



Padres Press Clips

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Austin Hedges, Padres keep on hitting in victory over Royals

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 3/2/18

Score: Padres 13, Royals 5

Batter's box: Austin Hedges continued a sizzling spring, hitting his fourth home run in four games and adding a walk and single. His slugging percentage fell almost 300 points to 2.125. ... The Padres, whose 16 homers are second-most by any team so far in spring training, also played some rare small ball Friday. ... Walks by Jose Pirela and Hedges preceded a two-run double by Christian Villanueva in the third inning. ... Consecutive singles by Manuel Margot, Freddy Galvis and Wil Myers scored a run in the fourth. ... They scored four more in the fifth on five singles, a walk and a sacrifice fly. ... The Padres are 4-0-1 in their last five games, averaging more than 13 hits and 10 runs in that span.

Balls and strikes: Starter Bryan Mitchell struggled with command of his curveball and got hit hard in the first but pitched two scoreless innings, same as he did in his debut Sunday. ... Relievers Adam Cimber, T.J. Weir and Tom Wilhemsen all pitched their third scoreless innings of the spring.

Extra bases: The Padres finished the game with their oldest late-inning infield of the spring — Josh Naylor, 20, at first; Dusty Coleman, 30, at second; Javy Guerra, 22, at shortstop; and 19-year-old Fernando Tatis Jr. at third.

On Deck: At A's, 12:05 PT. Jordan Lyles will start.

Padres' Hosmer has fun facing former Kansas City teammates

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 3/2/18

There were far more Royals fans than Padres fans inside the stadium at Peoria Sports Complex on Friday, a few of them wearing jerseys with “35” and “HOSMER” on the back.

Eric Hosmer now wears No. 30 for the Padres, forced to change because No. 35 is retired in San Diego in honor of Randy Jones. He switched to 30 to honor his deceased former Royals teammates Yordano Ventura.

This was Hosmer’s first time facing the team that drafted him in 2008 and with which he won the 2015 World Series.

“I’m not used to seeing that Royal blue on the other side,” Hosmer said after going 1-for-4 with a double. “It was weird. It really was.”

Royals fans gave Hosmer as big an ovation in pregame introductions as they gave any of their team’s current starters and cheered each time he batted.

Hosmer hugged catcher Salvador Perez at the plate before grounding out to lead off the second inning, and he and starting pitcher Danny Duffy appeared to be smirking throughout that at-bat.

At one point, Hosmer joked with the Kansas City media members peppering him with questions after he left the game in the fifth inning that they were making too big a deal out of the day.

Fact is, though, Hosmer was one of the greatest Royals ever. He was their Player of the Year in 2013, ’16 and ’17 and left ranked ninth in franchise history in runs scored and hits and eighth in home runs and RBI. He was a part of the ’14 team that made the franchise’s first World Series appearance in 29 years and the squad that won the Series the next year.

“Like I tell these guys, Salvy and Duffy, it will never change what we’ve all been through,” Hosmer said. “... I have nothing but love for everybody there, and I’ll always continue to root for

these guys. If I was to tell you there was no weird feeling in my body before the game, I'd be lying.

“But we've all been through this grind to understand we're just getting our work in. I think it would be weird if it were a regular season game.”

Hosmer said, too, that he is now a full-fledged Padre.

“It's been a couple weeks now,” he said. “I've gotten acclimated with everybody in the building. ... Everything is going as smooth as it can go.”

Extra bases

- The Padres had 20 hits in a 13-5 victory over the Royals. Of those, eight were by players who either did not start and/or who will not be on the major-league roster to start the season. Said manager Andy Green: “What is showing more than anything is the depth of the organization. The next wave of guys we're bringing are really good players. Where some organizations might experience a drop-off from their first tier to their next tier, I think you're seeing there are a lot of really solid baseball players that we have.”
- Cory Spangenberg, who has been sidelined by a wrist injury, is expected to be the Padres' designated hitter Saturday. He will eventually work into the second base competition with Carlos Asuaje.
- Outfielder Alex Dickerson has not practiced since early in camp due to elbow soreness. He said he overdid throwing after not playing all season due to a back injury that required surgery. The hope is Dickerson will be back by the beginning of the week. Said Green: “He hasn't been on the field in a year-and-change. He needs these at-bats.”
- Robbie Erlin and Colin Rea reported feeling good after their two innings of work in Thursday's “B” game. Both pitchers were getting their first work in a game setting since 2016 Tommy John surgery.

