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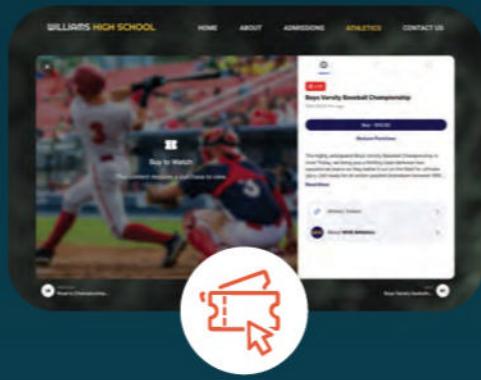
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# AUGUST

## Leading Off

AUGUST 2023  
VOLUME 43  
ISSUE 8

47



AP PHOTO/MORRY GASH

### DE LA CRUZ CONTROL

REDS ROOKIE SENSATION **ELLY DE LA CRUZ** RANKED NO. 1 ON OUR JUNE UPDATE OF THE TOP 100 PROSPECTS. HE GRADUATED TO THE BIG LEAGUES WITH HONORS IN JULY WHILE SHOWCASING HIS INCREDIBLE POWER, SPEED AND ARM STRENGTH. ON JUNE 23, DE LA CRUZ BECAME THE YOUNGEST PLAYER TO HIT FOR THE CYCLE IN MORE THAN 50 YEARS, AND THEN ON JULY 8 HE STOLE SECOND, THIRD AND HOME IN THE SPAN OF TWO PITCHES. HE IS PICTURED HERE SLIDING SAFELY INTO HOME.

## TOP 100 SUMMER UPDATE

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COVER PHOTO BY MIKE JANES/FOUR SEAM IMAGES

# AUGUST Leading Off

AUGUST 2023  
VOLUME 43  
ISSUE 8



Every month at BaseballAmerica.com, subscribers get exclusive access to BA writers to ask any question they want. Below are BA Mailbag excerpts from July.

**It appears that Drew Jones is out again for an extended period. Are we getting close to a lost season yet?**

Miggy from Chicago

It's trending that way for the 19-year-old D-backs outfielder, unfortunately. Let's see how he recovers and if he can get back in time to play a month-plus of games uninterrupted.

—Kyle Glaser

**Mick Abel has had a very uneven season but still maintains top 50 spot on the Top 100 Prospects. Is this just growing pains or should we start to wonder if he's just not going to have the command needed to reach his ceiling?**

Jack from Pennsylvania

Both things can be true. Phillies righthander Mick Abel is still just 21 at Double-A and comes from the Pacific Northwest, where you need to be a little more patient with guys' development. He's young and talented and far from a finished product. At the same time, I think it's fair to say his control will hold him back from being a front-of-the-rotation starter, which was seen as a possibility when he was drafted 15th overall in 2020.

—Kyle Glaser

**Ivan Melendez was on fire at High-A before his bump to Double-A. What are your thoughts on his progress, his path to the majors and his potential?**

Ziggy from Tahoe

D-backs prospect Ivan Melendez battled some mechanical issues early—his hands were too steep in his load and he was getting under a lot of balls—but he's worked through it and really clicked. He's a legit power hitter who has a chance to be an everyday first baseman. He's actually been better than expected defensively at third base this year.

—Kyle Glaser

**The BA Mailbag is a subscriber exclusive. Send your question at [BaseballAmerica.com](http://BaseballAmerica.com)**



**ON DECK FOR SEPTEMBER:** We divulge the identity of the MLB and minor league players with the best scouting tools this season. **ALSO:** We highlight the top prospects in college summer ball and pro complex leagues.



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# First Pitch

MAKING SENSE OF SOMETIMES DENSE ANALYTICS IN BASEBALL



The Pirates drafted Paul Skenes (right) with the No. 1 overall pick.

## Ship Shape

No. 1 overall pick Paul Skenes' overall arsenal should outweigh questions about fastball shape

by GEOFF PONTES

In the lead-up to the 2023 draft, we heard a lot of talk about the shape of Paul Skenes' fastball. Specifically, was the No. 1 overall pick's heater—which sits in the upper 90s and regularly reaches triple-digits—a “dead-zone” fastball?

A dead-zone fastball is one that has equal amounts of induced vertical and horizontal break. Typically, pitches with that movement profile do not perform as well as other fastballs with more defined four-seam or sinker shapes.

The criticism is valid, but it shouldn't be seen as an absolute indictment of the pitch as a whole. After all, there are plenty of other factors that make a fastball valuable. Skenes' velocity is

elite, and he delivers his pitches out of a unique release point.

Blue Jays Double-A lefthander Ricky Tiedemann has a dead-zone fastball, and he's been incredibly successful as a

pro. Both Skenes and Tiedemann have second and third pitches that border on elite.

Skenes' slider has an outlier combination of velocity and movement and grades out as a plus-plus pitch on Stuff+ models. That includes BA's internal model, which gives the pitch a 137. Our model also grades the former Louisiana State ace's fastball as a 127, which reinforces the idea that other variables—velocity, release point, command—have thus far mitigated any deficiencies in shape.

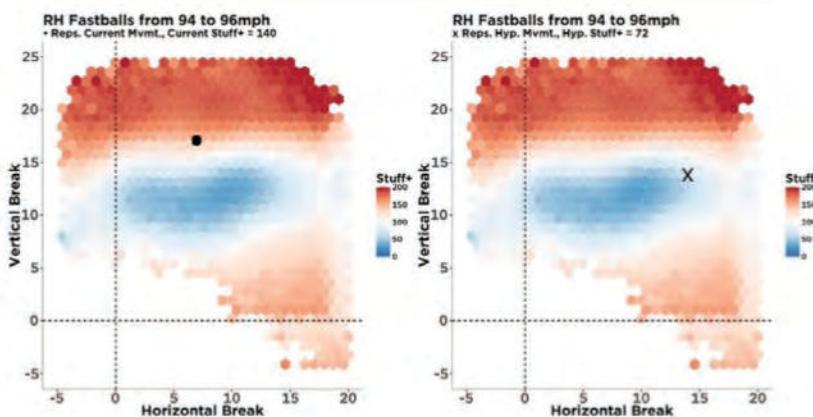
Skenes' changeup and curveball both grade out highly on the Stuff+ model as well, which speaks to the quality of his overall arsenal.

While there are nits to pick with any pitching prospect, Skenes has been one of the most dominant college pitchers in history—in one of the most hitter-friendly college landscapes in recent memory. The Southeastern Conference this year compiled a .493 slugging percentage and .889 OPS that were both the highest in Division I.

Skenes' development under former LSU pitching coach Wes Johnson is a testament both to his work ethic and coachability.

The proof will be in the pudding in pro ball, but Skenes has a variety of weapons that should make the Pirates' choice at No. 1 overall an excellent one. ■

THESE PLOTS CONTRAST A TYPICAL HIGH-VERTICAL-BREAK FASTBALL ON THE LEFT WITH A “DEAD ZONE” FASTBALL ON THE RIGHT  
GRAPHIC COURTESY OF DRIVELINE BASEBALL



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# From Phenom To The Farm

FORMER BALLPLAYERS REFLECT ON PRO SUCCESS AND FAILURE

## LIFE IN THE FAST LANE

Jacob Lindgren rediscovered his joy for the game after his MLB days ended

by KYLE BANDUJO

Jacob Lindgren was ready to set the world on fire at Mississippi State.

The lefthander from Bay St. Louis, Miss., turned down the Cubs after they drafted him in the 12th round in 2011 and met his asking price. That's how intent Lindgren was to go to Starkville. He figured he would slot into the Bulldogs' rotation and pick up where he left off in high school.

Then he started fall ball.

"I remember I had a rude awakening in my first fall," Lindgren said. "Coming out of being a draft pick out of high school, (my) ego was kinda big. I got put into place real quick."

It was obvious that Lindgren had an electric arm, but finding the right role took some fine-tuning. He spent most of his 2012 freshman season in the bullpen, getting a couple starts toward the end of the

year. Lindgren opened his sophomore year as the Bulldogs' Friday night starter, but injuries led to an up-and-down year.

Entering his junior year, Lindgren had a conversation with then-Mississippi State pitching coach Butch Thompson, who left the choice up to Lindgren:

Did he want to be a Friday starter, or a lock-down reliever?

Lindgren knew many pro teams would eye him as a reliever, so he slid back into the bullpen, determined to make the best of his final year in Starkville.

"I knew my stuff was nasty. I just had to throw strikes," Lindgren said. "When I did that, the results were good."

"Results were good" is an understatement. Lindgren turned in the best relief season in Division I and was named a BA first-team All-American. He recorded an 0.81 ERA with an astounding 100 strikeouts in 55.1 innings.

The Yankees drafted Lindgren in the second round in 2014. He pitched at four levels that summer, reaching Double-A. That fall at instructional league, the Yankees once again gave him the choice: starter or reliever?

For Lindgren, the choice was easy.

"I just want to get to the big leagues as fast as possible," Lindgren said.

It was the right decision. Lindgren made his MLB debut on May 25, 2015, and made seven appearances before arm injuries derailed his rise.



JIM MIESAIC GETTY IMAGES

Multiple elbow surgeries, including Tommy John surgery, ended his run with New York, and while in spring training with the Braves in 2018, Lindgren found out—just 19 months after his first TJ—that another would be required.

He eventually made it back, throwing his first pitches in nearly three years for the White Sox organization in 2019. The lost 2020 season cost him possibly his best chance to break into a depleted White Sox bullpen.

He latched on with Kansas City of the independent American Association in 2021.

"Going from getting released to winning a championship, it really made me appreciate baseball again," Lindgren said, "and get back to actually enjoying the game."

Lindgren retired following the 2022 season after once again finding happiness running out of a bullpen and missing bats. ■

**Yankees 2014 second-rounder**  
Jacob Lindgren rode a fast track from the Mississippi State bullpen to the Bronx before a series of arm injuries derailed his MLB career. He rediscovered his love for the game in independent ball.



### LISTEN NOW!

Scan the QR code to listen to Jacob Lindgren on the "From Phenom To The Farm" podcast

### Trap Toon by PAUL TRAP



paultrap@BaseballAmerica.com

# Numbers Game

AN ANALYTICALLY INCLINED LOOK AT THE GAME

## FIRST-RATE FIRST HALVES

Minor League Players of the Year  
for all 30 organizations at midseason

by MATT EDDY

The full-season minor leagues pause for four days at the MLB all-star break, providing a vantage point to assess Minor League Players of the Year for all 30 organizations.

The criteria we use is simply best performance by a prospect. This is *not* a listing of best overall prospects in each organization. All statistics cited are through July 9.

**A** ARIZONA DIAMONDBACKS  
**Ryan Bliss, 2B**  
Double-A Amarillo

In a major bounceback season, the 2021 second-round pick out of Auburn hit .358/.414/.594 with 12 homers and 30 steals in 68 games. The 23-year-old Bliss led the minor leagues with 105 hits and placed fourth in the batting race.

**A** ATLANTA BRAVES  
**Ignacio Alvarez, SS**  
High-A Rome

The Braves are rich in young pitching prospects with upside but are looking for a young hitter to emerge. Alvarez may be that hitter. The 20-year-old hit .294/.412/.393 with four homers and 14 steals in 75 games.

**O** BALTIMORE ORIOLES  
**Jackson Holliday, SS**  
High-A Aberdeen

The Orioles' system had no shortage of offensive standouts—Colton Cowser, Heston Kjerstad, Coby Mayo and the young Samuel Basallo—but it's the 19-year-old Holliday who stood out most by hitting .331/.466/.523 with seven homers and 20 steals in 71 games.

**B** BOSTON RED SOX  
**Roman Anthony, OF**  
High-A Greenville

Boston drafted Anthony in the second round last year out of Florida prep power Stoneman Douglas. His strong batted-ball data began yielding results after a promotion to High-A. The 19-year-old hit .264/.405/.458 with eight homers, 52 walks and 54 strikeouts in 58 games.

**C** CHICAGO CUBS  
**Owen Caissie, OF**  
Double-A Tennessee

Free from the Cubs' pitcher-friendly Class A affiliates, the 21-year-old Caissie showed his huge lefthanded power as one of the youngest regulars in the Southern League. He hit .275/.377/.519 with 15 homers in 71 games.

**S** CHICAGO WHITE SOX  
**Terrell Tatum, OF**  
Double-A Birmingham

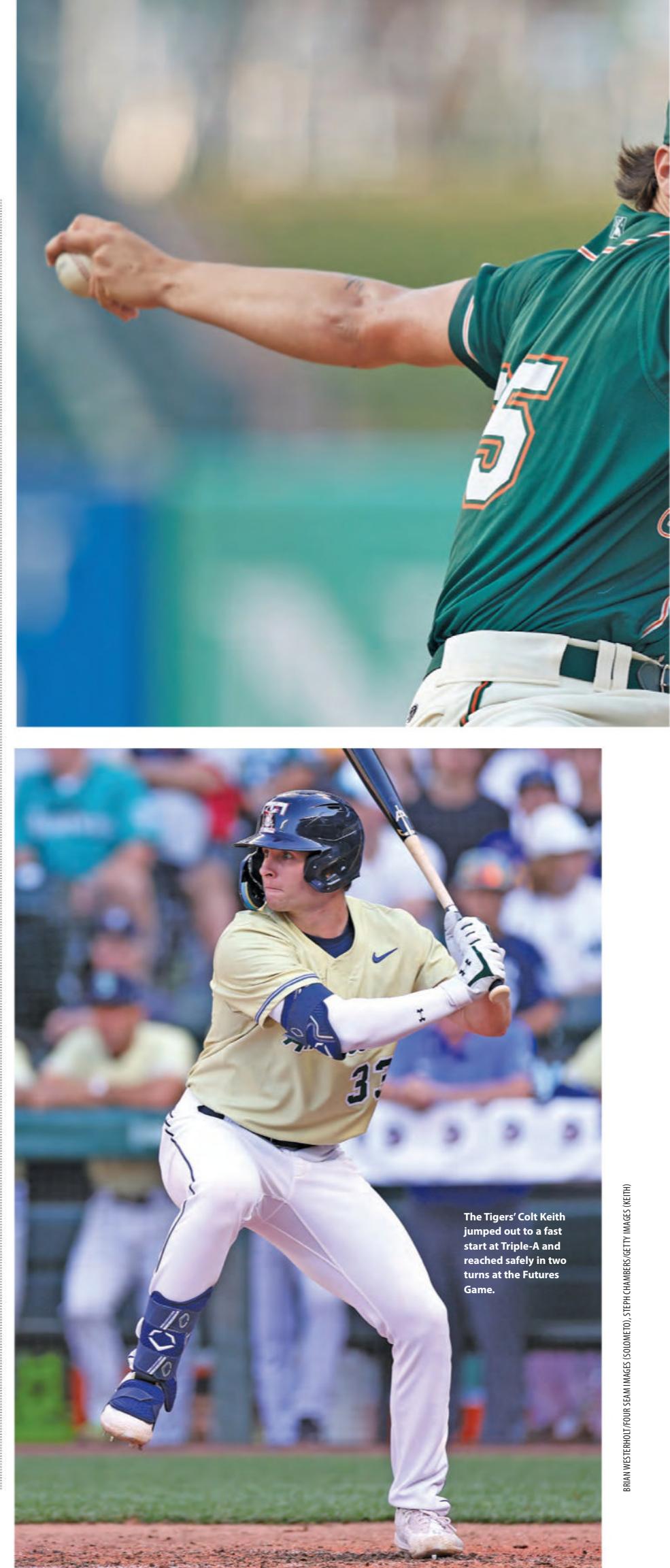
Injury-delayed first halves by Colson Montgomery and Noah Schultz created space for the 24-year-old Tatum, and he ran with it. The 16th-round pick in 2021 hit .269/.430/.426 with six homers and 36 steals in 71 games.

**C** CINCINNATI REDS  
**Christian Encarnacion-Strand, 1B**  
Triple-A Louisville

The Reds graduated young big leaguers Elly De La Cruz, Matt McLain and Andrew Abbott this season, leaving 23-year-old Encarnacion-Strand as the pick. He hit .321/.392/.620 with 20 homers in 65 games and ranked top 10 in the minors in home runs, slugging and total bases.

**G** CLEVELAND GUARDIANS  
**Gavin Williams, RHP**  
Triple-A Columbus

Williams made four starts for Cleveland in the first half, but the 2021 first-rounder from East Carolina spent most of his season carving Double-A and Triple-A hitters. The 24-year-old struck out 81 and walked 24 in 60.1 innings to go with a 2.39 ERA and 0.99 WHIP in 12 starts.



The Tigers' Colt Keith jumped out to a fast start at Triple-A and reached safely in two turns at the Futures Game.



High-A hitters put up little resistance to Pirates lefthander Anthony Solometo, who reached Double-A at age 20.

**COLORADO ROCKIES**  
**Yanquiel Fernandez, OF**  
Double-A Hartford

Power is Fernandez's carrying tool. The lefthanded hitter blasted 22 homers in the first half to rank one shy of the minor league lead. The 20-year-old Cuban corner outfielder hit .304/.355/.588 with 77 RBIs in 74 games.

