to sign an extension when they're not already on your team.

Desirable trade options with three-plus years of control are a rare species that would come at an even greater cost. To date, the Padres have not felt compelled to pull the trigger on any such trade — partly a reflection of the fact that they aren't a piece or two away from sudden contention. At the same time, they probably won't get there in the near future without a couple of additions who could take pressure off unproven prospects. And yes, the Padres like their own prospects very much, another reason we're still awaiting a blockbuster.

From the club's perspective, the free-agent market hasn't yielded many acceptable prices, though you wonder if the Padres have passed on some decent value plays. The prevailing school of thought is that you should stash the bulk of your cash until you're closer. (Through one season, San Diego's decision to sign Eric Hosmer has only reinforced that line of thinking.)

So, when to strike a deal? That's been the question dating back to last summer, when the Padres were inquiring about Noah Syndergaard, Chris Archer and other big-name starters. But winter will give way to spring in a matter of weeks, and the chances of landing a big name seemingly have diminished.

I suspect at least one noteworthy trade will shake out before the season begins. The market has been slowed by Harper, Machado and teams' collective willingness to wait for the price to drop on other options. The Padres still have a vast collection of prospects at their disposal, but they may no longer have a surplus of time on their side. After the front office's [declarations about 2019](#), it's fair for fans to expect real upgrades in advance of Opening Day. If those don't materialize, it's more than reasonable to make your voice heard with your wallet.

Why spend prospect capital over cash to supplement the core when they feel they are ready? — Jake L.

It's all currency, isn't it? A good organization has thorough scouting reports of 29 farm systems and major-league rosters. A very good organization also knows its own players, including the minor-leaguers, even better. Of course, it's a risk trading prospects before you know what you have, but if you're doing it right, you should already have a decent understanding of all of your assets.

Why are some beat writers already conceding 2019 and telling fans to point toward 2020? The season hasn't even started, why in a weaker NL West should fans throw in the towel already? Did the A's last year just concede 2018? —Robby M.

I think we've been saying for some time that 2020 is the target. The owners in the past have floated 2019 as a possible early arrival date, but we haven't seen anything to lend real credence to that; the Padres didn't make enough big-league progress last year, and they haven't made nearly enough improvements this offseason. The division window may be cracked, if not swinging open, but the Dodgers are still the Dodgers and the Rockies have the young pitching the Padres hope to have in a year or two.

Have you heard anything on (Dallas) Keuchel being connected with the Padres lately? —Thalia M.

The Padres like Keuchel. He was more hittable than usual last season and he turned 31 on New Year's Day. But the groundballer would bring a significant measure of certainty to a rotation in need of some guarantees. His 2018 [spike in contact rate](#) is concerning, especially for a soft-tosser, but Keuchel boasts the best track record of any remaining free-agent starter.

That, paired with his choice of representation in Scott Boras, also means he will require a lucrative, multi-year contract. At the moment, the Padres aren't willing to go anywhere near the asking price.

You also figure that some of the big-market losers in the Harper and Machado sweepstakes will target Keuchel as a way to spend the funds they had socked away. Maybe Boras' strategy of waiting out the market backfires, but in this case, I think Keuchel winds up scoring a nice deal from another club largely because he's a starting pitcher, not a post-prime position player.

The starting pitching in 2018 was atrocious. Do we have reason to hope for average or better in 2019? Who will deliver us from the basement? —Allison R.

Your question prompted a quick FanGraphs search. Since Petco Park opened, the Padres have fielded an average rotation, according to league- and park-adjusted ERA, just twice, in 2006 and 2010. (They came close in 2004, 2007 and 2011.)

The venue's pitcher-friendliness obviously has helped, but the margin has waned in recent years. So, from a very technical standpoint, it's unlikely that San Diego posts average starting-pitching numbers in 2019 after they posted some of their worst ever in 2018.

What about something close to average? Barring the addition of a Keuchel and/or another experienced arm, that's still a long shot. The Padres simply don't have the workhorses yet, and the prospects set to debut will need adjustment periods.

I do expect measurable improvement, though. Three of San Diego's four highest ERAs in the Petco era were logged between 2016 and 2018. Some of the upgrades will come through addition via subtraction. The Padres have discussed being [more selective with how they deploy their starters](#). Chris Paddack, Logan Allen and Cal Quantrill (even if his stock has dropped) have higher upsides than most of the overmatched arms and castoffs we've seen the last few seasons.