Matt Strahm and his 'electric' stuff set to debut for Padres

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 3/2/18

Matt Strahm will pitch for the Padres in 2018. Of that, there is virtually no doubt.

There is also no denying the excitement the left-hander has created with two live batting practice sessions, nor the anticipation of his first appearance Saturday against the Oakland A's.

The question are how and when Strahm will be utilized.

“His stuff is electric,” manager Andy Green said. “You can see it playing really well on the back of a bullpen. But his mix is such that he can start. A lot is going to be predicated on his health, how his knee feels, what kind of strain does that put on his body.”

Strahm tore the patellar tendon on his left knee, had surgery and was on crutches when the Padres acquired him last July in a trade with Kansas City. Royals manager Ned Yost acknowledged Strahm can start but said he preferred him in relief.

Green sees a sizzling fastball, good curve, improved slider and adequate change-up as a four-pitch mix that might be wasted in a limited role.

“I see him as an impact starter,” Green said. “That doesn't mean that's where he'll end up, but he has the potential to really, really give a tough time to hitters.”

The issue is how the Padres get him stretched out to start when he will pitch his first inning less than a month before the season begins and they are unsure about when his knee will be able to withstand multiple innings. Also, Strahm has never thrown more than 124 1/3 innings as a pro and pitched just 39 2/3 last season.

“For him, the mindset is it's May, it's June, it's July,” Green said. “It doesn't mean he's not making the club in April. It just means it's a long-term mindset. It's not. ‘Hey, sprint to get ready for opening day.’ ... I think he's pushing as hard as he can to get ready for opening day. It's on us to realize this guy could start for us. He's also not going to have a ton of innings available over the course of the year based on what he threw last year. So having him sprint to the starting post

on March 29 isn't nearly as important as having him as a starter in June, July or August, should he end up in that capacity."

MLB Pipeline rates Padres' system best in baseball

Jeff Sanders, SDUT, 3/2/18

We know from experience that a farm system ranking doesn't mean anything if it doesn't translate into future postseason berths. The Padres, however, can puff their chests out a bit over the fact that the publications that specialize in prospecting are in agreement:

San Diego's system is in *really* good shape.

MLB Pipeline on Friday unveiled the Padres as the top farm system in the game, up from No. 4 in 2017. While ESPN and Baseball America both rated the Padres third to start 2018 – behind the Braves and the Yankees – MLB Pipeline gave the nod to San Diego, which has an MLB-best six players inside its top-50 individual rankings and even more depth beyond usual suspects like Fernando Tatis Jr. (No. 8), MacKenzie Gore (No. 19) and Luis Urias (No. 36).

From Friday's unveiling:

"The Padres' system as a whole stands out as much for its overall depth and sheer upside. San Diego has assembled baseball's top farm system through a series of strong draft, key trades for high-ceiling young prospects and a 2016-17 international spending spree in which the club shelled out more than \$60 million (including penalties) to land seven prospects who now rank among the Top 30 in the organization."

The updated top-30 includes 12 draftees, 10 international signees and eight players acquired through trade. Right-handed starting pitchers is a strength (10), but every position group is represented and 10 of the top-30 Padres prospects are in big league camp this spring.

In other words, the Padres are getting really close.

That updated list is as follows:

1. SS Fernando Tatis Jr. (No. 8 overall)
2. LHP MacKenzie Gore (No. 19)
3. 2B/SS Luis Urias (No. 36)
4. RHP Cal Quantrill (No. 40)

5. RHP Michel Baez (No. 42)
6. LHP Adrian Morejon (No. 50)
7. RHP Anderson Espinoza (No. 89)
8. LHP Logan Allen
9. LHP Joey Lucchesi
10. OF Franchy Cordero
11. SS Gabriel Arias
12. 2B Esteury Ruiz
13. LHP Eric Lauer
14. RHP Jacob Nix
15. OF Tirso Ornelas
16. 1B Josh Naylor
17. 3B/SS Hudson Potts
18. OF Jorge Ona
19. OF Jeisson Rosario
20. Edward Olivares
21. RHP Trey Wingenter
22. RHP Andres Munoz
23. RHP Chris Paddack
24. C Luis Campusano
25. RHP Mason Thompson
26. RHP Pedro Avila
27. 3B/SS Luis Almanzar
28. RHP David Bednar
29. C Austin Allen
30. OF Michael Gettys

Padres' Christian Villanueva touching all bases as he tries to make team

Kevin Acee, SDUT, 3/2/18

The Padres seem to love the addition of Chase Headley to the clubhouse and the lineup, seeing his desire to mentor young players and his career .344 on-base percentage as valuable additions for as long as he stays around.