**DETROIT TIGERS**  
**Colt Keith, 3B/2B**  
Triple-A Toledo

Injuries had conspired to limit Keith in his first two pro seasons, but a healthy first half resulted in a career-high total of 67 games. The 22-year-old hit .335/.400/.593 with 16 homers as he climbed to Triple-A as one of the youngest players in the International League.

**HOUSTON ASTROS**  
**Zach Dezenzo, 3B/2B**  
Double-A Corpus Christi

Dezenzo gets the nod here for his infield versatility and for reaching Double-A in his first full pro season. The 23-year-old hit .350/.430/.543 with six homers and 13 steals in 54 games.

**KANSAS CITY ROYALS**  
**Cayden Wallace, 3B**  
High-A Quad Cities

The Royals have the youngest lineup in MLB and might get even younger next season. The 22-year-old Wallace hit .263/.343/.452 with nine homers and 13 steals in 77 games, ranking among the Midwest League leaders in hits.

**LOS ANGELES ANGELS**  
**Caden Dana, RHP**  
High-A Tri-City

Dana advanced quickly to High-A this season as one of just four teenage starting pitchers at the level. In that context, the 19-year-old's 3.61 ERA with 80 strikeouts, 28 walks and a 1.19 WHIP in 62.1 innings shines.

**LOS ANGELES DODGERS**  
**Emmet Sheehan, RHP**  
Double-A Tulsa

Called up to the majors on June 16, Sheehan spent the first two and a half months dominating Double-A hitters. His 41.7% strikeout rate ranked second in the minors. The 23-year-old Sheehan logged a 1.86 ERA with 88 strikeouts and 23 walks in 53.1 innings.

**MIAMI MARLINS**  
**Patrick Monteverde, LHP**  
Double-A Pensacola

A lot went right for 25-year-old Monteverde in the first half. He went 8-1 with a 1.93 ERA in 13 starts for Pensacola while striking out 84 and walking 26 in 74.2 innings.

**MILWAUKEE BREWERS**  
**Tyler Black, 3B**  
Double-A Biloxi

Injuries cut into Black's production in 2022, but he logged a career-high 66 games in the first half as he shined in the Southern League. The 23-year-old Black hit .273/.424/.502 with 11 homers, 41 steals, 51 walks and 63 strikeouts.

**MINNESOTA TWINS**  
**Cory Lewis, RHP**  
High-A Cedar Rapids

The Twins drafted Lewis in the ninth round in 2022 out of UC Santa Barbara. The 22-year-old recorded a 2.29 ERA through 63 innings to go with 81 strikeouts and 21 walks. Lewis' power knuckleball sets him apart.

**NEW YORK METS**  
**Mark Vientos, 3B/1B**  
Triple-A Syracuse

The Mets had seen encouraging growth from pitching prospects such as Mike Vasil, Christian Scott and Tyler Stuart, but it is the 23-year-old Vientos who gets the nod. He hit .311/.391/.636 with 16 homers in 55 games.

**NEW YORK YANKEES**  
**Chase Hampton, RHP**  
Double-A Somerset

The Yankees' fastest-rising pitching prospect, Hampton is a Texas Tech product who went from the sixth round in 2022 to Double-A in less than a year. He recorded a 3.12 ERA through 13 starts with 103 strikeouts and 22 walks in 69.1 innings.

**OAKLAND ATHLETICS**  
**Darell Hernaiz, SS**  
Double-A Midland

The key to the Athletics' return from the Orioles for Cole Irvin, Hernaiz hit the ground running in his new organization. The 22-year-old El Paso native hit .338/.393/.486 with five homers and just 48 strikeouts in 71 games for Midland.

**PHILADELPHIA PHILLIES**  
**Johan Rojas, OF**  
Double-A Reading

Rojas has implemented a minor swing change and has seen his power production improve. The 23-year-old hit .306/.361/.484 with nine homers and 30 steals through 76 games, while maintaining his high-end speed and center field defense.

**PITTSBURGH PIRATES**  
**Anthony Solometo, LHP**  
Double-A Altoona

Solometo climbed to Double-A as a 20-year-old. In 16 total starts he rode his slinging arm action and quality stuff to 89 strikeouts and 29 walks in 77.2 innings to go with a 2.32 ERA that ranked top 10 in the minors.

**ST. LOUIS CARDINALS**  
**Victor Scott II, OF**  
Double-A Springfield

A 2022 fifth-rounder out of West Virginia, Scott stole 52 bases in 75 games in the first half to rank second in the minors. The 22-year-old hit .282/.361/.397 with three homers.

**SAN DIEGO PADRES**  
**Robby Snelling, LHP**  
High-A Fort Wayne

Snelling zoomed to High-A in July as a 19-year-old, less than a year after the Padres drafted him out of high school. Through 13 starts he struck out 68 and walked 17 in 62.1 innings to go with a 1.88 ERA.

**SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS**  
**Luis Matos, OF**  
Triple-A Sacramento

Matos put a forgettable 2022 behind him with a stellar showing at Double-A and Triple-A that earned the 21-year-old a mid-June callup. While in the minors he hit .350/.415/.561 with 10 homers, 15 steals and 24 walks in 55 games.

**SEATTLE MARINERS**  
**Gabriel Gonzalez, OF**  
Low-A Modesto

Bryan Woo made quick work of Double-A but didn't stay in the minors long, leaving the 19-year-old Gonzalez as the best fit. In 73 games for Low-A Modesto he hit .348/.403/.530 with nine homers and just 46 strikeouts. He ranked third in the minors with 103 hits.

**TAMPA BAY RAYS**  
**Junior Caminero, 3B/SS**  
Double-A Montgomery

Caminero made quick work of High-A in his first Opening Day assignment in full-season ball. The 20-year-old kept hitting at Double-A and batted .333/.392/.604 with 16 homers in 66 games.

**TEXAS RANGERS**  
**Abimelec Ortiz, 1B**  
High-A Hickory

Ortiz turned in two nondescript seasons in the Rangers system before busting out this year. The 21-year-old hit .330/.403/.679 batting with 19 homers in 62 games at two Class A levels.

**TORONTO BLUE JAYS**  
**Orelvis Martinez, SS/3B**  
Double-A New Hampshire

Martinez opened the season in a 7-for-79 funk—but then a switch flipped. In his final 47 games of the first half, the 21-year-old hit .301/.425/.609 with 13 homers, 33 walks and 35 strikeouts.

**WASHINGTON NATIONALS**  
**James Wood, OF**  
Double-A Harrisburg

Wood may one day be regarded in Washington as shorthand for the Juan Soto trade with the Padres. The 20-year-old climbed to Double-A at the end of May and hit .262/.360/.520 with 14 homers and 13 steals in 75 games. ■



**B**aseball America and Louisville Slugger launched the Prospect Pad during All-Star Weekend in 2016 as a way to connect with the top prospects in baseball on the eve of the Futures Game.

During that initial weekend, BA talked to up-and-comers such as Eloy Jimenez, Alex Bregman and Joe Musgrove. Then, in 2017 we touched base with Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette and Kyle Tucker at the Prospect Pad. In 2018, it was Fernando Tatis Jr., Pete Alonso, Hunter Greene, Dylan Cease ...

And the list goes on. A veritable who's-who of young baseball talent has passed through the Prospect Pad in the past seven years.

And to celebrate the launch of our new website in 2023, we wanted to go even bigger with the event.

So we decided to go LIVE. For six hours.

Hosted by two-time sports Emmy winner Jenn Brown and BA editor-in-chief J.J. Cooper, nearly 40 of the stars in this year's Futures Game joined us live from Seattle. And so too did surprise guests, including MLB Network's Harold Reynolds and representatives from the local Tacoma Rainiers and Everett AquaSox.

This year's interviews—and all of the classic ones going back to 2016—are available on demand right now at the all-new [BaseballAmerica.com](https://www.BaseballAmerica.com)... and we hope you join us online next July for Prospect Pad Live from Arlington, Texas. ■



Pete Crow-Armstrong of the Cubs with Prospect Pad Live co-hosts J.J. Cooper and Jenn Brown.



Orioles top prospect Jackson Holliday



Amber Sabathia



MLB Network's Harold Reynolds



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VICTOR SCOTT II  
CARDINALS

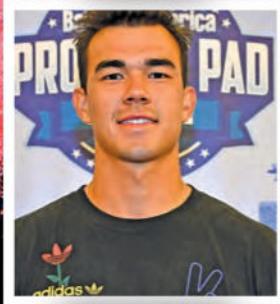


MARCELO MAYER  
RED SOX

JUSTIN CRAWFORD  
PHILLIES



JONATHAN CANNON  
WHITE SOX



JOEY CANTILLO  
GUARDIANS



JACKSON CHOURIO  
BREWERS



JONATAN CLASE  
MARINERS



PETE CROW-ARMSTRONG  
CUBS



LUIS GUERRERO  
RED SOX



TINK HENCE  
CARDINALS



JACKSON HOLLIDAY  
ORIOLES



BRADY HOUSE  
NATIONALS



SPENCER JONES  
YANKEES



NOELVI MARTE  
REDS



JP MASSEY  
PIRATES



JACKSON MERRILL  
PADRES



JACOB MISIOROWSKI  
BREWERS



PATRICK MONTEVERDE  
MARLINS



JEFFERSON QUERO  
BREWERS



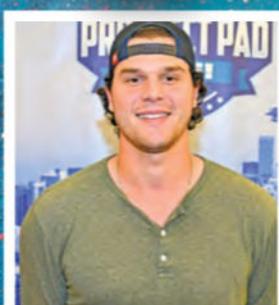
DALTON RUSHING  
DODGERS



SPENCER SCHWELLENBACH  
BRAVES



TYLER SODERSTROM  
ATHLETICS



MIKE VASIL  
METS

# HEARD AT THE 2023 PROSPECT PAD

## Jackson Chourio

*On what he needs to do to be big league ready*

"Control the strike zone, being able to control that as a hitter and that's about it."

## Jordan Lawlar

*On what worked in the first half and what he needs to improve in the second.*

"The first couple months, just kind of get my feet wet, learn—you know, being tested, going through some setbacks and struggles, which every player has to go through. It's part of the game. I've learned a lot from that. And then these last two months it's been really good. So I want to keep that going. I feel good in the box, feel good in the field, so just want to keep doing what I'm doing and keep playing good overall baseball."

## Pete Crow-Armstrong

*On whether he would rather hit or rob a home run at the Futures Game.*

"Robbing for sure. I get more excitement out of that. I worry too much about hitting homers during the regular season, during the weekly grind. So defense, it's always been a little easier for me than the offensive side of things, and I think that robbing would be pretty special here."

## Jackson Merrill

*On the benefits of playing in the Arizona Fall League last year as a 19-year-old.*

"After Fall League, when I came back to spring training this year, it was definitely a little easier. The pitching was a lot easier to pick up because when I first got to Fall League it was difficult, like, it was kind of an adjustment period."

## Lawrence Butler

*On how pickoff limits and the pitch clock advantage basestealers.*

"I would say we have the advantage, just because the pitcher only has a certain amount of times he can throw over. So he's more cautious about when he's going to throw over. He wants to make sure that when he does throw over, it's a chance he went and got a base-runner out. So you know, for us, it's just like, they don't really like to throw over a lot anyway, so we can really just go."

## Jackson Holliday

*On watching Elly De La Cruz go from the Futures Game last year to MLB this year.*

"Yeah, what he's doing in the big leagues is unbelievable, and he's so much fun to watch. Like when I get home, I turn on the Reds game, so it's been fun to see what he's doing and see how close we really are. It's been cool, but I try to just focus in on the day-in, day-out stuff and everything will take care of itself."

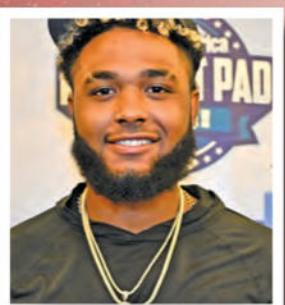
—Compiled by Glen Mitchell



CLAYTON BEETER  
YANKEES



LAWRENCE BUTLER  
ATHLETICS



JUNIOR CAMINERO  
RAYS



YANQUIEL FERNANDEZ  
ROCKIES



HARRY FORD  
MARINERS



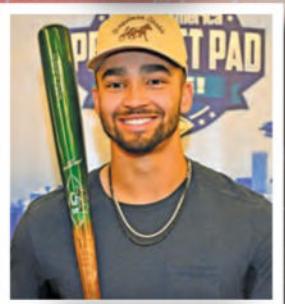
DREW GILBERT  
ASTROS



HESTON KJERSTAD  
ORIOLES



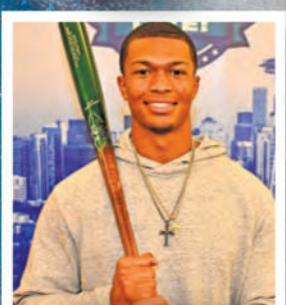
WILL KLEIN  
ROYALS



JORDAN LAWLAR  
D-BACKS



BJ MURRAY JR.  
CUBS



KYREN PARIS  
ANGELS



EDGAR QUERO  
ANGELS



CARSON WHISENHUNT  
GIANTS



JAMES WOOD  
NATIONALS



YOSVER ZULUETA  
BLUE JAYS

# SEASON OF CHANGE

The No. 1 pick in 2022 is now the No. 1 prospect, while a bountiful 2023 draft helps seed the prospect pool with needed reinforcements

by MATT EDDY

# SUMMER TOP 100



NICK JAMES/FOR SEAMAGAZINE



Jackson Holliday advanced to Double-A Bowie as a 19-year-old.

The names at the top of the Top 100 Prospects change, but one theme remains constant.

Once again, an Orioles prospect ranks No. 1.

This time it is 19-year-old shortstop Jackson Holliday, the No. 1 pick in the 2022 draft who zoomed to Double-A in mid July.

Holliday follows in the footsteps of catcher Adley Rutschman and third baseman Gunnar Henderson, who ranked as the No. 1 prospects in baseball heading into the 2022 and 2023 seasons. Holliday is the favorite to complete the Baltimore hat trick in 2024.

If he ranks No. 1 next spring, Holliday would be the third consecutive Orioles prospect to rank No. 1 on the canonical preseason Top 100 Prospects. That would be a first.

Holliday spent three-plus months at Low-A Delmarva and High-A Aberdeen this season prior to jumping to the Eastern League, where he was the only teenager. In his time at Class A, he hit .331/.466/.523 with seven home runs and 20 stolen bases in 71 games, while showing a mature batting approach with 64 walks and 67 strikeouts.

Holliday, Henderson and Rutschman are central to the Orioles' future success, but they are far from the only members of the club's young core. Righthander Grayson Rodriguez, outfielder Colton Cowser, second baseman Jordan Westburg and shortstop Joey Ortiz were all preseason Top 100 Prospects who have contributed in Baltimore this season.

The Orioles illustrate that when building a successful organization, there is definitely safety in numbers. ■



Adley Rutschman and Gunnar Henderson went from top prospects to core players for the high-flying Orioles.

## ORIOLES BUILD A FLOCK OF TALENT

The Orioles lost 110 games in 2021.

This season they're fighting for the top seed in the American League playoffs.

The Orioles flew from Point A to Point B on the strength of an above-average offense and the best bullpen in the game.

How did they get here? Baltimore owes its success to astute drafting, player development and pro acquisitions.

Central to the lineup's success were catcher Adley Rutschman and third baseman Gunnar Henderson, the top prospects in 2022 and 2023 who are now the Orioles' most valuable position players. Shortstop Jackson Holliday, the top prospect in baseball, aims to join the core in 2024.

Homegrown outfielders Cedric Mullins and Austin Hays play key roles on offense, as does Rule 5 pick Anthony Santander.

All of the Orioles' top pitchers originally signed with other organizations, but Baltimore identified them and developed them into MLB mainstays.

Closer Felix Bautista was unceremoniously released by the Marlins when he was in the Dominican Summer League. Today he is the top closer in baseball.