Why is there such a need to move (Francisco) Mejía or (Austin) Hedges? Catcher feels like the one position in sports where you would love to have two solid players. What does a Hedges/Mejía platoon look like? —Terrence D.

The Padres don't *need* to move Mejía or Hedges. Their July trade for Mejía was barely complete when team officials began reciting the new party line — namely, that successful modern baseball clubs often carry two solid catchers. A 100/60 split or thereabouts has been done very recently.

Should the Padres move one of the catchers? It's hard to see how they can put it off for too long. Since they still don't have an everyday third baseman or anything approaching a front-of-the-rotation arm, it stands to reason that two talented young catchers would be among the most logical trade chips.

Still, it may behoove the Padres to hang on to both for the time being. Despite their insistence that Mejía will stick behind the plate, rival teams remain skeptical. Trading Hedges during Mejía's discovery phase would be a sizable risk. Either way, we should find out more about both catchers, particularly Mejía, in 2019.

Do you agree that the jury is in on Austin Hedges? Good with pitchers, great defensively, light & inconsistent hitter, with no lumber upside left. — @WillieOReeFan

Catchers sometimes take longer to fully develop at the plate, so I'd quibble with the notion that Hedges has no upside left. That said, his offensive potential isn't in the same neighborhood as Mejía's, and the younger catcher has a lot to prove when it comes to plate discipline.

I'm surprised that (Miguel) Andújar is not more a part of the conversation as a possibility for solving our 3rd base problem. Is his defense that bad or is it just that he would take too much in the way of prospects to obtain? —Eric K.

Well, the Padres have had interest for some time, so he has been part of the conversation, which, to be clear, has touched on many other possibilities as well. You highlighted the two hang-ups with Andújar: One, his defense is a glaring liability and [may never get much better](#), although a team like the Padres could afford him more time to figure things out. And two, the Yankees, despite a desire to explore trades involving their young infielder, are asking a lot in return. Machado's free agency may have to end before we learn Andújar's fate.

Who are the prospects most likely to be called up in the April/May time frame? The rotation will still take time with the more elite arms at the lower levels of the minors, but will the offense we see this season be close to what the Padres envisioned for their future contending team? —Ethan M.

Paddack, Allen and Quantrill will compete for Opening Day jobs. So will Ty France. Because service time is an unavoidable consideration for the organization's best prospect in years, Fernando Tatis Jr. probably won't be up until the second half of April, at the earliest. I wouldn't be surprised if they keep him down until the Super Two deadline, sometime in June. If he blitzes through the Pacific Coast League, they may have little choice but to bring him up sooner than that.

Hey Dennis! What do you think of Chris Paddack's upside? Ace potential? Do you see him being a part of the Padres rotation this year? —John L.

A refusal to walk, well, anyone and one of the minors' best fastball-changeup combinations bode well for Paddack's chances of becoming at least a legitimate No. 3 starter.

To reach the next tier, he'll need to develop his curveball into an average or better offering and, of course, stay healthy. Objectively, what are the odds that he accomplishes both things? Probably not great, but Paddack, who's wired a bit differently than any other prospect I've interviewed, seems to have the intangibles part of the equation covered. Plus, he exceeded all expectations in his first season back from Tommy John surgery.

Major-league hitters are exponentially tougher opponents, but Paddack should arrive sometime in the first half of 2019, and while the Padres will be careful with his surgically repaired arm, I wouldn't be surprised if he ends up becoming more than a No. 3 starter.

Tatis struggled at the beginning of his AA stint, then they moved him to leadoff position in the batting order and he thrived. At first glance he seems like a middle-of-the-order guy, but do you see the Pads batting him leadoff instead of Urías? Urías seems like a natural #2 hitter. —Ryan W.

The nice thing about Tatis is he projects to be an average or better option at any of the first four spots in the lineup. It's been years since the Padres had a prospect with the same combination of power, speed and relatively good plate discipline. At maturity, his extra-base ability probably plays best if he's batting behind a teammate or two.

Do you believe there is a non-zero chance that Urías sticks at SS and Fernando Tatis Jr. is the solution at 3B? —Chris Y.

Here is the latest in a growing pile of evidence that Tatis just might be a pretty good shortstop:

Urías could be one of the main options until Tatis arrives, but to maximize the latter's value — presumably a middle-of-the-order hitter with similar game-changing potential in the field — the Padres should keep him at short for as long as he's not a detriment. Given his obvious athletic ability, instincts and the recent success of larger shortstops, I see no reason why he can't stay there for at least several years.