That creates a crowd at third base, the one position where Christian Villanueva can play.

“They’ve been pretty honest with me from the beginning,” Villanueva said through an interpreter. “I’ve been honest with them. I can play first base if needed in a pinch, though we may not need that any more. I really don’t see it as I’m competing with these other guys. I need to focus on third base and do what I need to do to be the everyday third baseman.”

As long as Headley remains a Padre – maybe until midseason, maybe all season, depending on if/when another team offers something intriguing for his services – Villanueva’s options are limited.

He came in needing to hit the way he showed he could in a September call-up, wherein he blasted four home runs and batted .344 in his only 32 major league at-bats.

Coming into camp more svelte, having stayed in San Diego to work out for the first time, the 26-year-old who the Padres signed as a free agent in December 2016 is doing what he can to break through.

Villanueva’s .500 batting average this spring leads all Padres who have more than five at-bats. Of his seven hits, two are home runs, including Thursday’s grand slam off Texas Rangers minor league pitcher James Jones.

“I think I came in in the best shape I could have come in,” Villanueva said. “I spent a lot of time in the offseason working on my agility. I feel prepared. ... Without question, last year was the best year of my career. I felt more experienced, more mature in my approach at the plate.”

This surge has followed a period in which Villanueva overcame multiple injuries, including a fractured fibula that cost him the 2016 season, and the death of his brother last spring at the age of 29.

“It is kind of crazy to think about,” said Villanueva, who hit 20 homers and went .296/.369/.528 at Triple-A El Paso last year. “The past few years have been challenging, and there have been some ups and downs. I promised my brother I was going to do this for him – I was going to make the big leagues and be the best player I can.”

Padres' farm ranks No. 1 in baseball

Mike Rosenbaum, MLB.com, 3/2/18

After ranking fourth in MLB Pipeline's farm-system rankings a year ago, the San Diego Padres now enter the 2018 season at the top of that list.

The Padres' No. 1 ranking comes after a season in which outfielders Manuel Margot and Hunter Renfroe, both Top 100 prospects at this time last year, right-hander Dinelson Lamet, infielder Carlos Asuaje and their trio of Rule 5 picks (Allen Cordoba , Miguel Diaz and Luis Torrens) all graduated to the Major Leagues.

Replacing those big names at the top of the list is a cast of even better young, high-ceiling players, including seven Top 100 prospects, six of whom rank in the Top 50.

It's a group headlined by a pair of future stars in shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. and left-hander MacKenzie Gore, MLB Pipeline's No. 8 and 19 overall prospects, respectively. Add in sweet-swinging Luis Urias (No. 36) and promising young hurlers like Cal Quantrill (No. 40), Michel Baez (No. 42), Adrian Morejon (No. 50) and Anderson Espinoza (No. 89).

The Padres have assembled baseball's top farm system through several means. In addition to a series of strong Drafts in recent years that have netted them players such as first-rounders Gore and Quantrill, the Padres have been aggressive in pursuing high-ceiling, teenage players in trades. The Padres have acquired several of their top position players through such deals, trading established big league assets for the likes of Tatis (from the White Sox), Esteury Ruiz (Royals) and Edward Olivares (Blue Jays).

Meanwhile, San Diego's efforts on the international front accounts for one-third of prospects on its new Top 30 and should pay dividends for years to come.

Specifically, the club's robust 2016-17 international spending spree, in which it ultimately shelled out more than \$60 million (including penalties for exceeding its bonus pool), has stocked the system with potential impact players and pitchers like Morejon (\$11 million), Baez (\$3 million), shortstop Gabriel Arias (\$1.9), outfielders Jorge Ona (\$7 million), Tirso Ornelas (\$1.5 million) and Jeisson Rosario (\$1.85 million), and infielder Luis Almanzar (\$4 million).

And while the Padres are unlikely to receive much help from their farm in the coming year, a host of prospects -- 14, to be exact -- are ticketed to debut in 2019, including Tatis, Quantrill, Baez and Morejon.

Biggest jump/fall

Here are the players whose ranks changed the most from the 2017 preseason list to the 2018 preseason list.