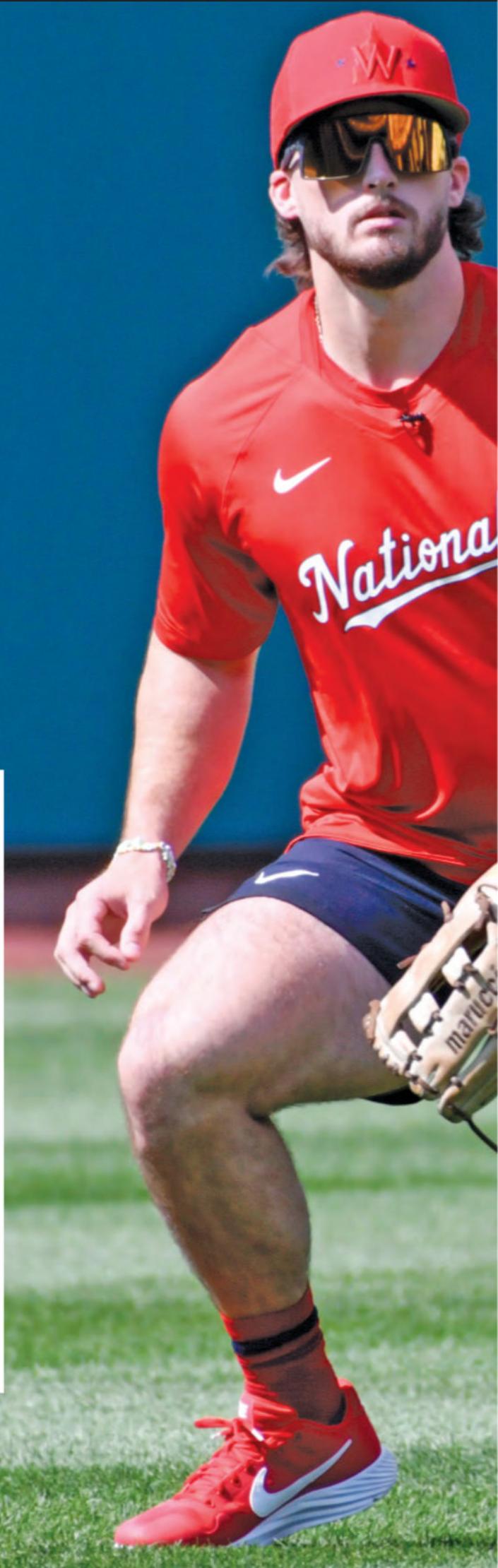
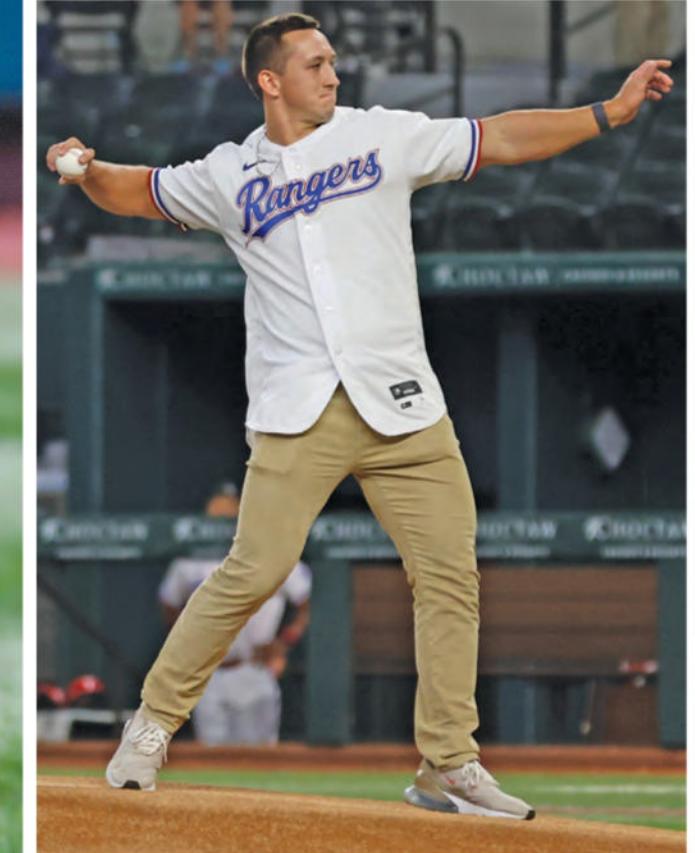
Baltimore added setup man Yennier Cano last summer when it traded Jorge Lopez to the Twins. Starters Kyle Bradish (Dylan Bundy trade) and Alex Wells (Rule 5 pick) joined in low-profile moves, proving that the organization has all its bases covered. ■



SUMMER  
TOP  
100



TOP DRAFT PICKS  
BECOME  
TOP PROSPECTS:  
(clockwise)  
Paul Skenes,  
Wyatt Langford  
and Walker Jenkins.





Dylan Crews (left) and Max Clark were the second and third overall picks in the draft.



Scan the QR code to watch our draft-night interview with Dylan Crews



## DRAFT PICKS INFUSE NEEDED TALENT

Our annual summer update of the Top 100 Prospects undergoes significant upheaval as top prospects graduate and newcomers, including players from the most recent draft, take their places.

Gone from the preseason top 10 are impact rookies **Gunnar Henderson** (No. 1), D-backs outfielder **Corbin Carroll** (No. 2), Cardinals outfielder **Jordan Walker** (No. 4), Marlins righthander **Eury Perez** (No. 7), Reds shortstop **Elly De La Cruz** (No. 8) and Mets catcher **Francisco Alvarez** (No. 9).

The preseason top 10 heading into 2022 was similarly stout, highlighted by Orioles catcher **Adley Rutschman** at No. 1, Mariners outfielder **Julio Rodriguez** at No. 2, Royals shortstop **Bobby Witt Jr.** at No. 3 and Tigers outfielder **Riley Greene** at No. 4.

These epic MLB rookie classes have strained the talent level in the minor leagues. Scouts have commented that the overall prospect talent level this season feels lower than usual.

While top prospects such as Orioles shortstop **Jackson Holliday**, Brewers outfielder **Jackson Chourio**, Nationals outfielder **James Wood** and Red Sox shortstop **Marcelo Mayer** all hold onto top spots, the talent wave behind them is less defined and appears less robust.

Rays third baseman **Junior Caminero** may be the lone exception. He shot all the way to No. 6 after entering the season unranked.

Add it all up, and the infusion of 2023 draft picks could not have come at a better time.

A trio of first-rounders enters the Top 100 Prospects summer update ranked in the top 10 overall: Nationals outfielder **Dylan Crews** at No. 3, Pirates righthander **Paul Skenes** at No. 5 and Rangers outfielder **Wyatt Langford** at No. 8.

While we won't know exactly where Crews, Skenes and Langford will rank on the Top 100 next spring, it's safe to assume they will hold onto top 10 spots. It is more rare than it sounds to see three players go from the first round of the draft to the top 10 of the Top 100 the following year.

It has happened just twice before in 34 cycles of ranking the Top 100 Prospects.

## 1996 FIRST ROUND → 1997 TOP 100

Top 100 Ranking	Source	Pick No.	WAR
4. Matt White, RHP, Giants	HS	7	N/A
5. Travis Lee, 1B, Twins	4YR	2	7
8. Kris Benson, RHP, Pirates	4YR	1	13

*Benson was the College Player of the Year and No. 1 overall pick, but the 1996 draft is remembered best for its four "loophole" free agents. Agent Scott Boras exploited a contract tendering technicality to earn free agency for four of his first-round clients, including Lee and White, who earned record bonuses in excess of \$10 million from the expansion D-backs and Rays, respectively.*

*High school pitchers John Patterson and Bobby Seay were*

*the other two loophole free agents who could negotiate with all 30 clubs. They signed for the third- and fourth-highest bonuses in the 1996 first round, also with the D-backs and Rays. None of the four loophole free agents made a significant MLB impact. White failed to reach the majors at all.*

*In retrospect, third baseman Eric Chavez, righthander R.A. Dickey and outfielder Mark Kotsay were the most productive big leaguers from this 1996 first round.*

## 2001 FIRST ROUND → 2002 TOP 100

Top 100 Ranking	Source	Pick No.	WAR
2. Mark Prior, RHP, Cubs	4YR	2	17
7. Joe Mauer, C, Twins	HS	1	55
10. Mark Teixeira, 3B, Rangers	4YR	5	51

*The 2001 draft was loaded with talent. A total of 14 first-rounders that year ranked among the Top 100 Prospects in 2002, highlighted by first baseman Casey Kotchman and righthander Gavin Floyd in addition to stars Mauer, Teixeira and Prior.*

## 2023 FIRST ROUND → 2024 TOP 100

Top 100 Ranking	Source	Pick No.	WAR
? Dylan Crews, OF, Nationals	4YR	2	TBD
? Paul Skenes, RHP, Pirates	4YR	1	TBD
? Wyatt Langford, OF, Rangers	4YR	4	TBD

*LSU teammates Crews and Skenes made history as the first teammates ever selected with the top two picks in a draft. They also ranked as the top two prospects for the draft; Langford ranked third. All three received pre-draft BA Grades of at least 60, making them logical fits among the top pro prospects.*

The 2023 draft class is notable for Crews, Skenes and Langford, its trio of Southeastern Conference standouts, but it also supplied two high school outfielders with high ceilings to the pro prospect talent pool.

The Tigers' **Max Clark** and the Twins' **Walker Jenkins** both move into spots inside the top 20 on the summer update of the Top 100 Prospects.

If they hold those spots heading into 2024, it would mark the first time in which five first-rounders ranked inside the top 20 in their first year of eligibility for a preseason Top 100 Prospects list.

The best previous showing was by 2011 first-round picks **Trevor Bauer** (No. 9 the following spring), **Dylan Bundy** (10), **Gerrit Cole** (12), **Anthony Rendon** (19) and **Danny Hultzen** (21).

The class of 2011 supplanted the first-round class of 1990, which featured **Todd Van Poppel** (No. 1 the following spring), **Rondell White** (13), **Tim Costo** (17), **Mike Mussina** (19) and **Kurt Miller** (24).

This year, conditions were ripe for top draft picks to dominate our Top 100 Prospects summer update. Not only was the draft class of 2023 strong by historical standards, but the overall talent level in the minor leagues was lower than usual.

Look no further than our updated Top 100 Prospects ranking for proof. ■



# SUMMER TOP 100

## HOW PLAYERS QUALIFY

All prospect-eligible players—no more than 130 at-bats or 50 innings in the big leagues—were considered for the Top 100. Prospects summer update, though prospects on MLB rosters as of July 14 were excluded.



### 1. JACKSON HOLLIDAY ORIOLES, SS

After tearing up the Class A levels, Holliday earned a mid-July promotion to Double-A Bowie. The No. 1 overall pick from 2022 is one of the purest hitters in the minors and shows strong on-base skills. He's primed to be another Orioles gem.

### 2. JACKSON CHOURIO BREWERS, OF

After a slow start in the Southern League, Chourio started to show flashes of his tremendous talent in the second half. At his best, the 19-year-old can hit for average and impact and play a tremendous center field with speed that also plays on the bases.

### 3. DYLAN CREWS NATIONALS, OF 2023 DRAFT PICK

The Nationals snagged the top position prospect in the 2023 draft from the No. 2 slot. Debating whether Crews or James Wood is the best outfield prospect in Washington's system should be a fun discussion for the next couple of years.

### 4. JAMES WOOD NATIONALS, OF

Wood was one of the gems acquired by the Nationals in last year's Juan Soto trade and so far has lived up to the billing. The massive outfielder has ascended from High-A to Double-A and shown his signature light-tower power at both stops.

### 5. PAUL SKENES PIRATES, RHP 2023 DRAFT PICK

The No. 1 pick in the 2023 draft is coming off of one of the best college seasons of the 21st century—and arguably the best by a pitcher. Now the question becomes how quickly can he help the Pirates' big league rotation.

### 6. JUNIOR CAMINERO RAYS, SS/3B

The Rays acquired Caminero from the Guardians in November 2021 in a reserve roster deadline deal for Tobias Myers. At the time he was 18 and had not appeared in a game in the domestic minor leagues.

Since then Caminero has blossomed into one of the top prospects in baseball, while Myers didn't even make it through the 2022 season with the Cleveland organization.

The Dominican shortstop flashed loud plate skills and power in the Dominican Summer League in 2021 while still with the Guardians and followed that up with a strong U.S. debut in 2022.

This season, Caminero broke out early with High-A Bowling Green, pacing the South Atlantic League by hitting .356/.409/.685 with 11 home runs in 36 games. That earned him a promotion to Double-A Montgomery in late May.

His success continued in the Southern League, where only Jackson Chourio was the only younger player. Caminero hit .288/.348/.439 through 37 games.

Caminero, a power-oriented righthanded hitter with at least average plate skills and the ability to stick on the infield, even if he moves to third base or possibly second.

—Geoff Pontes



RISING

This ranking was compiled by Ben Badler, Carlos Collazo, JJ Cooper, Matt Eddy, Kyle Glaser, Josh Norris and Geoff Pontes.

### 7. MARCELO MAYER RED SOX, SS

Mayer was one of the top prospects in the 2021 draft and has lived up to his billing so far as a professional. He's got a well-rounded skill set that helped him crush the competition at High-A and earn a promotion to Double-A as a 20-year-old.

### 8. WYATT LANGFORD RANGERS, OF 2023 DRAFT PICK

The Rangers were delighted to see Langford fall to them with the fourth pick in the 2023 draft. Adding his pop and athleticism will one day give Texas an outfielder to bolster a deep lineup that leads the major leagues in runs scored.

### 9. EVAN CARTER RANGERS, OF

Carter faces questions about remaining physical projection and impact, but he plays excellent defense in center field and controls the strike zone with aplomb for someone his age. At 20 years old, he still has plenty of time to fill out, too.

### 10. JORDAN LAWLER D-BACKS, SS

Lawler reached Double-A in 2022 and returned to the level this year, when he's had his ups and downs in the Texas League. Still, Lawler offers plenty of potential to provide impact on both sides of the ball.

### 11. GRAYSON RODRIGUEZ ORIOLES, RHP

Rodriguez sputtered to a 7.35 ERA in his first 10 big league starts and was sent back to Triple-A for more seasoning. Armed with a power pitcher's frame and stuff that is truly wicked at its best, the righthander still has time to reach his tremendous upside.

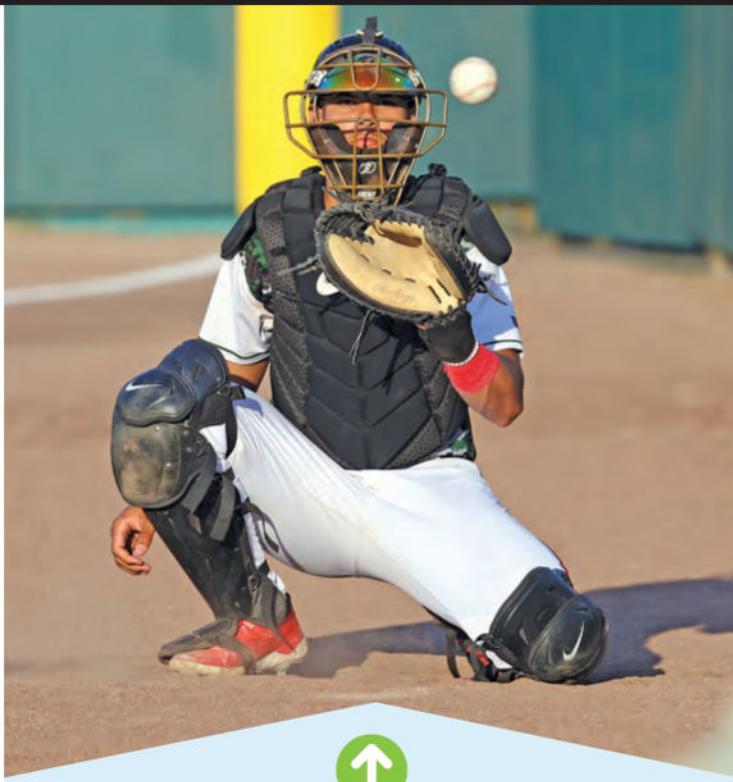
### 12. PETE CROW-ARMSTRONG CUBS, OF

No matter what he does with the bat, Crow-Armstrong has a claim as the best defensive center fielder in the minor leagues. He's no slouch at the plate, either, and has put up numbers that stand out considering his youth and defensive value.

### 13. JACKSON MERRILL PADRES, SS

Merrill is one of the sweetest-swinging lefthanded hitters in the minors and saw his bat warm with the Midwest League's weather. His quest to pull the ball in the air with more authority continued following a promotion to Double-A in July.





RISING

#### 14. ETHAN SALAS PADRES, C

Signed out of Venezuela in January, Salas first turned heads in spring training when he ably caught all-stars Yu Darvish and Joe Musgrove as a 16-year-old. He then torched extended spring training, received a assignment to Low-A Lake Elsinore two days before turning 17 and has more than held his own as the youngest player in the full-season minor leagues.

Salas has been remarkably poised in his pro debut and looks like a seasoned veteran next to players three to five years older. He makes consistent contact with a smooth, balanced lefthanded swing, rarely expands the zone and is rapidly getting stronger to hit for more power.

Salas is an exceptionally advanced defender behind the plate with soft hands, excellent blocking skills and an accurate arm with a quick release. He still needs to get stronger to withstand the grind of catching every day—in the first half of the season he served as DH in more than half of his games and did not catch on consecutive days—but his precocious talent on both sides of the ball marks him as a potential future star.

—*Kyle Glaser*

#### 19. ADAEL AMADOR ROCKIES, SS

The Rockies' system has undergone a resurgence of late, and Amador is its top prospect. The wiry, twitchy shortstop has shown a blend of hitting ability and power at High-A and has a chance to stick at the position as well.