What do you foresee the Padres doing to get rid of the logjam in the OF? The talent is young and needs to play regularly. There are just too many for that to happen unless they make a move, like a trade for a SP. —David H.

A corner-outfield trade before late March still looks like a decent bet. Wil Myers, if he isn't dealt, will probably spend most of his time in left field. Hunter Renfroe, if he isn't dealt, needs to show he can continue the progress he made against right-handers. Franmil Reyes, if he isn't dealt, deserves the playing time to prove his rookie season wasn't a fluke. You'd like to give Franchy Cordero enough run to produce the occasional jaw-dropping highlight and, more important, find out if he can be a regular himself. Travis Jankowski tends to get overlooked, but he's a valuable reserve because of his speed and versatility.

So, the math appears simple, as you mentioned. But you also need to preserve some depth. Offseason injuries, albeit relatively minor ones, have struck Reyes and center fielder Manuel Margot. If Cordero breaks out, he still could benefit from being the left-handed member of a platoon.

That brings us to potential returns. Aside from Myers, who'd have to net another expensive contract in a deal, none of these outfielders has been deemed worthy of headlining a trade of significance. All of them carry major question marks and, on good teams, would fit as backups or part-time starters until they prove otherwise.

Renfroe and Reyes do fit the profile of deal sweeteners, though; more than a few clubs would be happy to take on a young, power-hitting outfielder with upside. As always, a text or phone call could change things any minute, but the Padres could enter spring training with the outfield intact. Based on health and performance, they could then decide on the exact composition.

Most subjective evidence shows that (Ron) Fowler and the rest of the ownership group's MO/goal is to pocket profits, not reinvest said profits back into the team, and going out of its way to create the illusion to fans that it's building a competitive team. What evidence refutes this? — @QuinnWinterEsq

Here are a couple of statements from Fowler relevant to this topic:

- March 2015, before the Padres opened that season with a club-record payroll of \$108 million: “We’re doing more than reinvesting revenues. This is not the cap of where payroll’s going to be. We’ve made the commitment to spend dollar over dollar of every one we bring in.”
- February 2018, [regarding Forbes’ estimates of the Padres’ operating income](#): “They’re huge disparities. I have no idea where they’re coming from. ... What I think they fail to understand is the amount of money that goes into non-major league activities. That’s the only thing I can guess.”

Since the Padres are a privately owned organization and thus not obligated to open their books, this is about as close to evidence as you’ll find. Whether or not you choose to believe it is another matter, though it would be odd for Fowler to make such statements without at least some truth behind them.

This also can be true: The Padres, who continue to rank among the lowest-spending teams in terms of major-league payroll, can afford to commit more money to their most visible product. Last anyone checked, MLB owners are generally doing very well for themselves and franchises are worth more than ever. Exactly how much more could, and should, the Padres spend on big-leaguers before they’re ready to contend? That’s a harder question to answer.

This question may not be in your wheelhouse, but here goes. In light of the recent promotion of Erik Greupner, is it possible that we’ll see changes in terms of the fan experience? Lower ticket prices, perhaps? —@PadresGeekster

I don’t see seismic changes on the way. Greupner’s bump had been planned for a while. Lower ticket prices would be a welcome development for fans, but the Padres frankly don’t have much incentive to go that route. Last season, they produced their worst record in a decade while still drawing more than 2.1 million attendees to Petco.

Friars awash with catching talent, depth

By AJ Cassavell MLB.com @AJCassavell

Jan. 4th, 2019

With Spring Training on the horizon, MLB.com is taking an in-depth look at the 2019 Padres, breaking the team down position by position. Today, we preview the San Diego catchers.

SAN DIEGO -- Every team in baseball is looking for young catching talent. The Padres, it seems, have it in droves.

Francisco Mejia, acquired from Cleveland at the non-waiver Trade Deadline, ranks squarely among the **top catching prospects** in baseball. **Austin Hedges**, who once held the same title, is only 26 himself and coming off a breakout second half.

Many have wondered what the presence of both Hedges and Mejia could mean for playing time in 2019. The Padres view their forthcoming catching competition in an extremely positive light.

"Both guys have really shown ... they're going to be Major League-caliber catchers," Padres general manager A.J. Preller said. "Is this a situation where both guys are splitting time? Does one guy take the lead and be the main guy? Do we go after a veteran catcher to supplement at the Triple-A level? All those things will be determined."