Jump: Michel Baez, RHP (2017: NR | 2018: 5)

Fall: Michael Gettys, OF (2017: 13 | 2018: 30)

Best tools

Players are graded on a 20-80 scouting scale for future tools -- 20-30 is well below average, 40 is below average, 50 is average, 60 is above average and 70-80 is well above average. Players in parentheses have the same grade.

Hit: 70 -- Luis Urias

Power: 60 -- Fernando Tatis Jr.

Run: 70 -- Franchy Cordero

Arm: 70 -- Michael Gettys (Gabriel Arias)

Defense: 60 -- Gabriel Arias (Michael Gettys)

Fastball: 80 -- Andres Munoz

Curveball: 60 -- MacKenzie Gore (Jacob Nix, Pedro Avila)

Slider: 55 -- MacKenzie Gore (Michel Baez, Trey Wingenter)

Changeup: 65 -- Cal Quantrill (Chris Paddack)

Control: 55 -- MacKenzie Gore (Cal Quantrill, Adrian Morejon, Eric Lauer, Jacob Nix, Chris Paddack)

How they were built

Draft: 12

International: 10

Trade: 8

Breakdown by ETA

2018: 4

2019: 14

2020: 8

2021: 4

Breakdown by position

C: 2

1B: 1

2B: 2

3B: 2

SS: 2

OF: 6

RHP: 10

LHP: 5

Hosmer doubles in first game against Royals

AJ Cassavell, MLB.com, 3/2/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Eric Hosmer spent his first 10 professional seasons suiting up for the Royals' organization. On Friday, he suited up *against* his former club for the first time.

Hosmer received a nice ovation -- from Padres and Royals fans alike -- before each of his four at-bats in the Padres' 13-5 Cactus League victory over Kansas City. He went hitless in his first three, before smashing a sixth-inning double down the right-field line. He would exit for a pinch-runner, finishing his day 1-for-4 with an RBI groundout.

"I'm not used to seeing that Royal blue on the other side," Hosmer said. "It was weird."

Hosmer, who helped lead Kansas City to two American League pennants and the 2015 World Series title, inked a franchise-record eight-year deal with San Diego last month. The Royals were the only other team reported to be strongly pursuing Hosmer's services.

Kansas City selected Hosmer with the third overall pick in the 2008 Draft, and he made his big league debut three seasons later. Hosmer batted .284/.342/.439, winning four Gold Glove Awards and a Silver Slugger Award in parts of seven seasons with the Royals.

Hosmer was particularly chatty at first base on Friday, as former teammate after former teammate came through.

"Those guys, they're family," Hosmer said. "It goes way past baseball. These are the guys we all grew up together with. Really, we went from 18-year-old kids to grown men. We all went through that maturation together."

Hosmer's first at-bat was particularly special. Royals starter Danny Duffy played alongside Hosmer at just about every level. They both debuted in May 2011. Hosmer called Duffy his favorite teammate in an #AskThePadres Twitter Q&A last month.

The two hadn't faced each other since playing instructional ball together a decade ago. Duffy recalled that Hosmer took him deep, "about 500 feet over the center-field batter's eye."

This time Duffy got the better of that matchup. He came after Hosmer with three straight fastballs and got him to pop weakly to shortstop.

"If you know Duffy's personality a little bit, you know he's going to challenge you," Hosmer said. "It was just fun to see these guys."

Hosmer, who batted .318/.385/.498 with 25 homers in 2017, is 3-for-10 this spring. Is he finally starting to feel like a Padre?

"I am," Hosmer said with a grin. "It's been a couple weeks now. I've gotten acclimated with everybody in the building, all my teammates and the coaching staff. Everything has gone as smooth as it could go."

Hedges knocks 4th homer in four spring games

AJ Cassavell MLB.com 3/2/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- Another game, another homer for Austin Hedges. The Padres catcher certainly seems to be embracing his new swing.

Hedges has played four games this spring, and he's homered in all of them, putting him atop the Cactus League and tied with the Yankees' Miguel Andujar for Spring Training. Friday's blast was a no-doubter, as Hedges turned on a 3-2 fastball from Royals reliever Scott Barlow.

Hedges' 18 home runs last season were four shy of a record for a Padres catcher. But his on-base percentage floundered to .262, and he was quick to acknowledge that he needed to find a way to quit chasing pitches out of the strike zone.

Hedges' swing hasn't undergone a complete overhaul, by any means. His high leg kick and raised hands remain intact. But there's significantly less movement before Hedges loads. The idea is that a quieter approach at the plate will allow Hedges to pick up the ball better.