#### 20. CARSON WILLIAMS RAYS, SS

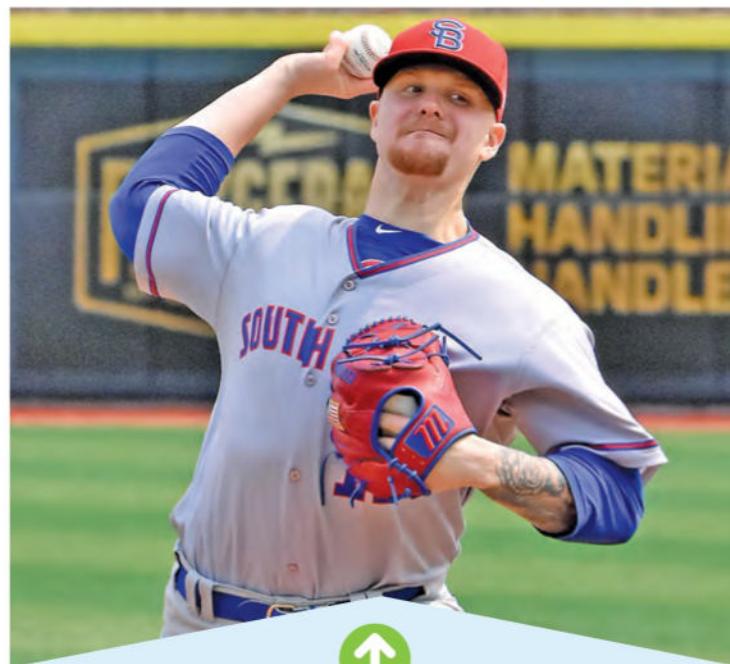
Williams has a case as the best defensive shortstop in the minors, with some scouts willing to go as high as a 70 on his glove. He also has plenty of power at the plate, albeit with below-average hitting ability and high strikeout rates.

#### 21. LOGAN O'HOPPE ANGELS, C

A shoulder injury ended a potential Rookie of the Year season from O'Hoppe. His ability to handle everyday catching duties while providing above-average offensive production should make him the Angels' catcher of the future.

#### 22. COLSON MONTGOMERY WHITE SOX, SS

After spending much of the first half rehabbing an oblique strain, Montgomery returned to action at High-A in July. At his best, he provides the chance for an offensive force up the middle who could stick at shortstop.



RISING

#### 23. CADE HORTON CUBS, RHP

Horton was still working his way back from Tommy John surgery most of last season at Oklahoma, but he got stronger as the year went on and electrified with a historically dominant performance at the 2022 College World Series.

The Cubs bet Horton would keep improving the further he moved away from surgery when they drafted him seventh overall, and so far that bet looks like a good one. The 21-year-old has dominated the Class A levels in his pro debut with a powerful 94-97 mph fastball and plus-plus mid-80s slider with late break and depth.

Most encouraging is that Horton's power 12-to-6 curveball and sinking mid-80s changeup have progressed rapidly in a short time to become average or better pitches that can neutralize lefthanded hitters.

With a power four-pitch arsenal he throws for strikes out of an athletic, low-effort delivery, Horton has raised his ceiling from a potential midrotation starter to a potential front-of-the-rotation one.

—*Kyle Glaser*

#### 15. WALKER JENKINS TWINS, OF

2023 DRAFT PICK

The Twins won the draft lottery last winter when they secured the fifth pick. Now Minnesota has its new No. 1 prospect. Scouts love Jenkins' powerful lefthanded swing, and he should hit for average and power after a standout prep career.

#### 16. KYLE HARRISON GIANTS, LHP

Harrison's nasty three-pitch mix and deceptive delivery make him the top lefthanded pitching prospect. He has struggled with command as one of the youngest pitchers in the hitter-happy Pacific Coast League but still should give the Giants a rotation piece.

#### 17. COLT KEITH TIGERS, 3B

The Mississippi prep product has been one of the minors' breakout hitters. He crushed Double-A, made the Futures Game and continued to hit as one of the youngest players in the International League. Keith faces defensive questions but should hit.

#### 18. MAX CLARK TIGERS, OF

2023 DRAFT PICK

It's hard to say a high school player has a lengthy track record, but Clark has hit wherever he's gone while facing the best pitchers on the showcase circuit. Detroit needs an offensive boost, and third overall pick Clark should eventually help provide it.



# SUMMER TOP 100

## 24. SAL FRELICK BREWERS, OF

Frelick missed a chunk of time at Triple-A with a thumb injury this season, but in previous seasons has shown the potential to be a pure hitter who sticks in center field. There are lingering questions about his ultimate impact at the plate.



FALLING

## 25. ANDREW PAINTER PHILLIES, RHP

In 2022, Painter dominated hitters like few had in the modern era of the minor leagues. His statistics read like typos.

He recorded a 1.56 ERA in 103.2 innings to go with 155 strikeouts, 25 walks and just five home runs allowed in 22 starts in 2022. Painter reached Double-A as a 19-year-old in August, paving the way for him to rank as the top pitching prospect in baseball—and No. 5 overall—heading into 2023. It also spurred talk of him reaching Philadelphia this season.

Instead, Painter has spent the entire season on the sidelines after coming down with a sore elbow early in spring training. He attempted to rehab his elbow ligament but could not shake the discomfort. In July, Tommy John surgery and ulnar nerve transposition were recommended. The procedure will likely take Painter out of action for virtually all of 2024, in addition to his lost 2023.

The good news is that Painter will still be just 22 years old when he returns in 2025. If he shows similar stuff and results as he did in 2022, then he once again becomes one of the brightest pitching prospects in baseball, with plenty of time to build back up to necessary endurance levels.

—Matt Eddy

## 26. COBY MAYO ORIOLES, 3B

The top hitter in the Eastern League in the first half, the 21-year-old Mayo has shown exceptional on-base skills and power. While his contact skills are just average, he had limited his swing-and-miss and earned a promotion to Triple-A.



RISING

## 27. ROMAN ANTHONY RED SOX, OF

Anthony was Boston's supplemental second-round pick in 2022 out of Florida power Stoneman Douglas, the High School Team of the Year.

In his first full season as a pro, the lefty-hitting outfielder has been a revelation. Even at Low-A Salem, when his baseball card numbers weren't jumping off the page, scouts were enthused. They saw a physical player with a sweet swing and a keen eye for the strike zone who might have been stymied by a combination of bad luck and too many grounders.

Once the Red Sox bumped Anthony to High-A Greenville, the numbers started to show up. The 19-year-old slammed eight home runs in his first 22 games in the South Atlantic League.

Anthony should have plenty of bat to profile on an outfield corner. After little more than a year as a professional, he already looks like one of the better pieces of a Boston system that has slowly improved in recent years.

—Josh Norris

## 28. BROOKS LEE TWINS, SS

The eighth overall pick in 2022, Lee has enjoyed a solid full-season debut at Double-A. The switch-hitter rarely swings and misses, reaches base regularly and produces average power. Lee looks like an above-average everyday player.

## 29. DALTON RUSHING DODGERS, C

An electric hitter with all-world bat speed, Rushing is one of the top hitting catchers in the minors with enough hitting ability and power to profile at other positions should he not stick at catcher.

## 30. TINK HENCE CARDINALS, RHP

The undersized but extremely athletic righthander earned a promotion to Double-A after impressing as a 20-year-old in High-A. Hence mixes a low-launch, mid-90s fastball with a mid-80s slider, changeup and a curveball.



### 31. JACOB MISIOROWSKI BREWERS, RHP

Armed with an arsenal that includes a fastball that regularly parks in the upper 90s and peaks at 102 mph and a high-80s slider that snatches the souls from hitters, Misiorowski has a case as the pitcher with the best pure stuff in the minor leagues.

He spent the first half of the season showcasing that mix at Low-A Carolina and High-A Wisconsin, then unveiled it to the world in the most dominant outing at the Futures Game, when all of his fastballs were thrown at 100 mph or harder.

The righthander—whom the Brewers drafted in the second round in 2022 out of Crowder (Mo.) JC—was eased in slowly to begin the year at Low-A but has moved quickly enough to make it to Double-A Biloxi by July.

Misiorowski still has to iron out his control and command, but the upside is there to become a big league weapon of some stripe relatively quickly, especially if he moves to the bullpen.

If he can stay in the rotation and maintain his stuff over longer outings, the 21-year-old Misiorowski has a chance to be a frontline starter.

—Josh Norris

### 32. MICK ABEL PHILLIES, RHP

Abel's road splits away from homer-happy Double-A Reading are more indicative of the type of pitcher he is. His mid-to-high-90s fastball and curveball are his go-to offerings. Abel has No. 2 starter upside and might not be far from reaching Philadelphia.

### 33. SHANE BAZ RAYS, RHP

The powerful righthander will be on the shelf for all of 2023 as he recovers from Tommy John surgery. When Baz is healthy, he has an excellent combination of a plus fastball and plus slider that can dominate the opposition for stretches.

### 34. MASYN WINN CARDINALS, SS

It took Winn about a month to find his footing in Triple-A, but the cannon-armed 21-year-old found his swing after April. He hit .288/.363/.442 with eight home runs and seven stolen bases from May 1 to the all-star break, a stretch of 54 games.

### 35. NOAH SCHULTZ WHITE SOX, LHP

A strained left flexor muscle delayed Schultz's pro debut until June 2. The 2022 first-rounder was worth the wait. Schultz flummoxed Low-A hitters with a combination of a heavy mid-90s fastball, a silly-good slider and occasional changeup.

### 36. ROBBY SNELLING PADRES, LHP

The 19-year-old was a revelation by dominating Low-A competition in 11 starts to earn a bump to High-A. Snelling mixes a low-to-mid-90s fastball, a low-to-mid-80s slider, a curveball and a changeup. Each pitch has seen success this season.

### 37. AJ SMITH-SHAWVER BRAVES, RHP

Smith-Shawver flew from High-A on Opening Day to Atlanta on June 4. After four up-and-down appearances, Smith-Shawver returned to Triple-A, but his high-ride, mid-90s fastball and high-80s cut-slider are excellent bat-missing weapons.

### 38. YANQUIEL FERNANDEZ ROCKIES, OF

Signed out of Cuba in 2019, Fernandez has blossomed into one of the best power-hitting outfielders in the minors. His profile is driven by his bat, which combines plus-plus power and special hands that help him adjust to breaking pitches.

### 39. RICKY TIEDEMANN BLUE JAYS, LHP

Health has been an issue for Tiedemann for more than a year. He went down in early May with biceps inflammation and got into rehab games in July. When healthy, Tiedemann misses bats with a mid-90s fastball, sweepy slider and devastating changeup.

### 40. DYLAN LESKO PADRES, RHP

The poor timing of an elbow injury during spring 2022 led to Lesko missing more than a year as he recovered from Tommy John surgery. He returned to the mound in late June flashing a mid-90s four-seamer with heavy ride and his signature changeup.

### 41. CHASE DOLLANDER ROCKIES, RHP

2023  
DRAFT PICK

The righthander from Tennessee entered the season as the top pitcher in college. While others passed him by, Dollander still possesses a mid-90s fastball and a plus slider with feel for a curveball and changeup.

### 42. NOBLE MEYER MARLINS, RHP

2023  
DRAFT PICK

The Marlins targeted two of the top high school pitching talents in the draft, led by Meyer, a righthander from Oregon. He's an electric talent with a three-pitch mix led by a plus fastball and a plus-plus slider to go with above-average control.



# SUMMER TOP 100

## SCOUT'S VIEW

### THE BEST PLAYER I'VE SEEN THIS YEAR

**Josh Norris** asked scouts which player had impressed them most this season.

#### Junior Caminero

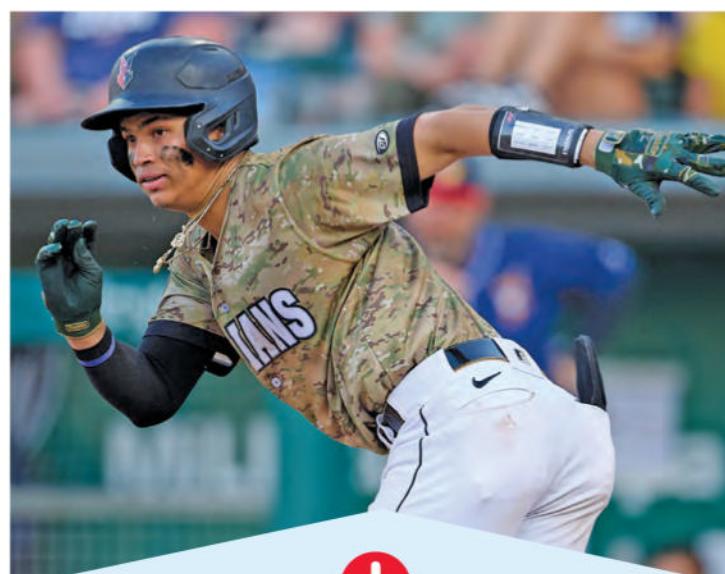
"I love him. I saw him in the FCL last year. He was good and I put a big league grade on him. He lit me up this year. He's got bat speed and plate coverage and can play a solid third base with solid arm strength . . . He's got electric bat speed with plate coverage and swagger and the chance for average defense. There's not much he can't do . . . He has zero problem with velocity, and he'll barrel breaking balls over the plate and drive them the other way. He's impressive."

#### Jackson Chourio

"He's an impact defender in center, a 70 runner with plenty of power. He's got a loose, fluid body, and his power-speed combo is insane. He's showing plus raw power and could get to 65 in-game power."

#### Marcelo Mayer

"I think it's the smoothest swing I've ever seen in my short career, and I have no concerns at shortstop. He's lean and athletic and could be an average defender. He has the potential to be a plus hitter across the board. There's a special hitter in here who can do damage in games. He'll have easy impact to all fields in games eventually."



### 44. ENDY RODRIGUEZ PIRATES, C/1B

In 2022, Rodriguez was the one of the biggest breakouts in the entire minor leagues. He shined especially once Henry Davis was bumped from High-A Greensboro to Double-A Altoona in mid May.

Rodriguez got more consistent time behind the plate and produced enough on both sides of the ball to zoom from High-A to Triple-A by season's end. He led all minor leaguers with a 1.181 OPS from July 1 through the end of the season.

Though he reached the big leagues this season, Rodriguez has struggled to make the same impact he made last year. He hit .268/.356/.415 in 67 games for Triple-A Indianapolis prior to his July callup.

The root of his problems stem from poor swing decisions that led to him making poor contact on pitcher's pitches, which led to plenty of outs. The 23-year-old switch-hitter also had a tendency to over-stride and get a bit too steep with his bat path.

Rodriguez is still ahead of Davis on the catching depth chart and will likely get plenty of leash in the race to be the Pirates' backstop of the future, but now it appears there's more polish to be applied than was apparent a year ago.

—**Josh Norris**

### 43. BRANDON PFAADT D-BACKS, RHP

Ever since he reached Double-A Amarillo in August 2021, Pfaadt has had a home run problem. Over a span of 261 minor league innings since then, he allowed 51 home runs—or a rate of 1.76 per nine innings.

Much of the industry ignored this problem, writing it off as product of two extreme hitters' parks in Amarillo and Triple-A Reno. In reality, the home runs should have been a warning sign of potentially questionable fastball command.

Pfaadt's struggles as a rookie this season were rooted in bad in-zone command of his fastball. Big leauge hitters slugged .508 against his four-seam fastball in 2023 and slugged .431 against his slider, with lefthanded batters having particular success.

All is not lost with Pfaadt. The 24-year-old's slider still missed bats at an above-average rate. Now, it's simply a matter of executing pitches in less problematic zones.

—**Geoff Pontes**

### 45. OSWALD PERAZA YANKEES, SS

For two consecutive years Peraza has produced at Triple-A, while seeing limited time in the major leagues. A strong defensive shortstop, Peraza has hit for more power this year while cutting his strikeout rate and raising his walk rate.

### 46. NOELVI MARTE REDS, 3B

Many hitters struggled to adjust to the pre-tacked baseball in the Southern League, but Marte produced a well above-average line in the first half. While his plus raw power is yet to fully blossom, Marte has limited his strikeouts and flashed plus-plus impact.

### 47. JEFFERSON QUERO BREWERS, C

A standout defender behind the plate, Quero's bat has begun to catch up to his advanced catch-and-throw skills. He has shown a balance of power, contact and approach as one of the better hitters in the Southern League.

### 48. BRAYAN ROCCHIO GUARDIANS, SS

A heady player who limits mistakes, Rocchio is a plus defender and runner with an average hit tool, average power and a well-balanced overall game. While Rocchio may never be an all-star, he'll be a steady above-average regular.

### 49. CHASE HAMPTON YANKEES, RHP

The 2022 sixth-rounder from Texas Tech has emerged as the best Yankees pitching prospect in some time. After earning a quick promotion to Double-A, he continued to miss bats with his mid-90s fastball with heavy ride and mid-80s slider with heavy sweep.

### 50. SAMUEL BASALLO ORIOLES, C

A tall, physical teenager with plus-plus raw power and a plus-plus throwing arm, Basallo is one of the standouts of the Orioles' lower minors. Basallo's immense frame may force him off catcher, but his bat and potential for plus-plus game power will play.

### 51. MASON MILLER ATHLETICS, RHP

Miller suffered an elbow ligament sprain after just four MLB starts and has been on the IL since early May. When healthy, Miller pairs an upper-90s fastball with a mid-90s cutter, a mid-80s slider and a rarely used changeup.