As things stand, here's a breakdown of how San Diego might line up at catcher this year:

Projected starter: Hedges

Potential backups: Mejia, **Austin Allen**

Top 30 prospects: No. 3 Mejia, No. 24 Luis Campusano, No. 25 Allen

We'll start with Hedges, who has made it very clear he views himself as a primary option behind the plate. He wants to catch 130 games, and he's let the Padres know that.

It's not arrogance. Hedges wants to be on the field every day, and the Padres appreciate that.

"He definitely comes in as a guy that we're expecting really big things from this year," manager Andy Green said. "Couldn't be any more pleased with what Austin has done."

What's he done exactly? Well, he's evolved into one of the game's elite defensive backstops. Hedges has finished in the top 10 in framing runs above average each of the past two seasons, and there are few better at controlling the running game (though Hedges took a step back in that department last year).

At the plate, Hedges finished with a .711 OPS in 2018, including a .744 mark in the second half -- both well above the MLB average for catchers. It'll be awfully hard to supplant a defensive wizard like Hedges if he's hitting, too.

But Mejia just might have the tools to do so. Granted, Mejia is incredibly raw, and he chases far too many pitches. But no one denies his elite bat speed and plate instincts, plus his arm is on par with Hedges'. (It might even be better, which says an awful lot.)

Still, Hedges will enter camp as the favorite. Mejia has work to do with his game-calling and framing, and he's just 23 years old.

But there's a possibility that Mejia finds playing time elsewhere. If his bat lights up, the Padres could use him as a versatile piece -- spelling Hedges behind the plate, while also seeing time in the outfield. They haven't committed to such a move yet, but if the Padres are going to keep both Hedges and Mejia, it seems inevitable.

Then there's Allen, who was added to the 40-man roster in November. His bat is excellent, but his defense remains a question mark, and he'll get a serious test during Spring Training.

Perhaps it's telling that Preller has mentioned Allen alongside Mejia and Hedges when he discusses the spring competition. It's certainly one worth watching.

"It's going to benefit me, Austin and Francisco, having that competition," Allen said recently. "It's going to be friendly competition, but it's only going to make us better in the long run."

Padres roster review: Jacob Nix

Jeff Sanders

Sizing up the Padres' 40-man roster, from A to Z, heading into the 2019 season:

JACOB NIX

- **Position(s):** Right-handed starting pitcher
- **2019 Opening Day age:** 23
- **Bats/throws:** R / R
- **Height/weight:** 6-foot-4 / 220 pounds
- **Acquired:** 3rd round in 2015 (IMG Academy)
- **Contract status:** Made MLB debut in 2018; will not be arbitration-eligible until 2022 at the earliest.
- **Key stats:** 2-5, 7.02 ERA, 21 strikeouts, 13 walks, 1.54 WHIP, .304 opponent average (9 starts, 42 1/3 innings)

STAT TO NOTE

- **4.17** – The whiff rate on Nix's slider in the majors in 2018, well below his change-up (11.83) and off the pace of his curve (6.20) and four-seamer (5.85). Among Padres with at least nine starts, only **Eric Lauer's** change-up (3.65), **Tyson Ross's** sinker (0.66), **Bryan Mitchell's** change-up (1.37) and **Luis Perdomo's** change-up (3.53) fetched whiffs at a fewer rate than Nix's slider.

TRENDING

- **Down** – For the second year in a row, Nix's season was delayed due to a troublesome groin, one he corrected this offseason via sports hernia surgery. The hope is that Nix having his legs truly under him will help his major league numbers approach what he accomplished in the minors in 2018. Before his big league promotion, Nix, was 3-3 with a 1.84 ERA, 44 strikeouts and a .215 opponent average in 58 2/3 innings split between Double-A San Antonio and Triple-A El Paso. Yet the hallmark of his profile – pitching to contact over the strikeout – hurt him more often than not in the majors. Nix won his major league debut with six shutout innings and was two outs away from a complete game shutout when he gave up a home run in his fourth start. Outside of those two efforts, Nix had a 10.28 ERA. His strikeout rate over his entire big league debut (4.5 per nine innings) was last among all Padres pitchers with at least one inning completed.

2019 OUTLOOK

- Given Nix's history with the yips after signing with the Padres, his rise up prospect rankings – No. 14 currently in MLB.com's Padres top-30 – and to the majors is a feat to behold. Of course, he was considered a first-round arm when he got entangled in the **Brady Aiken** draft fiasco and retains considerable upside, which pitching coach **Darren Balsley** believes Nix could continue to tap into if a bit more velocity and firmness in his breaking ball fetches more strikeouts (see above). The Padres are embracing a youth movement for the rotation and Nix is among the candidates who'll receive every opportunity to stick long-term.