"All I've been trying to do is get into a position where I can see the ball longer, slow the game down a little bit, hunt my pitch," Hedges said earlier this week. "Anything else, just disregard it."

In nine Cactus League plate appearances, Hedges has four hits and a walk. Padres skipper Andy Green loves seeing early returns like those.

"He's worked hard on [his swing]," Green said. "You don't want to read too much into the first whatever number of at-bats, but it's been pretty special."

Villanueva at short?

The Padres will experiment with Christian Villanueva at shortstop, as they attempt to find a roster spot for the slugging third baseman. Of course, he's virtually a lock if he keeps hitting like he has during the first week of Cactus League play.

Villanueva doubled and homered against the Royals on Friday, bringing his Cactus League totals to 9-for-16 with three dingers.

Villanueva's roster prospects are already very good, but they would get a significant boost if he could add "shortstop" to his resume. He's only played three games there in nine professional seasons, but Freddy Galvis played 162 games last season. Villanueva would only serve as a short-term safety net. If something were to happen to Galvis, another shortstop would be called up.

"Nobody is looking for him to be a Gold Glove backup shortstop," Green said. "But we'll see if he can man the position and offer some versatility."

Camp battles

- Jose Pirela is a heavy favorite for a starting job -- whether at second base or in left field. He reinforced his case Friday with two hits and a walk in three plate appearances.:10 PM ET
- Outfield candidate Franchy Cordero added another extra-base hit to his spring stat line with a seventh-inning double. He's 6-for-14 in the Cactus League with three doubles and two homers -- and that doesn't include his triple in Thursday's "B" game.

Injury updates

- Carter Capps is slated for his Cactus League debut on Sunday, after undergoing surgery to address thoracic outlet syndrome in September. It's been a struggle for Capps, who missed the 2016 season and part of '17 with Tommy John surgery. But he feels as though he's on a relatively normal progression this spring -- the first time he could say that since 2015 in Miami.

"I definitely feel like it's a reboot, almost," Capps said. "It's exciting. I've probably been wearing [pitching coach] Darren Balsley and [bullpen coach Doug Bochtler] out to get me back in a game, so it's definitely exciting for me."

- The Padres are hopeful infielder Cory Spangenberg will serve as DH on Saturday. Spangenberg has missed five games with a sore left wrist, but he went through full workouts Thursday and Friday.
- Outfielder Franmil Reyes has two Cactus League homers already, and he added a third in Thursday's "B" game. But he jammed his wrist sliding into third base and will miss "a couple days," Green said.
- Catcher Luis Torrens is day-to-day with oblique trouble.

Up next

When the Padres acquired Matt Strahm at the Trade Deadline last July, he was coming off surgery to repair a torn patellar tendon in his left knee. Strahm, who is competing for a starting job, will make his first appearance as a Padre on Saturday, when the Friars head to Mesa to face Oakland at 12:10 p.m. PT. Jordan Lyles -- also in that rotation mix -- will get the start. Listen to the game on Gameday Audio.

Hosmer deal marks turning point for Padres

AJ Cassavell, MLB.com, 3/2/18

PEORIA, Ariz. -- During their offseason courtship of free-agent first baseman Eric Hosmer, the Padres may have reached a turning point as a franchise.

Following a disappointing 2015 campaign, general manager A.J. Preller orchestrated a teardown of his roster, shedding aging veterans and burdensome contracts while stocking the Padres' farm with talent. The process played out over a two-year stretch in which San Diego held more Draft picks and spent more on international amateurs than any team in baseball.

That part of the process is over. The Padres are still squarely in the talent-acquisition game. But the focus has turned within -- to developing those youngsters and building a Major League culture.

"It really started three years ago, in terms of building a foundation, building a core and building a farm system," said Preller. "The next stage for us, from a planning standpoint, was being able to layer in the right piece, the right players over the course of the next few years to add to that core."

Hosmer was the first piece to be layered into the master plan. He arrived in Peoria last month, having signed an eight-year deal worth \$144 million on Feb. 19, making him the offseason's most expensive free agent.

It's a sign the Padres believe they're headed toward contention in the near future, even if it doesn't come in 2018.

"If you add a player like that, you're obviously accelerating the process," said Wil Myers, who will shift from first base to the outfield, clearing room for Hosmer. "Adding a player like that -- not only for the fans, but for the players here -- [shows] how serious we are of going for it."