### 52. MARCO LUCIANO GIANTS, SS

Luciano's swing-and-miss has led to major hit tool concerns, even if some of that is offset by a selective approach. He's trending toward a Three True Outcomes hitter with the ability to stick in the infield, but likely not at shortstop.

### 53. RONNY MAURICIO METS, SS/2B

Mauricio cooled in June after a red-hot start. He overcomes sometimes questionable swing decisions with bat-to-ball skills and quality contact. Mauricio is a tall, long-limbed athlete with quick-twitch movements that will keep him in the infield.

## THE BEST PLAYER I'VE SEEN THIS YEAR

*Josh Norris asked scouts which player had impressed them most this season.*

**Jacob Misiorowski**

"That's the best stuff I've seen in a long time. As he pitches more as a starter, the command and the control should get better. His presence on the mound will get better. Chance at a frontline starter. He could pitch in the big leagues right now . . . This guy hasn't pitched much, so there's still a lot of room to grow."

**Sebastian Walcott**

"He has a physical body and strong hitter's actions. He's a hitter over a defender at this stage. The actions weren't quite as natural at shortstop, but he's got all the ingredients to be an above-average MLB hitter and a potential middle-of-the-order bat."

**Evan Carter**

"He's growing into his body and he still has plenty more growing to do. I just think he's a couple of years away from a prime-time breakout. The swing is there and the foundation was there, and now the physical attributes are coming together. He's not overmatched, and there's certain points when he can dominate on both sides of the ball . . . He's physically matured naturally without a major shift in his body composition. The jumps and reads and closing speed is still there. He's a plus runner who can play a plus center field and gets good reads and jumps and on the bases."

**54. EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ TWINS, OF**

Few players in the low minors have Rodriguez's advanced on-base skills. Fewer have his level of power. His below-average bat-to-ball skills will always be an impediment, but his on-base ability, power and athleticism offset that concern to a degree.

**55. HESTON KJERSTAD ORIOLES, OF**

After enduring two years plagued by medical issues and injuries, Kjerstad has thrived in his first full healthy season as a professional. The No. 2 overall pick in 2020 held his own at Triple-A, showing an average hit tool and plus power.

**56. ORELVIS MARTINEZ BLUE JAYS, SS/3B**

Martinez dramatically improved his swing decisions in a repeat of Double-A, and he was one of the Eastern League's most productive hitters in May, June and early July. That earned Martinez a promotion to Triple-A for the second half.

**57. JACKSON JOBE TIGERS, RHP**

The third overall pick in 2021 looked dominant in a handful of short High-A starts. He sat 96-98 mph and mixed in a low-80s curveball, mid-80s sweeper, cutter and changeup. Jobe's feel for spin is unique, and he looks to be learning to harness his raw stuff.

**58. CURTIS MEAD RAYS, 2B/3B**

Mead is an advanced hitter who projects to hit for average power, but he's going to have to stay healthy and find a position. The 22-year-old had lost most of the season at Triple-A Durham with a wrist injury.

**59. JASSON DOMINGUEZ YANKEES, OF**

Dominguez's youth, physicality and tools have enticed ever since he signed with the Yankees for \$5.1 million in 2019. Translating those traits into production has been a struggle, but he's still extremely young and at Double-A.

**60. KYLE MANZARDO RAYS, 1B**

Manzardo has struggled at Triple-A this season, but he still flashes a good feel for the strike zone and a solid foundation to hit. The challenge will be proving he has enough power to profile at first base.

**61. RHETT LOWDER REDS, RHP**

2023 DRAFT PICK

The Reds made Lowder the seventh overall pick after he went 15-0 with a 1.87 ERA in a dominant season for Wake Forest. His solid pitch mix and plus control give him a chance to be a midrotation starter—and quick.

**62. DIEGO CARTAYA DODGERS, C**

Cartaya's swing has progressively gotten longer as he's gotten older, and his body has changed. Where once he had a tight, compact, powerful righthanded swing that crushed all pitch types, his swing has now gotten so long that he struggles to catch up to hittable fastballs over the heart of the plate.

Cartaya was swinging and missing more, chasing out of the strike zone more, walking less, becoming more pull-heavy and had overall has regressed as a hitter. His .193 batting average for Double-A Tulsa was third-lowest out of any qualified hitter in the Texas League through July 17. His .275 on-base percentage was fourth lowest.

Cartaya is still just 21 years old and has time to reverse course, but he's going to have to get back to his old swing and approach to hit enough to be an everyday player in the major leagues, even as a catcher.

—*Kyle Glaser*

**63. JARED JONES PIRATES, RHP**

The 2020 second-rounder has long been a twitchy athlete with an explosive fastball. Now that Jones has shown he can control his arsenal and log innings up through Triple-A, he has increased his chances of becoming a power starter.

**64. GAVIN STONE DODGERS, RHP**

Stone's fastball has taken a step back and his slider has not progressed after his breakout 2022 campaign. He still has command of his excellent changeup and was working to rediscover his previous form at Triple-A.

**65. HARRY FORD MARINERS, C**

Ford is a good athlete and an on-base machine whose strike-zone discipline remains elite. His swing mechanics and defense behind the plate still need work for him to get the most from his abilities.

**66. COLE YOUNG MARINERS, SS**

Nothing Young does is sexy, but his eye for the strike zone, contact skills from the left side and advanced instincts should allow him to be at least a solid player. Drafted 21st overall out of high school in 2022, he advanced to High-A in July this year.

**67. JOEY ORTIZ ORIOLES, SS**

Ortiz remains a gifted defensive shortstop who has improved markedly as a hitter since turning pro. With a bevy of infielders blocking him in Baltimore, he'll likely be a utility infielder or an appealing trade candidate.

**68. MAX MEYER MARLINS, RHP**

Meyer continued to rehab from Tommy John surgery and will be out until 2024. His power fastball and devastating slider give him a chance to still be an impact pitcher as long as his stuff returns.

**69. MICHAEL BUSCH DODGERS, 3B/2B**

The 25-year-old Busch continues to hit for average and power at Triple-A and faces little doubt about his bat. He's a below-average defender who needs to find a position and is blocked in Los Angeles.

**70. GABRIEL GONZALEZ MARINERS, OF**

Gonzalez continues to hit for average and power and shows the traits of a potential middle-of-the-order force. He'll need to maintain his overly large frame and not lose any more speed or agility than he already has.





# SUMMER TOP 100

## SCOUT'S VIEW

### THE BEST PLAYER I'VE SEEN THIS YEAR

**Josh Norris** asked scouts which player had impressed them most this season.

**Spencer Jones**  
"I like him a lot. He can do everything... Swing-and-miss isn't going to be a huge problem because he's going to hit for average because he can go line to line... and can turn for power. He's got good instincts in center field and an average arm. He gets good jumps and can move around well. He could hit 20-25 home runs annually."

**Noelvi Marte**  
"He can play the infield and has a 70 arm. He's not rangy or twitchy but will pick up what gets to him. He's got huge strength and crushes anything on the barrel. He might chase too much, but he can still barrel the stuff he chases... He's going to swing at some really bad pitches, but he'll rope them."

**Brayan Rocchio**  
"He could be Lindor light. He can defend. The speed is the only weak spot. He can hit from both sides of the plate and he can hit for power. I understand the exit velos aren't elite, but he knows what he's doing. He's got a good contact rate and this guy gets better every year."

### 71. CHRISTIAN ENCARNACION-STRAND REDS, 3B/1B

Encarnacion-Strand swings at everything, but he also hits everything. In other words, he is a very good bad-ball hitter who may be the rare player whose bat-to-ball skills and power allow him to succeed despite an overly aggressive approach.

### 72. DANIEL ESPINO GUARDIANS, RHP

Espino has some of the best stuff in the minors but has struggled to stay on the mound. He made four starts in 2022 due to knee and shoulder injuries and will miss the entire 2023 season after having shoulder surgery.

### 73. JACOB WILSON ATHLETICS, SS

2023 DRAFT PICK

The son of former all-star shortstop Jack Wilson, Jacob had a dominant career at Grand Canyon and was drafted sixth overall by Oakland. He's a heady player who projects to hit for a high average while playing an above-average shortstop.

### 74. AUSTIN WELLS YANKEES, C

Wells has the strength to impact the ball from the left side and projects to rack up doubles and homers. He remains a below-average defender behind the plate and will likely move to first base.

### 75. EDGAR QUERO ANGELS, C

Quero won MVP of the Low-A California League in 2022 and jumped straight to Double-A as a 20-year-old this year. He had struggled with the aggressive assignment, but still holds promise as a switch-hitting catcher who knows the strike zone.

### 76. MIGUEL BLEIS RED SOX, OF

Bleis had season-ending shoulder surgery to repair a separated shoulder in June. He showed some of the loudest tools at Low-A when he was on the field, but he still needs to make big strides as a hitter.

### 77. TOMMY TROY D-BACKS, SS

2023 DRAFT PICK

Troy carried Stanford to three straight College World Series appearances and was drafted 12th overall by the D-backs. He's a heady player with a compact swing who should hit for a high average, and he has the athleticism to play all around the infield.

### 78. LUISANGEL ACUÑA RANGERS, 2B

Acuña successfully made the jump to Double-A and has improved as a defender at shortstop. He doesn't project to be the same caliber player as his brother Ronald, but he has the all-around tools to be a solid everyday player.

### 79. JUSTIN CRAWFORD PHILLIES, OF

The son of former all-star Carl Crawford, Justin is a speedy athlete who has gotten stronger and is beginning to impact the ball more. He has a knack for contact from the left side and is a prolific basestealer, just like his father.

### 80. CARSON WHISENHUNT GIANTS, LHP

Whisenhunt shot up from Low-A to Double-A this season and dominated hitters with his low-90s fastball and exceptional changeup. He quickly asserted himself as a potential midrotation starter who could help the Giants quickly.

### 81. SEBASTIAN WALCOTT RANGERS, SS

The Rangers quickly moved the Bahamas native Walcott, who signed in January, to the Arizona Complex League. He swatted five home runs in his first 19 games and the 17-year-old shot quickly into the upper echelons of a deep system.

### 82. BRADY HOUSE NATIONALS, 3B

House struggled through Covid and a back injury last year, but he's returned healthy this year and been one of the best hitters in the low minors. He projects to hit for average and power and is on the rise.

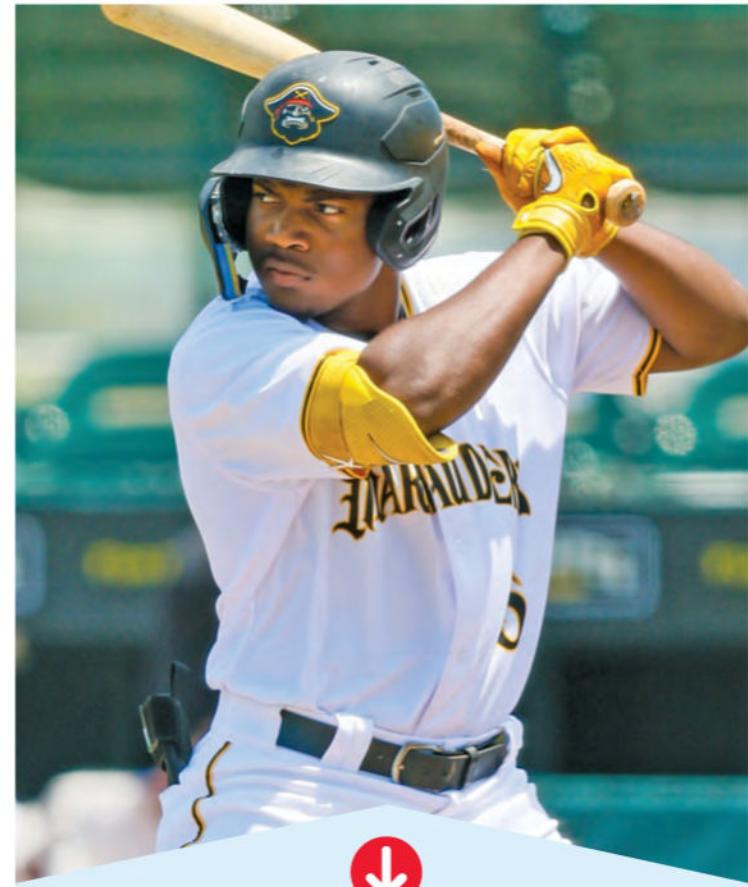
### 83. MATT SHAW CUBS, SS

2023 DRAFT PICK

Shaw was Big Ten Conference player of the year at Maryland before the Cubs drafted him 13th overall. He's an advanced hitter who makes consistently hard contact and is also an adept basestealer, giving him plenty of ways to contribute.

### 84. EVERSON PEREIRA YANKEES, OF

Pereira has struggled to stay healthy, but he continues to impress whenever he's on the field. He has the natural contact skills to hit for average and has gotten stronger to hit for power.



FALLING

### 85. TERMARR JOHNSON PIRATES, 2B

When he was drafted fourth overall in 2022, Johnson was regarded as one of the most advanced prep hitters in years. As it turns out, the road to reaching his ceiling might have a few more twists and turns than anticipated.

Johnson had to play a bit of catch-up early in the season after an injury shelved him for a chunk of spring training, and he started slowly at Low-A Bradenton before showing improvement each month.

Johnson has plenty of patience and some twitch under a thicker frame, but some evaluators are concerned that his approach might not translate well to higher levels.

Specifically, they've keyed in on the fact that he rarely swings at anything other than fastballs, which might not help him learn how to hit other types of pitches as he moves up the ladder.

Johnson also was making less contact than expected on the fastballs he does swing at. Through 67 games he had hit .256/.419/.471 with a strong walk rate of near 21% and more strikeouts (28%) and also home runs (12) than expected.

Ultimately, Johnson is still 19 and has plenty of time to adapt.

—Josh Norris

## 86. SPENCER JONES YANKEES, OF

A 6-foot-7 behemoth, Jones is remarkably athletic for his size and has premium power from the left side. His size gives him holes in his swing he'll have to close to continue to hit at levels higher than High-A.



## 87. DRUW JONES D-BACKS, OF

Jones has played sparingly since the D-backs drafted him with the second overall pick last year. He tore his labrum in his left shoulder after he signed, strained his right quad just 10 games into his pro debut this season at Low-A Visalia and strained his right hamstring while rehabbing in the Arizona Complex League.

In addition to struggling to stay on the field, Jones' swing has been alarmingly poor when he has played and become a major source of concern among both rival scouts and within the D-backs' organization.

Jones identifies pitches and has plenty of bat speed, but he bails out on pitches on the inner half of the plate and doesn't incorporate his lower half into his swing. He has poor natural timing and his barrel drags through the zone, leading to lots of foul balls and swings and misses through average fastballs over the heart of the plate.

Jones is a good athlete whose defense in center field is major league-ready, but he has to stay on the field to develop a bat that is much further behind than expected.

—*Kyle Glaser*

## 88. OWEN WHITE RANGERS, RHP

White's stuff has backed up and had been inconsistent this year, but he still shows flashes of premium arm strength and should have a steady role in the majors sooner rather than later.

## 89. ROBERT GASSEN BREWERS, LHP

Gasser has an "any pitch, any time" approach. He pitches off a fastball that sits in the low 90s, but he has a mix of average to a tick better pitches that he mixes in liberally to keep Triple-A hitters off-balance.

## 90. DENZEL CLARKE ATHLETICS, OF

A native Canadian, Clarke is a standout athlete with power and speed. He's shown advanced on-base skills and improved bat-to-ball this season. While there's swing-and-miss in Clarke's game, he has the skills to make an impact on both sides of the ball.

## 91. TYLER BLACK BREWERS, 3B

Black has excellent plate discipline, a direct swing, the ability to barrel all pitch types and an all-fields approach. His defense still lags, but he's a potential on-base threat with above-average speed and basestealing instincts.

## 92. KYLE TEEL RED SOX, C

2023  
DRAFT PICK

Teel is an athletic catcher who spent time as an outfielder as an amateur but has the strong arm to be given a chance to stick behind the dish. The Virginia product has contact and on-base skills and should get close to average power as a professional.

## 93. CONNOR PHILLIPS REDS, RHP

The minor league strikeout leader was angling for a callup to Cincinnati by proving his plus fastball and slider could miss bats up through Triple-A. Phillips has a wide enough repertoire to start but must show at least fringe control to stay in the rotation.

## 94. DREW GILBERT ASTROS, OF

The Astros' 2022 first-rounder advanced rapidly to Double-A and took his lumps early before rounding into form and showing his trademark blend of power, speed, swing decisions and outfield range.

## 95. ANTHONY SOLOMETO PIRATES, LHP

The No. 37 overall pick in 2021 impressed at hitter-happy High-A Greensboro before moving to Double-A Altoona. He struggled with strikes early but saw more success after attacking the zone with a mid-90s fastball and a slider that has shown better action.

## 96. RODERICK ARIAS YANKEES, SS

Arias was the prize of the Yankees' 2022 international signing class but struggled through an injury in his 2022 debut in the Dominican Summer League. This year in the Florida Complex League he has shown hitting ability, power and solid enough defense.

## 97. TYLER LOCKLEAR MARINERS, 1B

Only a broken bone in his right hand could slow Locklear's power barrage in the Northwest League. Prior to being hit by a pitch on June 1, he had hit 11 home runs and slugged .572 in 48 games, hinting at his middle-of-the-order power upside.