PADRES POWER RANKINGS

(Currently 40 players on the 40-man roster; the list below reflects only the players reviewed thus far in the series)

1. Wil Myers
2. Eric Hosmer
3. Austin Hedges
4. Manuel Margot
5. Francisco Mejia
6. Franchy Cordero
7. Joey Lucchesi
8. Ian Kinsler
9. Eric Lauer
10. Dinelson Lamet
11. Jose Castillo
12. Anderson Espinoza
13. Travis Jankowski
14. Robbie Erlin
15. Miguel Diaz
16. Jacob Nix
17. Phil Maton
18. Greg Garcia
19. Austin Allen
20. Pedro Avila
21. Bryan Mitchell
22. Brett Kennedy
23. Ty France
24. Javy Guerra

Removed from the roster

- Carlos Asuaje (claimed by the Rangers)

#PadresOnDeck: Teenaged Starting Pitchers Luis Patiño, Joey Cantillo and Omar Cruz Off to Fast Starts in Padres System

[FriarWire](#)

Jan 4

By Bill Center

The Padres have a number of top pitching prospects closing in on the Major League rotation such as **Chris Paddock**, **Logan Allen** and **Cal Quantrill**.

But the secret to any farm system is depth—having prospects across the field.

So this Padres On Deck report focuses on three teenaged pitchers getting their starts in the lower echelons of the system—**Luis Patiño**, **Joey Cantillo** and **Omar Cruz**.

A closer look at the trio by where they are in the system:

— Luis Patiño is already ranked the [Padres' No.12 prospect by MLB Pipeline](#) although he will be 19 throughout the 2019 season. The 6-foot, 190-pound right-hander is a native of Colombia and signed with the Padres as a member of the 2016 international class.

Patiño spent the entire 2018 season as one of the youngest pitchers in the Midwest League with Single-A Fort Wayne. In fact, Patiño was four years younger than the average age of a Midwest League player.

Patiño, who came to the Arizona Rookie League midway through the summer of 2017 from the Dominican Summer League, began the 2018 season in extended spring training.

He made 17 starts with Fort Wayne and finished with a 2.16 earned run average, a 1.07 WHIP and a .220 opponents' batting average. He allowed 25 runs (20 earned) on 65 hits and 24 walks with 98 strikeouts in 83 1/3 innings. That's a 4.1-to-1 strikeout to walk ratio while averaging 10.6 strikeouts per nine innings.

In 2017, Patiño had a 2.25 ERA, a 1.09 WHIP and a .208 opponents' batting average in his debut professional season split between the Dominican Republic and Arizona, where he made nine appearances (eight starts) with a 2.48 ERA.

— Joey Cantillo, who turned 19 last Dec. 18, finished the 2018 season with a start at Fort Wayne after making 11 appearances (nine starts) in the Arizona Rookie League. The 6-foot-4, 225-pound left-hander was the Padres 16th-round pick in the 2017 Draft out of Kailua (Hawaii) High.

Cantillo made his professional debut in the summer of 2017 with seven appearances in the Arizona Rookie League with a 4.50 ERA over eight innings.

This past summer, Cantillo gave up 18 runs (11 earned) on 33 hits and 12 walks with 58 strikeouts in 45 1/3 innings in Arizona. He had a 2.18 ERA, a 0.99 WHIP and a .198 opponents' batting average with a 4.8-to-1 strikeout-to-walk ratio while averaging 11.5 strikeouts per nine innings.

— Omar Cruz will turn 20 on Jan. 26. The 6-foot, 170-pound left-hander is a native of Sonora, Mexico, and was a member of the Padres' 2017 international signing class. He made his professional debut in the Arizona Rookie League last summer.

Cruz split the 2018 season almost evenly between Arizona and Short-Season Single-A Tri-City of the Northwest League. Overall in an almost even split, Cruz made a combined 11 appearances (10 starts) in his debut season with a 1.91 ERA, a 1.32 WHIP and a .221 opponents' batting average.

In a combined 42 1/3 innings, Cruz allowed 13 runs (nine earned) on 34 hits and 22 walks with 59 strikeouts in 42 1/3 innings—for an average of 12 1/2 strikeouts per nine innings.