What's the goal?

The Padres aren't eyeing 2018 as the year they begin to make noise in the National League West. They don't think they're far off, though. Ideally, they will use the upcoming season as a chance to make a statement for the future.

How can they do that? By developing their young talent into big league value. Center fielder Manuel Margot and catcher Austin Hedges could be in the early stages of becoming franchise players. The farm system is loaded. San Diego might not contend in 2018, but its young players are certainly capable of turning heads.

What's the plan?

For the most part, the core is already in place on offense. Hosmer, Hedges, Margot and Myers will anchor the Padres' lineup for the next half decade. Top prospects Luis Urias and Fernando

Tatis Jr. could join them this season as the club's middle infield of the future. Carlos Asuaje and Hunter Renfroe are under team control as well.

It's an intriguing mix, and San Diego is banking on a few of those pieces developing into stars. It's a bit less clear on the mound, where the farm system is loaded with high-upside arms, but the big league rotation has serious question marks. In the long run, the Padres have five spots left to fill in their so-called "rotation of the future."

What could go wrong?

Myers is coming off a down year. Hosmer is coming off a career year. In the worst-case scenario, Hosmer struggles to replicate his 2017 season, and Myers repeats his. Both would still be useful pieces going forward. But that's an awful lot of money tied into two non-premium positions.

The Padres expect to take a step forward offensively, after consecutive years in which they finished last in the Majors in on-base percentage. But there are still plenty of question marks within that offense. A repeat of the past two seasons would be nothing short of disastrous.

Who might surprise

Preller's philosophy has always been to promote his prospects according to merit, disregarding their age. San Diego has accelerated that process for a handful of young players -- Tatis, Urias and right-hander Cal Quantrill included. It's possible all three will arrive in the Majors this season.

But all three are destined for the Minors during the season's first half. At the big league level, keep an eye on right-handers Dinelson Lamet and Bryan Mitchell. The Padres have bought into their upside, and it's likely both will enter the year with a job in the rotation.

Lin: Four Padres pitchers open up about thoracic outlet surgery

Dennis Lin, The Athletic, 3/2/18

PEORIA, Ariz. — There are four of them, within a span of 14 lockers, inside the Padres' clubhouse this spring. They are members of an exclusive order, among fewer than 20 in major league history. Their proximity creates an opening for humor.

“We’ll be able to form a support group and have meetings or something,” right-hander Carter Capps said, grinning.

What Capps and three teammates have in common is no joke. Each pitcher lost a rib, after all. What they gained, in at least two cases, is far more valuable.

All four have undergone surgery to address thoracic outlet syndrome. All four believe they are better for it.

“I’ve been able to experience things that I would not otherwise have had,” Chris Young said.

“If I had not done that, I don’t know that I would’ve had any career past 2013,” Clayton Richard said.

“All things considered, best possible outcome,” Capps said.

“I feel like the odometer,” Tyson Ross said, “has been set back to zero.”

Thoracic outlet syndrome is a silent disrupter of careers, affecting the passageway from the lower neck to the armpit—critical real estate for anyone who hurls baseballs for a living. Even with the latest medical advancements, early detection has proven elusive.

“It’s kind of a diagnosis you’ve got to get through exclusion,” Ross said. “You’ve just got to check off all the boxes. Like, it’s not this, it’s not that. It’s not A, B, C, D or E.”

Symptoms include pain, numbness, tingling or weakness. A congenital abnormality may predispose a patient to the condition. Injuries or repetitive strain also can constrict the space known as the thoracic outlet. Pitchers are especially susceptible. And the source of the problem—the compression of nerves and/or blood vessels between the collarbone and the first rib—is rarely obvious from the beginning.

“In general ... they’re athletes who have chronic repetition with a single arm,” said Dr. Osita Onugha, a thoracic surgeon at Providence Saint John’s Health Center in Santa Monica. “And sometimes the diagnosis can be hard.”

In 2009, two years after he represented San Diego in the All-Star Game, Young underwent his first surgery as a major leaguer, for a torn labrum. He subsequently tore the anterior capsule in the same shoulder, attempted to rehab the injury and conceded to another operation, in 2011. In 2013, the right-hander failed to make the Nationals’ roster out of spring training.

That summer, Young emailed Dr. Robert Thompson, a vascular surgeon at Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis. A former teammate, Kenny Rogers, had undergone thoracic outlet

decompression surgery, but at that point, Rogers was one of very few cases. Young described his message to Thompson, detailing his injury history and futile attempts at recovery, as a “last-ditch effort.”