## 98. JAIRO IRIARTE PADRES, RHP

The 21-year-old Iriarte has an athletic delivery and eye-popping stuff. His fastball and changeup look good. Now he needs to refine a third pitch and improve his control. Iriarte has relief risk to be sure, but his arm and athleticism are appealing.

## 99. JONATHAN ARANDA RAYS, 2B/3B

Aranda has MVP awards in the Southern and International leagues, but does he have a role in Tampa Bay? The 25-year-old has hit nearly .330 with on-base skills in two Triple-A seasons but hasn't had an extended look in MLB or settled at a defensive home.

## 100. LAWRENCE BUTLER ATHLETICS, OF

Butler is a massive human with commensurate power. He's done a much better job controlling the zone in 2023 and earned a promotion to Triple-A at midseason. If those gains hold, he has a chance to up his hit tool a touch and have an exciting array of skills.



Slugging first baseman  
Nick Kurtz ranked  
11th in the nation  
with 24 home runs  
as a sophomore.

# HISTORY IN THE WAKEING?

Wake Forest boasts five of the top 50 prospects in a thin 2024 draft class, led by the top hitter and one of the top pitchers

by PETER FLAHERTY

**W**ake Forest had a historic season in 2023. The Demon Deacons won a program-record 52 games and made their first trip to the College World Series since 1955.

While Wake Forest's bid to win a championship fell short, the program is in great shape for 2024.

Despite having 10 players drafted, including ace righthander Rhett Lowder and power-hitting third baseman Brock Wilken in the first round, Wake Forest is loaded with talent.

No school has had more than three players selected in the first round of a single draft, a feat most recently accomplished by Florida in 2018, when third baseman Jonathan India (fifth overall) and righthanders Brady Singer (18th) and Jackson Kowar (33rd) were first-round picks.

Wake Forest has a chance to set a new record in 2024 with more than three first-round picks. That's because the program has five players ranked inside the top 50 prospects for the 2024 draft: first baseman Nick Kurtz (No. 1), righthander Chase Burns (9), shortstop Seaver King (17), righthander Michael Massey (36) and lefthander Josh Hartle (42).

While Kurtz, Massey and Hartle have been Demon Deacons from Day One of their collegiate careers, Burns and King will don the black and gold for the first time in 2024. Burns comes to Winston-Salem by way of Tennessee. King was the best non-Division I player in the country last

spring and starred for Division II powerhouse Wingate (N.C.).

Kurtz has a chance to be the highest draft pick in Wake Forest history and the first top-five pick since



Power-armed Chase Burns  
transferred from Tennessee.

righthander Kyle Sleeth was selected third overall in 2003. The hulking 6-foot-5 lefthanded hitter is one of the premier hitters in college baseball.

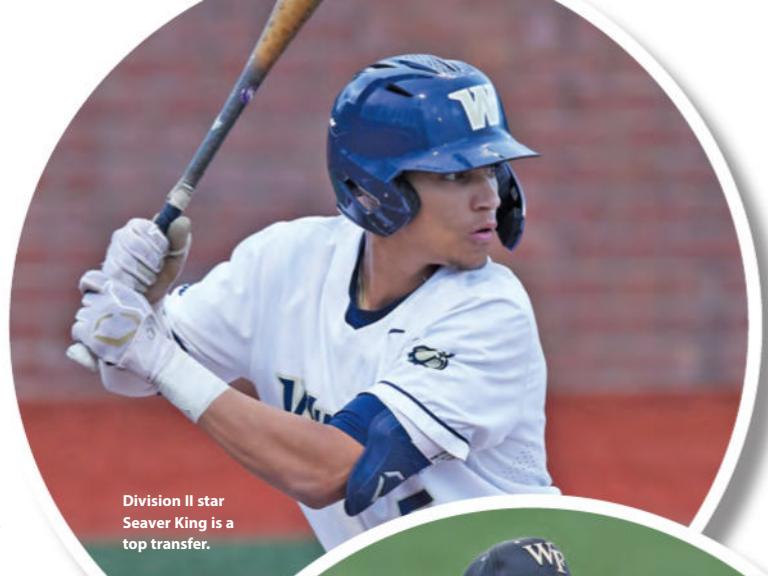
Across two seasons, Kurtz has hit .345/.499/.708 with 39 home runs and 125 RBIs in 110 games. What might be most impressive is his 111-to-88 walk-to-strikeout ratio and overall professional approach. He has plus power to all fields, is an outstanding pure hitter and is an excellent defender.

While Kurtz is perhaps the best hitter in the 2024 draft class, Burns might be the best pitcher. The 6-foot-4 righthander's calling card is his fastball, a pitch that averaged 96 mph in 2023 and topped out at 102. He supplements his fastball with a hellacious slider that generated a whopping 61% miss rate this year. After spending the better part of the 2023 season in the Tennessee bullpen, Burns figures to be the centerpiece of a loaded Wake Forest rotation.

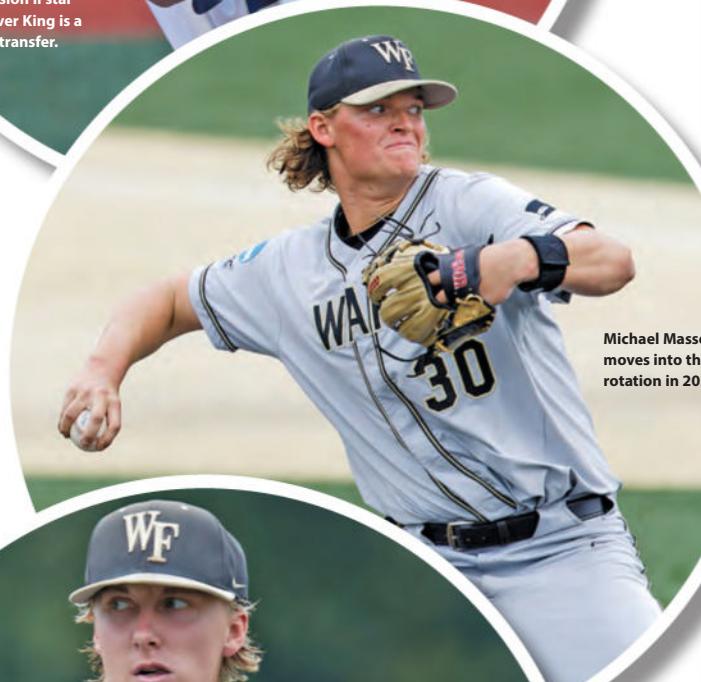
Seaver King is an outstanding athlete fresh off a monster 2023 season in which he hit .411 with 20 doubles and 11 home runs. He has an explosive operation at the plate and has turned in 70-grade run times. King earned a spot on Team USA's Collegiate National Team and figures to slot in at second base or in the outfield for Wake next season.

Hartle (11-2, 2.81 ERA) and Massey (3-1, 2.59 ERA) project to round out coach Tom Walter's stellar 2024 rotation. Hartle has impeccable control and a true five-pitch mix with his curveball being his best offering. Massey has thunderous stuff and a lethal fastball/slider combination. He spent all of 2023 appearing in relief but projects to make the jump into the rotation next season.

Five first-round draft picks would be unprecedented, but so is having this amount of high-end talent on a single roster. There will once again be considerable buzz surrounding Wake Forest heading into the 2024 season, but the Demon Deacons have proved they thrive under the spotlight. ■



Division II star  
Seaver King is a  
top transfer.



Michael Massey  
moves into the  
rotation in 2024.



Josh Hartle controls a  
true five-pitch mix.

## THRICE AS NICE

Just seven times in 59 drafts have three teammates been selected in the first round of the same draft. Here they are in reverse chronological order.



Former  
Gators  
India and  
Singer

### 2018 FLORIDA

- 5. Jonathan India, 3B, Reds (5 WAR)
- 18. Brady Singer, RHP, Royals (6)
- 33. Jackson Kowar, RHP, Royals (-2)

### 2016 LOUISVILLE

- 5. Corey Ray, OF, Brewers (0 WAR)
- 26. Zack Burdi, RHP, White Sox (-1)
- 32. Will Smith, C, Dodgers (14)

### 2015 VANDERBILT

- 1. Dansby Swanson, SS, D-backs (18 WAR)
- 8. Carson Fulmer, RHP, White Sox (-1)
- 24. Walker Buehler, RHP, Dodgers (14)

### 2008 MIAMI

- 7. Yonder Alonso, 1B, Reds (8 WAR)
- 12. Jemile Weeks, 2B, Athletics (2)
- 27. Carlos Gutierrez, RHP, Twins (N/A)

### 2004 RICE

- 3. Philip Humber, RHP, Mets (1 WAR)
- 4. Jeff Niemann, RHP, Rays (4)
- 8. Wade Townsend, RHP, Orioles (did not sign)

### 1989 FRESNO STATE

- 14. Steve Hosey, OF, Giants (-1 WAR)
- 19. Eddie Zosky, SS, Blue Jays (-1)
- 22. Tom Goodwin, OF, Dodgers (9)

### 1979 MICHIGAN

- 13. Rick Leach, OF, Tigers (3 WAR)
- 16. Steve Howe, LHP, Dodgers (10)
- 25. Steve Perry, RHP, Dodgers (N/A)

# EXT UP

# NEXT UP



West Virginia second baseman JJ Wetherholt starred for Team USA.



Iowa righthander Brody Brecht has tantalizing raw stuff.



Mississippi prep Konnor Griffin played in the High School All-American Game.

## TOP 50 DRAFT PROSPECTS FOR 2024

Rk	Player	Pos	School	State	Source	Draft Age	HT	WT	B	T	Committed/Drafted
1.	Nick Kurtz	1B	Wake Forest	NC	4YR	21.4	6-5	235	L	L	Never
2.	Travis Bazzana	2B	Oregon State	OR	4YR	21.9	6-0	197	L	R	Never
3.	JJ Wetherholt	2B	West Virginia	WV	4YR	21.9	5-10	190	L	R	Never
4.	Vance Honeycutt	OF	North Carolina	NC	4YR	21.2	6-3	205	R	R	Giants 2021 (20)
5.	Brody Brecht	RHP	Iowa	IA	4YR	21.8	6-4	205	R	R	Never
6.	Tommy White	3B	Louisiana State	LA	4YR	21.4	6-0	236	R	R	Never
7.	Jac Caglianone	1B/LHP	Florida	FL	4YR	21.4	6-5	245	L	L	Never
8.	Konnor Griffin	OF/SS/RHP	Jackson Prep	MS	HS	18.2	6-4	210	R	R	Louisiana State
9.	Chase Burns	RHP	Wake Forest	NC	4YR	21.5	6-4	195	R	R	Never
10.	Mike Sirota	OF	Northeastern	MA	4YR	21.1	6-3	188	R	R	Dodgers 2021 (16)
11.	Derek Curiel	OF	Orange Lutheran HS	CA	HS	19.2	6-2	175	L	L	Louisiana State
12.	Owen Paino	SS	Ketcham HS	NY	HS	18.6	6-3	205	L	R	Mississippi
13.	Braden Montgomery	OF/RHP	TBD (transfer portal)	—	4YR	21.2	6-2	217	B	R	Never
14.	PJ Morlando	OF/1B	Summerville HS	SC	HS	19.2	6-3	200	L	R	South Carolina
15.	Michael Mullinax	OF	North Cobb Christian HS	GA	HS	19.0	6-1	195	B	R	Georgia
16.	Malcolm Moore	C	Stanford	CA	4YR	21.0	6-1	215	L	R	Never
17.	Seaver King	SS/2B	Wake Forest	NC	4YR	21.2	6-0	190	R	R	Never
18.	Charlie Condon	1B/OF	Georgia	GA	4YR	21.3	6-6	211	R	R	Never
19.	Hagen Smith	LHP	Arkansas	AR	4YR	20.9	6-3	215	L	L	Never
20.	Bryce Rainer	SS/RHP	Harvard-Westlake HS	CA	HS	19.0	6-3	195	L	R	Texas
21.	Jacob Cozart	C	North Carolina State	NC	4YR	21.5	6-3	205	L	R	Never
22.	Anthony Silva	SS	Texas Christian	TX	4YR	21.0	6-2	200	R	R	Never
23.	Jonathan Santucci	LHP	Duke	NC	4YR	21.6	6-2	195	L	L	Never
24.	Cameron Smith	3B	Florida State	FL	4YR	21.4	6-3	221	R	R	Never
25.	Cade Arrambide	C	Tomball HS	TX	HS	18.8	6-3	210	R	R	Louisiana State
26.	Griff O'Ferrall	SS	Virginia	VA	4YR	21.5	6-1	185	R	R	Never
27.	Brendan Lawson	SS	Lawrence Park Collegiate HS	ON	HS	18.6	6-3	200	L	R	Florida
28.	Charlie Bates	SS	Palo Alto HS	CA	HS	18.8	6-1	175	L	R	Stanford
29.	Thatcher Hurd	RHP	Louisiana State	LA	4YR	21.6	6-4	200	R	R	Never
30.	Tegan Kuhns	RHP	Chambersburg Area HS	PA	HS	19.2	6-3	175	R	R	Tennessee
31.	Ben Hess	RHP	Alabama	AL	4YR	21.9	6-5	250	R	R	Never
32.	Cam Caminiti	LHP/OF	Saguaro HS	AZ	HS	17.9	6-2	205	L	L	Louisiana State
33.	Cody Schrier	SS	UCLA	CA	4YR	21.4	6-1	200	R	R	Never
34.	Carter Holton	LHP	Vanderbilt	TN	4YR	21.9	5-11	201	L	L	Brewers 2021 (19)
35.	Kaelen Culpepper	3B	Kansas State	KS	4YR	21.6	6-0	185	R	R	Never
36.	Michael Massey	RHP	Wake Forest	NC	4YR	21.3	6-5	230	R	R	Never
37.	Christian Moore	2B/3B	Tennessee	TN	4YR	21.7	6-1	200	R	R	Never
38.	JD Dix	SS	Whitefish Bay (Wis.) HS	WI	HS	18.8	6-2	170	B	R	Alabama
39.	Bryce Clavon	SS	Kell HS	GA	HS	18.7	6-0	185	R	R	Uncommitted
40.	Will Turner	OF	South Alabama	AL	4YR	21.8	6-1	196	L	L	Never
41.	Carson DeMartini	3B	Virginia Tech	VA	4YR	21.6	6-0	185	L	R	Never
42.	Josh Hartle	LHP	Wake Forest	NC	4YR	21.3	6-4	210	L	L	Never
43.	Joey Oakie	RHP	Ankeny Centennial HS	IA	HS	18.2	6-3	195	R	R	Iowa
44.	Casan Evans	RHP	St. Pius X HS	TX	HS	18.8	6-2	180	R	R	Louisiana State
45.	Drew Beam	RHP	Tennessee	TN	4YR	21.4	6-4	203	R	R	Never
46.	Daniel Avitia	RHP	Grand Canyon	AZ	4YR	21.2	6-4	200	R	R	Cubs 2021 (19)
47.	Trey Yesavage	RHP	East Carolina	NC	4YR	21.0	6-4	230	R	R	Never
48.	Rodney Green Jr.	OF	California	CA	4YR	21.3	6-3	190	L	L	Never
49.	Billy Amick	3B	Tennessee	TN	4YR	21.7	6-1	220	R	R	Never
50.	Levi Clark	C	Walton HS	GA	HS	18.1	6-2	195	R	R	Tennessee

# Way-Too-Early 2024 Mock Draft

by CARLOS COLLAZO

The 2023 draft is in the books. It's time to look ahead to 2024 with our way-too-early mock draft.

While the final draft order will be determined in the draft lottery at the Winter Meetings, for this exercise we use the reverse order of MLB standings at the all-star break.

An exceptionally strong 2023 draft class made the process easier. That might not be the case for what could be a down 2024 group.

## 1. ATHLETICS: NICK KURTZ

### 1B, WAKE FOREST

Kurtz was the best overall hitter on one of the best teams in the country with Wake Forest. He's likely the most well-rounded hitter in the class and pairs a savvy batting eye with a clean lefthanded swing and plenty of raw power from his 6-foot-5, 235-pound frame. Kurtz slashed .353/.527/.784 with 24 home runs last year and has walked more than he's struck out in both college seasons. He's a terrific defensive first baseman, and scouts think he might be athletic enough to play the corner outfield.

## 2. ROYALS: TRAVIS BAZZANA, 2B

### 2B, OREGON STATE

Bazzana is an Australia native who has developed a strong reputation as a pure hitter by performing at a high level wherever he's played, whether with Australia's 18U National Team, with Oregon State or once again this summer in the Cape Cod League. He's coming off a .374/.500/.622 season when he hit 11 home runs and stole 36 bags in 39 tries. He stays within the strike zone consistently and makes a ton of contact, with an 85% contact rate this spring.

## 3. ROCKIES: VANCE HONEYCUTT

### OF, NORTH CAROLINA

Honeycutt's raw tools, athleticism and all-around profile should make him the 1-1 favorite, but he has consistently struggled with strikeouts and took a step backward in 2023 after a sensational freshman season in 2022, when he hit 25 home runs and stole 29 bases. Honeycutt hit just .257/.418/.492 as a sophomore, though he did cut his strikeout rate from around 30% to 20% and also walked more often. He has speed, power and a no-doubt center field profile, but there are still questions looming about his hitting ability.

## 4. NATIONALS: BRODY BRECHT

### RHP, IOWA

Brecht has elite arm talent on the mound and averaged 97.5 mph this spring as a starter for Iowa. He posted a 3.74 ERA in 77 innings despite an unsustainable 18% walk rate. Brecht has a whippy fast arm and has eclipsed 100 mph many times, and he also has a potentially 70-grade slider that generated whiffs at a 53% rate this spring. He throws his fastball and slider equally, and his breaking pitch has terrific tilt and diving action in the upper 80s. As Brecht's walk rate suggests, he has plenty of reliever risk.



Travis Bazzana hits for both contact and impact.

## 5. WHITE SOX: JJ WETHERHOLT

### 2B, WEST VIRGINIA

You could use a single hand to count the hitters who performed better than Wetherholt this spring. He led the country in hitting and slashed .449/.517/.782 with 16 home runs and 35 stolen bases. Wetherholt is just 5-foot-10, but he's physical with plenty of strength in his hands and forearms. The ball jumps off his bat. He had a 93 mph average exit velocity this spring, and while he might be a second baseman, he should offer power, speed and strong pure hitting ability at the position. He was also one of the most impressive hitters with USA Baseball's Collegiate National Team this summer.

## 6. CARDINALS: TOMMY WHITE

### 3B, LOUISIANA STATE

The 2022 Freshman of the Year at North Carolina State transferred to LSU and helped power the Tigers to the 2023 national championship. White has 51 home runs in his first two seasons and pairs physicality and big power with impressive feel for the barrel. He loves to swing and will regularly expand his strike zone, with a 40% chase rate in 2023 that will need to be improved in pro ball. White might settle in as a 6-foot, righthanded-hitting first baseman, but he has more than enough power to profile at the position if he moves off the hot corner.

## 7. TIGERS: KONNOR GRIFFIN

### SS/RHP, JACKSON PREP, FLOWOOD, MISS.

Originally a member of the 2025 class, Griffin is an exceptional athlete who reclassified for 2024 after his freshman season. He has already led his Jackson Prep team to two Mississippi state championships, and he pairs impressive athleticism with loud tools, including plus speed, double-plus arm strength and plus raw power. He's probably a hitter first, but he would be a real pro prospect as a pitcher as well. He throws a fastball in the low 90s already.

## 8. PIRATES: JAC CAGLIANONE

### LHP/1B, FLORIDA

Caglianone led the nation with 33 home runs and also started 18 games and posted a 4.34 ERA. Power, not polish, is his defining characteristic as both a hitter and a pitcher. He has incredible lefthanded raw power, with one of the best 90th percentile exit velocities in 2023, but he also chased at a 44% rate and struck out 18% of the time compared to a 5% walk rate. On the mound, Caglianone averaged 95 mph, but walked batters at a 16% clip.

## 9. METS: DEREK CURIEL

### OF, ORANGE (CALIF.) LUTHERAN HS

Curiel is a well-known prepster who has shown a smooth lefthanded swing and advanced hitting ability since his freshman season with SoCal power Orange Lutheran. It wasn't uncommon for scouts to see both him and teammate Mikey Romero, a 2022 first-rounder by the Red Sox, and leave the park thinking Curiel had the better swing and pure hitting ability. Curiel is lean with a 6-foot-2, 175-pound frame and has some future impact questions, though he should stick in center field as a plus runner with good defensive instincts and arm strength.

## 10. CUBS: CHASE BURNS

### RHP, WAKE FOREST

Burns was throwing 100 mph before he reached campus at Tennessee and struck out 217 batters and walked just 47 in 152.1 innings in two seasons for the Vols. He moved into a piggyback reliever role with 2023 first-rounder Chase Dollander this spring and after the year transferred to Wake Forest. The 6-foot-4, 195-pound Burns averaged 96 mph and has been up to 102, and he has a nasty, upper-80s slider with high spin rates and hard, biting action that generated a 61% miss rate this spring. ■

# ORGANIZATION REPORTS



● Despite hitting 30 home runs at Double-A last year, Orelvis Martinez made adjustments to “swing hard but more under control.” **PAGE 34**

**PAGE 33** Yankees 2022 sixth-round pick Chase Hampton quickly shot to Double-A in his pro debut.





## Healthy Kjerstad Marches Toward MLB

After two years of health setbacks, 24-year-old outfielder **Heston Kjerstad** was showing in his first full minor league season that his power was worth the wait.

It took until last June for the No. 2 overall pick in 2020 to get on the field after missing all of 2021 with myocarditis—inflammation of the heart muscle—and then injuring his hamstring during spring training in 2022.

Kjerstad played 65 games last season at Low-A and High-A and put up an .851 OPS with five home runs as he re-acclimated himself with the game. An MVP performance in the Arizona Fall League signaled that he was ready for the upper levels.

Kjerstad impressed in big league spring training before being assigned to Double-A Bowie and hitting 11 home runs with a .960 OPS. The Orioles promoted him to Triple-A Norfolk in early June, and he earned International League player of the week honors for his first full week at the level.

The Arkansas product is proud of how he has improved in the last year.

"Sometimes, you have to have a little bit of time to work through some things," Kjerstad said. "Last year, I worked through some stuff and was just getting back to where I wanted to be."

"Even now, when you're in a good spot or you're playing good, you still want to be better. There's still some things you're not totally cool with, or things you want to improve. That's just baseball."

Kjerstad's emergence has put him firmly back into the Orioles' top prospect mix, and the lefthanded hitter could be in Baltimore sooner than later. Given the Orioles' major league outfield depth—and fellow top prospect **Colton Cowser's** July callup—Kjerstad was playing some first base to create more avenues.

The Orioles could conceivably call up Kjerstad, who was drafted one year ahead of Cowser, down the stretch if he continues to hit in Triple-A.

—JON MEOLI



## Teenager Cespedes Stands Out In DSL

**Yoelin Cespedes** is just 17 and was in the Dominican Summer League, so it's early to get too carried away by his performance.

Still, at the start of his professional career, the shortstop is showing signs of not only significant in-game power but a surprisingly

mature approach that allows him to get to it with unusual frequency.

Already, Cespedes looks like one of the top hitting prospects to come through the organization's academy since **Rafael Devers** a decade ago.

"He definitely stands out offensively," Red Sox assistant general manager **Eddie Romero** said. "He's been one of the better offensive players that we've had there in a while."

Through 24 games, Cespedes hit .326/.372/.529 with four home runs—including a 469-foot blast—to go with 10 walks and 15 strikeouts. His low walk and strikeout rates reflect a confident approach and sound contact skills with two strikes.

"He's a very intelligent guy," Romero said. "He just has an idea already about what to expect, that with two strikes, I'm not going to see X, so let me zone in over here."

Cespedes' calling card is certainly his bat, which carries middle-of-the-order potential. But the thickly built, 5-foot-10, 180-pound teenager has also shown enough progress at shortstop—particularly with strength gains that have improved his first step—to continue developing at the position.

Boston signed Cespedes for \$1.4 million out of the Dominican Republic in January.

Given Cespedes' overall advancement as a hitter, he could get to the Florida Complex League this season. If his impressive DSL debut carries over to the U.S., he could quickly emerge as one of the more highly regarded prospects in the system.

"He's really advanced for his age, for where he is," Red Sox farm director **Brian Abraham** said. "He stands out."

—ALEX SPEIER



## Healthy Elko Bashes Baseballs In Class A

First baseman **Tim Elko** started his professional career at the bottom, but he and his powerful righthanded bat could quickly ascend the minor league ladder.

"He's having a productive year," White Sox assistant general manager/director of player development **Chris Getz** said.

The 24-year-old Elko finished his time with Low-A Kannapolis as the Carolina League leader in home runs (17) and RBIs (57) while hitting .297/.360/.556 in 66 games. He moved to High-A Winston-Salem in late June.

The 6-foot-4, 240-pound Elko shined in five seasons at Mississippi before the White Sox drafted him in the 10th round last year.

Remarkably, Elko played the 2021 season



MIKE JAMES FOR SEAM IMAGES

The Guardians' 21-year-old second baseman Juan Brito quickly reached Double-A Akron on the strength of his hit tool.

with a torn ACL in his right knee. He suffered the injury early in the season, sat out a month and returned as the Bulldogs' DH.

"It's possible that (his knee) affected his final year in college, and perhaps even early on with us," Getz said. "Medically, he's in a very good spot. The knee is healthy."

After signing with Chicago, Elko managed a disappointing .706 OPS in 17 games for Kannapolis last summer and appeared to be less than 100% healthy.

That changed this year.

"He's been able to strengthen his lower body now and really activate certain areas of his swing because of the health of his knee," Getz said. "That's contributed to some of his success he's had so far, but he's a really talented player who works his butt off."

Elko's Low-A strikeout rate fell from 39% to 30% year over year.

"Just his mature approach to the game, obviously playing at a big-time program and accomplishing what he has in his career, I think has helped this transition," Getz said.

—SCOT GREGOR



## Brito Advances Quickly In New System

The Guardians liked second baseman **Juan Brito** so much that they committed a 40-man roster spot to him last November, at a time when roster space was at a premium and the fifth-year pro had not yet advanced

past Low-A.

Cleveland acquired Brito in a Nov. 15 trade that sent **Nolan Jones** to the Rockies. Colorado had signed Brito out of the Dominican Republic in 2018.

The 21-year-old Brito is already at his second level in the Cleveland system. He started the season at High-A Lake County and after 35 games was promoted to Double-A Akron.

In his first 43 games for Akron, Brito hit .314/.398/.484 with six homers.

"He has been a top performer in our system and has shown the ability to make good swing decisions and consistent contact, which has allowed him to identify pitches that he can drive," Guardians assistant general manager **James Harris** said.

The 5-foot-11, 202-pound Brito knows the strike zone. Through 78 total games this season, he had drawn 47 walks against 56 strikeouts. His career minor league on-base percentage tops .400.

"We've seen occasional power that excites us," Harris said, "but his signature is putting the ball in play. He prepares through advance and early work, and takes that preparation into the game."

Where Brito eventually settles defensively is still to be determined. He has played mostly second base this season but has pro experience at shortstop and third base.

"His athleticism, game awareness and work ethic has shown since joining our organization," Harris said, "and his arm strength is trending in the right direction."

—JIM INGRAHAM



### Hurter Blends Old With New To Emerge

While some players aren't introduced to the analytics-driven direction of baseball until they're drafted, lefthander **Brant Hurter** was fortunate enough to get a pre-view ahead of time.

While building his résumé at Georgia Tech, Hurter noticed the program taking a turn with the hiring of pitching coach **Danny Borrell** for the 2020 season.

"Early on . . . it was pretty old school," Hurter said. "Then we got a new pitching coach my junior year. And then a new lab facility my senior year, which we were able to really dive into."

Hurter views himself as a mix of both old-school and new-age mentalities. As part of his journey, he had to go through having Tommy John surgery as a sophomore.

When play resumed following the pandemic-truncated 2020 season, Hurter, now a fourth-year player, was ready to lead the Yellow Jackets' staff with 85.1 innings in 2021. The Tigers drafted him in the seventh round that July.

Standing 6-foot-6, Hurter has access to plenty of natural downhill plane, but the art of finding balance has been a major key to the 24-year-old's success this season.

"I'm kind of in between," Hurter said. "I pick and choose which metrics I like to look at, but I still keep the thought of being able to feel each pitch. And even if the metrics say one's better than the other, if I can't control that pitch, I don't really use it."

Throwing a two-seam and four-seam fastball, slider, sinker and changeup, Hurter carried a 3.89 ERA with 90 strikeouts and a 1.23 WHIP through 17 starts and 76.1 innings for Double-A Erie.

"I've been a sinker guy my whole life," Hurter said, "so this year we added a four-seam to mainly just throw at the top of the zone. Just another fastball that I throw three or four times a game just to get hitters off looking for low balls."

—EMILY WALDON



### Baez Draws Early Buzz In U.S. Debut

It didn't take **Luis Baez** long to show he was ready to play in the United States.

In 17 games, the 19-year-old outfielder hit .271/.434/.661 with seven home runs in the Rookie-level Florida Complex League. That earned him a mid-July promotion to Low-A Fayetteville.

—JOSE DE JESUS ORTIZ



The Astros' 19-year-old outfielder Luis Baez stood out early in the Florida Complex League while making his U.S. debut.

Astros farm director **Sara Goodrum** identified Baez immediately when asked about young players creating buzz.

"The biggest thing that stands out is his power and ability to do damage at the plate," Goodrum said. "He consistently hits the ball hard at a good trajectory."

"From this season to last year, he has shown improvements in his ability to discern ball versus strike."

The Astros signed the 6-foot-1, 205-pound Baez out of the Dominican Republic for \$1.3 million in January in 2022.

Baez put up a .903 OPS in 58 games last year in the Dominican Summer League.

The righthanded hitter had dramatically improved his plate discipline since last season, bumping his walk rate from 6% to 18%, while cutting his strikeout rate from 25% to 18%.

"As he continues to make good swing decisions with his ability to do damage, Luis will continue to rise as a standout player," Goodrum said.

Defensively, Baez is athletic enough to play center field but has focused on right field as a professional.

### KC Rushford's Work Ethic Shines In ACL

If there's one key lesson that 19-year-old outfielder **Milo Rushford** has learned from his father, it's perseverance.

After his career at San Diego State, **Jim Rushford** spent five years bouncing around various independent leagues before finally getting a chance in affiliated ball, debuting with the Brewers' High-A affiliate in 2001 at the age of 27.

One year later, Jim made it to the big leagues for 23 games.

That type of determination has been handed down from father to son.

Milo didn't have to wait as long as his father to get to affiliated ball, making his pro debut last summer in the Arizona Complex League after being drafted in the 18th round out of high school in Arizona. Back in the ACL this season, Rushford hit .362/.471/.580 through his first 19 games.

Rushford has more pop in his lefthanded swing this year after adding strength to his wiry, 6-foot frame.

"This offseason I stayed at the complex and did the team workouts," Rushford said.

"We did lifts multiple days a week, yoga every day . . . I ended up putting on about 10 pounds from last year."

The improvement since instructional league last fall has piqued the interest of scouts covering the Arizona backfields. They were especially impressed by Rushford's tools, makeup and projection.

ACL Royals hitting coach **Ramon Castro**, who played winter ball in Venezuela with Jim Rushford nearly 20 years ago, also was impressed by Milo's makeup.

"He's a special guy," Castro said. "He's working really hard in the cage and he's doing everything we want."

—BILL MITCHELL



### Rada Proves He Belongs At Low-A

**Nelson Rada** turns 18 on Aug. 24, an age when most U.S. players are beginning their senior year of high school.

That's what makes what the Venezuelan center fielder is doing this season at Low-A Inland Empire all the more remarkable.

Rada hit .254/.393/.316 with two home runs and 41 stolen bases through 76 games. He showed advanced plate discipline with 52 walks and 69 strikeouts.

"When you see a 17-year-old guy holding his own in Low-A ball, it's a credit to the amount of work he's put in over the last couple of years and to the staff there," Angels minor league field coordinator **Joe Kruzel** said.

The 5-foot-10, 160-pound Rada signed for \$1.85 million as a 16-year-old in 2022. In the Dominican Summer League last year, the lefthanded hitter batted .311/.446/.439 with 27 steals in 50 games.

That gave the Angels the confidence to start Rada at Low-A this season, when he was the youngest player on a Opening Day roster.

Rada quickly proved he belongs.

"His ability to draw walks and (put the ball in play) means he has a good understanding of the strike zone," Kruzel said. "He has above-average speed, and his knowledge of reading pitchers and working on jumps has improved."

"He's like a sponge. He absorbs and incorporates it into his game."

Rada has a line-drive approach to all fields, and the Angels believe he will add power as he matures physically.

"I would project him to be a 10-15-homer guy," Kruzel said. "With his understanding of the strike zone, ability to get the barrel to the ball and knowledge and approach

to use the whole field, putting him in that range someday is not far-fetched."

Rada's closing speed and his decisive reads and routes give him the potential to be a plus defender, especially if his throwing arm improves. His elite speed can impact the game in many ways.

"We often look at stolen bases to decide whether a guy is a good baserunner," Kruzel said, "but his knack for going first to third, reading balls in the dirt, tagging on balls to the outfield, those are like stolen bases, even though they don't go down as stolen bases."

—MIKE DIGIOVANNA

## Unique Repertoire Elevates Lewis

Midway through spring training, **Jorge Polanco** walked into the Twins clubhouse with a confused look on his face, put his bat in his locker and sat down.

What's the matter?

"I just took live BP, and the pitcher was throwing knuckleballs," Polanco said incredulously. "Knuckleballs!"

Count Polanco as the first—and surely not the last—major league all-star to be flustered by 22-year-old righthander **Cory Lewis'** repertoire.

"I would imagine he had never seen an 84 mph knuckleball," Twins farm director **Drew MacPhail** said, "because I don't know if anyone has."