That email, though, sparked a career revival. A visit to Thompson’s office produced a diagnosis of neurogenic TOS, the compression of the brachial plexus nerves that serve the hand and the arm.

“I went through a significant number of orthopedic surgeons who, quite frankly, missed it,” Young said. “Hindsight’s 20/20, and I understand if you have shoulder pain, it’s natural to look in your shoulder. But it certainly was a real thing for me.”

In July 2013, Thompson removed Young’s first rib and scalene muscles in his neck, freeing the brachial plexus nerves. When Young awoke from surgery, the pain that had plagued him was gone. Within five weeks, he was playing catch again. Within a year, he was on his way to winning MLB’s Comeback Player of the Year Award. In 2015, he helped the Royals to a World Series title.

“I had a very, very by-the-book recovery,” said Young, who returned to the Padres on a minor league deal in December. “Maybe it was somewhat a function of the pain I was in pre-surgery, that anything was going to feel better post-surgery.”

Not every patient has the same result, but Richard considers himself fortunate that he had a friend to consult. Prior to Young’s triumphant return in 2014, the two ex-teammates were playing catch at La Jolla High when Young offered a suggestion. Like Young, Richard had endured multiple shoulder surgeries without the desired results. The latest operation had not alleviated his discomfort.

Young was familiar with Richard’s symptoms. Feeling rejuvenated by his surgery, Young told the left-hander, “I think you should look into this.” It was not long before Thompson diagnosed Richard and, in February 2014, performed a procedure similar to Young’s.

Richard’s path back to the majors, however, was longer and more circuitous. He sustained a surgery complication, a lymphatic injury, that prevented him from eating for a week; he subsisted on an IV drip. It was not until July 2015, after two minor league deals and a trade to the Cubs, that Richard returned to a big-league mound. The operation had eased his pain, but he was still left with mechanical challenges.

“My delivery had been manipulated so much from arm issues that I had to get back to [being] comfortable pitching with a healthy shoulder,” Richard said. “Once I finally released, let my brain trust my body, that’s when stuff started coming along.”

“Especially with pitchers, they deal with pain in their arm quite a bit during the season, and sometimes they’re dealing with symptoms of TOS and they don’t realize it,” Onugha said. “If it’s been going on for quite some time, then you can expect a longer recovery.”

Richard reinvented himself as a reliever with the Cubs, finding some success out of the bullpen. After he was released in the summer of 2016, he latched on in a rotation role with San Diego, his former organization. As the veteran re-established himself, he reconnected with Ross, who had not pitched for the Padres since opening day.

Ross' case had been particularly mysterious. The right-hander earned an All-Star berth in 2014, continued to produce in 2015 and entered 2016 as the Padres' No. 1 starter. But his season debut saw him yield a career-worst in runs, and he soon landed on the disabled list with shoulder inflammation. Multiple rehab stints ended in frustration. Ross remained on the DL late into the summer.

"A lot of doctors poking and prodding," Ross recalled. "They checked for everything, pretty much. ... Unfortunately, it took all year to diagnose it."

Ross' reunion with Richard led to a revelation. Like Young had before him, Richard recognized his own past symptoms in another pitcher. Doctors in San Diego applied a test, giving Ross a numbing shot in his neck. With his scalene muscles turned off for a 24-hour window, he felt instant pain relief, played catch and recovered without incident. "Basically," Ross said, "that was a telltale sign it was thoracic."

In October 2016, Ross became Thompson's latest patient. The procedure went as planned, but like Richard, he faced a daunting road. The Padres non-tendered Ross. He was informed it could take eight to 12 months for him to return to full strength. He proceeded to sign a one-year, \$6 million deal with the Rangers.

"I'm kind of hard-headed in the fact that someone says it's going to be a certain time period, and in my mind it's going to be half that," Ross said. "I was rehabbing my butt off and determined to get back out there."

Last June, he finally did resurface in the majors, but he looked like a shell of his former self. Ross had relied on velocity and a wipeout slider, but he could not throw as freely as he had in the past. He made just 10 starts for the Rangers, who demoted him to the bullpen before releasing him in September. Ross took "a physical break and a mental break," and began throwing bullpen sessions in December. Only then, he said, did he start to feel like himself again.

The fourth member of the Padres' unofficial thoracic outlet syndrome support group also spent the offseason regaining his strength. Capps, whom San Diego acquired from Miami in 2016, had returned from Tommy John surgery last summer, but he did not resemble the dominant reliever he was in 2015. The right-hander made 11 mostly ineffective appearances late last season for the Padres. One September night in Minneapolis, he awoke to a sharp pain in his back. Initially, he believed it was a kidney stone. He was later taken to a local hospital, where doctors diagnosed a blood clot.

"It was pretty scary, because I'm a young, healthy guy," Capps recalled. "'What are you doing getting blood clots?'"

A second diagnosis followed, providing some reassurance. Capps had venous TOS, a rarer condition than the neurogenic form. The compression of a vein had produced the clot, a piece of which had broken off in the middle of the night and traveled to Capps' lung.

"Whenever you have venous TOS, sometimes you can get a clot," Onugha said. "You have this small area, and because of all the repetitions from training, the muscle gets kind of hypertrophied and it makes the space really small. When the space is small, it pushes on the vein."

For Capps, the remedy was fairly straightforward. Dr. Gregory Pearl, a vascular surgeon in Dallas, removed the pitcher's first rib, but did not release muscles in his neck or chest; that step

was not deemed necessary. Within two weeks, Capps started his rehab program. He entered camp last month, he said, without limitations.

Ross is in the same position. He signed a minor league deal with the Padres in December, around the same time as Young. Well over a year since his surgery, Ross has appeared closer to the pitcher he was before 2016, though he will still have to prove it to win a roster spot.

Young and Richard are now outspoken proponents of the surgery they say saved their careers. At 38, Young maintains he still has a couple of productive years left in his arm. He believes several were stolen from him earlier in his career, before he stumbled upon a fix for TOS.

“There’s been multiple guys and just multiple everyday people that have written to me and I’ve reached out to,” Young said. “College kids, high school kids. Dr. Thompson has used me as a resource for several people, and I’m happy to do so.”

Richard, 34, is a strong candidate for what would be his first opening-day start. The Padres awarded him a two-year extension last season, recognizing the value of his leadership and newfound durability.

“I wouldn’t have thrown again, I don’t think, had it not been for the thoracic outlet,” Richard said.

“I probably had thoracic outlet because of CY,” he added, referring to Young. “I leaned on him heavily through the process when I was getting diagnosed and had shoulder issues but didn’t know what they were. And then Tyson went through the same process talking to me. It’s kind of gone down a chain.”

Last February, Thompson published a study of TOS in active and retired major league pitchers. At the time, 13 were known to have undergone corrective surgery. Ten returned to play in the majors. Overall, there was little difference in pre- and post-operation statistics. A few more pitchers, Capps included, have since gone for the procedure.

“Probably the biggest thing I learned from a medical standpoint was nobody has all the answers,” Young said. “And to be your own biggest advocate, because nobody cares about it as much as you do. I’ve had doctors who thought that this is taboo, but I kept pursuing it and eventually it turns out I was right. Had I just stuck to those expert opinions, I’d be done.”

Hedges and Villanueva homer again in Padres win

John Horvath, FSSD, 3/2/18

Spring Training has been kind to Christian Villanueva and Austin Hedges.

Villanueva and Hedges hit their third and fourth home runs of the spring respectively, leading a 20-hit Padres attack as they defeated the Royals 13-5 on Friday afternoon at Peoria Stadium.

Seeking a roster spot in a crowded infield, Villanueva is currently hitting 9-16 (.563) with three home runs and 10 RBI in spring training action. Meanwhile, after tweaking his swing in the offseason, Austin Hedges is hitting 5-8 (.625) with four home runs. He has homered in each game he has played this spring.

Six different Padres recorded multi-hit games. Along with Villanueva and Hedges, CF Manuel Margot (2-4), RF Wil Myers (2-4), LF Jose Pirela (2-2), and 2B Luis Urias (2-3) all recorded two hits apiece. It was the fourth time in five games that the Padres ran across double-digit runs.

RHP Bryan Mitchell started for the Padres, throwing two scoreless innings and striking out one. He was hit pretty hard in the first inning, giving up two hard hit fly balls that were caught on the warning track by Manuel Margot. In the second inning, though, Mitchell was much sharper.

LHP Danny Duffy started his first game of the spring for the Royals, throwing two innings. He gave up two runs on one hit and also walked two batters.

RF Jorge Bonifacio and C Salvador Perez homered for Kansas City, who suffered their first loss of the spring.