The 2022 ninth-rounder out of UC Santa Barbara comes armed with a "real impact carry fastball," MacPhail said, "plus some of the best movement on his slider and changeup in our system."

"And then he throws a knuckleball incredibly hard," MacPhail said. "That pitch is getting a crazy amount of misses so far. He punched out 30% of the hitters in Low-A, and now he's punching out (25%) at High-A, too."

Lewis opened his pro career at Low-A Fort Myers in April and held overmatched hitters to a .179/.259/.303 line. Within two months, his 55 strikeouts and 15 walks through 39.1 innings, plus a 2.75 ERA, got him promoted to High-A Cedar Rapids.

He got even better.

"He's just taken off," MacPhail said. "(Twins 2022 first-rounder) **Brooks Lee** played in the same conference as Cory and said those were the most difficult at-bats he ever had in college."

So how can a pitcher release a pitch with mid-80s velocity but without any spin?

"You'd have to ask a scientist. I'm no physicist," MacPhail said. "What I know is, his



The Twins' Cory Lewis blends a fastball, slider and changeup with a high-velocity knuckleball—with impressive results.

pitch mix makes it hard to sit on any particular pitch. His offspeed stuff is that good.

"He throws them all for strikes. And if you're sitting on the knuckler? Good luck guessing where it's going."

—PHIL MILLER

## Hampton Makes His Presence Known

Righthander **Chase Hampton** didn't stay under the radar for long.

Drafted in the sixth round last year out of Texas Tech, the 22-year-old Hampton entered the season with little fanfare before quickly establishing himself as one of the Yankees' top prospects.

To underscore that point, he earned a promotion to Double-A Somerset in mid June after striking out 77 batters in 47 innings to go with a 2.68 ERA in nine starts for High-A Hudson Valley.

Hampton skipped Low-A Tampa entirely this spring, after he was shut down last summer after New York drafted him.

"I actually wasn't surprised about that," the 6-foot-2, 225-pound Hampton said. "I'm a big competitor, and throughout spring training, that was my goal: to not start out so low."

Now using a pitch mix that's been bolstered by the addition of a cutter and slider, Hampton has blown hitters away with a

well-commanded 93-95 mph fastball.

He didn't use his changeup at all in his June 18 Double-A debut in which he allowed two earned runs in six innings and struck out eight.

"The changeup is really good also," Somerset pitching coach **Grayson Crawford** said. "But the addition of the cutter, the curveball plays to both (batting) hands, the slider is there, and then obviously he has a really good fastball also."

Hampton finds himself on a similar trajectory to righthander Will Warren, the Yankees' 2021 eighth-rounder who quickly ascended to Double-A in 2022.

While Hampton hopes he can climb the ladder just as fast, the fiery Texan said he doesn't want to "play GM" and is focused on the task at hand.

—MIKE ASHMORE

## Estes Thrives With Unique Fastball

There is something different about **Joey Estes**, something that makes scouts sit up in their seats when he pitches.

"His fastball has really good horizontal and vertical movement," Athletics minor league pitching coordinator **Gil Patterson** said. "It's an outlier."

"This guy is way different. Almost nobody else in baseball has that same movement."

That movement, with late run, turns Estes' mid-90s fastball into a weapon. Where it will take him is far from decided, but it has led to a series of good starts for Double-A Midland.

In his first 18 games (15 starts) he put together a 3.43 ERA and 1.10 WHIP. He had 89 strikeouts and 26 walks in 94.1 innings.

"Every time I read a report from (Midland manager) **Bobby Crosby**, he talks about how this kid is competitive," Patterson said. "Everyone is competitive, but he takes it to a different level."

And what is that level?

"He's kind of a maniac on the mound," Crosby said. "He walks around, super energetic. He runs off the mound. I love when he pitches. He's a competitor. He doesn't like to lose or give up a run. He's a guy who I love having on the mound."

"No matter what, he's going to compete and give you his best effort."

The 6-foot-2, 190-pound Estes grew up outside Los Angeles in Lancaster. He went 8-0 with a 0.91 ERA in 2019 as a Paraclete High senior. The Braves selected him in the 16th round. Oakland acquired him in the deal for **Matt Olson** before the 2022 season.

In addition to his outlier fastball, the 21-year-old Estes has a slider and changeup that grade out as average offerings. How those pitches improve will help determine whether he remains a starter or takes his heat to the bullpen.

—CASEY TEFERTILLER

## Rodriguez Learns From A Lost 2022

After a disappointing 2022 season, **Alberto Rodriguez** bounced back in a major way.

The 22-year-old Dominican outfielder was one of the top sluggers in High-A this season, batting .306/.393/.580 with 11 home runs in 72 games with Everett. He moved to Double-A Arkansas in mid July.

"This year, he really did turn a corner, both as a player and as a person," Everett hitting coach **Mike Fransoso** said.

Rodriguez had a breakout 2021 with Low-A Modesto, earning him a spot on the 40-man roster for Rule 5 draft protection.

But the lefthanded hitter struggled in Everett last year, hitting just .261/.336/.396 while seeing his strikeout rate jump to 26%. During the offseason, he was dropped from the 40-man roster.

"Sometimes young players come in and kind of go through the motions and think

they're bulletproof," Fransoso said. "And then you kind of get slapped in the face."

"For some, it's quicker than others. But at some point, I think all the good players realize, 'I've gotta put in the work for what I want' ... And he really took the reins in that."

After falling out of shape in 2022, Rodriguez focused on conditioning last off-season. He also worked to tighten his swing.

"He's a guy who has a lot of moving parts in his swing," Fransoso said. "That's how he moves, that's how he's wired, and it works for him. I think it just got a little out of control."

"So we kind of just reined it in. We made it just a little bit tighter (and) gave him a little bit more margin for error ... And he was able to get to a few more fastballs on the inner part of the plate."

After last year's struggles, Rodriguez has a new outlook.

"He's not chasing numbers," Fransoso said. "He's not chasing a batting average. He's not chasing trying to get promoted. He's really just where his feet are."

—CAMERON VAN TIL

## Isaac Exceeds Expectations At Low-A

When the Rays drafted 6-foot-5, 240-pound first baseman **Xavier Isaac** last year, they faced questions about a player who was viewed as a non-consensus talent at pick No. 29.

A year later, the 19-year-old Isaac has shown there is little reason for concern.

Playing for Low-A Charleston, Isaac has looked very much like the overall hitter the Rays expected him to be and, if anything, the lefthanded hitter has yet to show much of the power expected.

Through his first 69 games, he hit .266/.385/.477 with 10 home runs, 44 walks and 58 strikeouts.

"I think he's been great," Rays scouting director **Chuck Ricci** said. "I think he's controlled the strike zone. He's controlled at-bats, and now he's starting to get into power. I think we're thrilled with the way it's gone."

The Rays had a sense of Isaac's work ethic after he initially worked his way onto scouts' radars as a sophomore at East Forsyth High near Winston-Salem, N.C., then how he battled to overcome a fractured left foot that sidelined him for the summer showcase as a rising senior.

Then they got a firsthand look as he spent the winter working out with organization-mate **Brock Jones** and working on



Xavier Isaac looks very much like the overall hitter the Rays expected when they drafted him 29th overall in 2022.

improving his conditioning, which has made a difference at the plate and at first base.

"X spent a lot of time working in Miami, working out, working on his body, working on his agility. He got himself in really good shape," Rays general manager **Peter Bendix** said. "And it showed in spring training."

"Over the course of the season, we're seeing the hitter develop. He's always had very hitter strong abilities, in addition to the power that's in there. As the season's progressed, he's kind of gotten to a little bit more of that power."

"He's not striking out very much. He's taking his walks. He's hitting the ball hard, and he's making the adjustments over the course of the season."

"Doing that in his first full season at such a young age is really impressive ... I think he's exceeding our expectations at this point."

—MARC TOPKIN

## Stephan Looks Like An Unearthed Gem

Righthander **Josh Stephan** said he has thought about playing a little closer to home, which in the Rangers organization could mean a few locations.

Foremost would be Globe Life Field, which is about 20 minutes from where Stephan grew up in Grand Prairie, Texas. Triple-A Round Rock is about three hours away.

There's also Double-A Frisco, which is roughly 45 minutes from his home. It's also Stephan's latest stop as the 21-year-old ascends the minor league ladder.

To earn the promotion, Stephan recorded a 2.17 ERA with 73 strikeouts and 12 walks in 62.1 innings for High-A Hickory.

The righthander throws strikes as well as anyone in the organization. Through his first 66.2 innings, Stephan had walked just 13 batters.

The Rangers have taken their time with Stephan, who signed out of South Grand Prairie High as an undrafted free agent after the five-round 2020 draft rather than attend Stephen F. Austin. He could have gone to college and developed into a draft prospect, but he wanted to get his career going.

The success traces back to an offseason of introspection.

"I didn't really have a pitching coach," Stephan said. "It was just more of me feeling myself out and what I knew I needed to work on."

"I felt I needed to work on my posture and stride direction, and once I cleaned all

of that stuff up, it helped my zone percentage with all my pitches."

Stephan didn't throw hard in high school, but he quickly added 4-5 mph once the pandemic cleared and he was able to get into the Rangers' program.

"I felt like it was the right decision for me," Stephan said. "It's just holding yourself to a higher standard. I want to be around these guys, and I want to be with the best."

—JEFF WILSON

## Martinez Swings Hard But Now In Control

Shortstop **Orelvis Martinez** could very easily have been set in his ways after hitting 30 home runs as a 20-year-old for Double-A New Hampshire last year.

Instead, after he and the Blue Jays examined the process behind his .203/.286/.446 batting line, they made swing decisions a focal point in Martinez's work.

His new approach was producing better results after a slow start in his repeat of the Eastern League.

"Yeah, 30 homers is a good number, but I think I can do better than that," Martinez said in comments interpreted by New Hampshire teammate **Steward Berroa**.

"I can hit 30 homers with a decent average and be in more situations to hit the ball more than just having 30 homers with a really low average. I'm always open to receive feedback and get better."

The 21-year-old has indeed gotten better after a 7-for-79 (.089) start to the season. Early on, Martinez was making good contact but not seeing results.

In 49 games following that slump, he hit .294/.419/.594 with 13 homers and, perhaps more importantly, 34 walks against 38 strikeouts.

His strikeout percentage of nearly 29% a year ago had shrunk to nearly 21%, while his walk rate climbed from 8% to 14%.

The Blue Jays promoted Martinez to Triple-A Buffalo in mid July.

"Basically, the difference is (that) last season, I was going up there to swing hard and sometimes I got out of control," Martinez said.

"So this year I have the same intent to swing hard, but I've been focused more on control—like, swing hard but more under control. That is getting better."

Martinez split his time on the left side of the diamond, with 32 starts at shortstop and 24 at third base, where he continued to make gains.

—SHI DAVIDI

# ORGANIZATION REPORTS



● Reds outfielder Hector Rodriguez, a 2022 trade deadline acquisition, showed more power than anticipated this season in the Low-A Florida State League.

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**PAGE 38** A minor tweak to his delivery helped the Pirates' Jared Jones keep his average-to-plus stuff in the strike zone more often as he climbed to Triple-A.



### A Melendez Breaks Out After Early Struggles

Through his first nine games of the season, first baseman **Ivan Melendez** had as many hits as he did stints on the injured list: two.

His season—and his professional career, really—had not gone according to plan, but the depth of the 23-year-old's struggles helped get him back on track.

"I was like, 'It can't get any worse at this point,'" Melendez said. "You get to a certain point and you're like, 'You've got what you got, and you go out there and play and tune out all the noise.'"

After that miserable start, Melendez proceeded to be just the type of slugger the D-backs envisioned when they drafted him in the second round in 2022 from Texas.

In 49 games from May 5 to July 9, Melendez hit .298/.364/.667 with 18 homers for High-A Hillsboro, numbers befitting a player who won the BA College Player of the Year award as a senior in 2022.

That earned him a mid-July promotion to Double-A Amarillo.

Melendez's college days left him ill-prepared in one respect: He had never had to deal with failure. But he had heard it was coming, and he wound up leaning on advice he received, including from all-star shortstop **Troy Tulowitzki**, an assistant coach at Texas.

"Tulo and other guys who played in the pros before, they kind of explained the roller-coaster and waves that come with success and failing," Melendez said. "Whenever I would deal with that failure, I'd be like, 'Oh, that's what they're talking about.' It was coming. This game is not easy."

The 6-foot-3, 225-pound Melendez struggled in a 29-game pro debut out of the draft, then went just 2-for-his-first-28 this year, a stretch that included an 11-day absence after being hit by a 95 mph fastball near his left eye on April 21.

Melendez struck out at a near 34% clip at High-A and was continuing to work on his defense, including seeing time at third base.

—NICK PIECRO

### A McCabe Shows Intriguing Power Upside

The Braves have graduated or traded so much prospect talent recently that the organization is light on position talent.

Switch-hitting third baseman **David McCabe**, drafted in the fourth round last year out of Charlotte, is a candidate to help



A dominant fastball allowed the Cubs' Brody McCullough to carve up Low-A hitters and earn a quick promotion.

fill the void.

McCabe blasted 30 home runs over his last two collegiate seasons in Conference USA. Former Braves vice president of scouting **Dana Brown** loved the power he provided from both sides of the plate.

The 23-year-old McCabe got off to a good start in his pro career, hitting his way out of Low-A Augusta after 42 games this season. Through 68 games for Augusta and High-A Rome he hit .272/.385/.473 with 12 home runs, 45 walks and 74 strikeouts.

The 6-foot-3, 230-pound McCabe was drafted as a third baseman, but the Braves acknowledge he might require a move to first base one day. His fielding percentage at the hot corner was a poor .892 this season.

But the Braves drafted McCabe for his power potential. Brown noted at the time that the National League adopting the DH allowed the Braves to think differently.

"A lot of times in the past, because we're a National League team, you would draft guys who you knew could play a position," Brown said.

"Now, you have some flexibility that if you really like the (player's) bat, and he could play a big role in your lineup and hit somewhere between one and six, you may be more interested in that player. With a guy like McCabe, a switch-hitter with power, that is intriguing."

While defensive issues remain, McCabe gives the Braves an exciting power prospect at a time when the system isn't exactly stacked with blue-chip young hitters.

—GABE BURNS

ball and changeup—to play up.

For as great as McCullough's fastball/slider combination can be, the Cubs don't want him to become a two-pitch pitcher. To that end, they've been pushing him to continue to incorporate his curveball and changeup.

"We're trying to improve the shapes on those pitches so he can have a well-rounded arsenal that will help him in the long run," Jacobson said.

—MEGHAN MONTEMURRO

### C Rodriguez Surprises With Newfound Power

When **Hector Rodriguez** joined the Reds at the 2022 trade deadline, he was considered to be a hit-over-power player. The 19-year-old outfielder has started to change perceptions this season.

Rodriguez hit three home runs in each of his first two pro seasons. This season he hit 14 of them through 66 games with Low-A Daytona in the pitcher-friendly Florida State League. He led the league in slugging percentage by nearly 100 points.

"For a smaller guy, he's got incredible strength," Reds vice president of player development **Shawn Pender** said of the 5-foot-8 Rodriguez.

"He's certainly shown that his exit velocities and his raw power were probably better than we projected. Since we've gotten him, he's shown an increase in power."

Rodriguez had a top exit velocity of 110.2 mph this season. That number had been topped by just five Reds players in the major leagues this season.

While his power has taken a big step forward, Rodriguez's batting average had not suffered. The lefthanded hitter was batting .309/.363/.584 with 20 walks and 56 strikeouts.

The Reds acquired Rodriguez last July when they traded **Tyler Naquin** to the Mets. Originally a second baseman, Rodriguez is focusing on center field this season.

"He's not a natural center fielder, so his jumps and reads are still a little raw, but he's showing great improvement," Pender said.

While Rodriguez must improve his outfield instincts, his arm was up to the task. His top throw this season clocked at a well above-average 98.4 mph.

Rodriguez broke out in the first half of the season because of his amplified power. He's more than just a power hitter, and shows an ability to hit for average, good speed and a strong outfield arm.

—DOUG GRAY



## Ritter Shows More Than Just Good Glove

Stellar defense was shortstop **Ryan Ritter's** calling card in 2022 when the Rockies drafted him in the fourth round out of Kentucky.

So far, he's come up with good answers about how much he would hit as a pro.

In 65 games for Low-A Fresno, Ritter hit .305/.405/.606 with 18 home runs. He had a 24.4% strikeout rate and 12.6% walk rate. The Rockies promoted him to High-A Spokane in early July.

"It's above-average power," Rockies assistant farm director **Jesse Stender** said. "It's a hit tool that is emerging and has upside. It's gap-to-gap (power), but he can also put it over the fence."

The 22-year-old Ritter showed the ability to stay inside the ball and not deviate from his plan at the plate by chasing pitches.

After going hitless in three straight games to begin the season, a stretch in which Ritter went 0-for-14 with seven strikeouts, he hit safely in 12 consecutive games.

The Rockies have introduced Ritter to second base, where he made 10 of his 64 starts for Fresno. He has a solid-average arm.

"The hands are quick, the hands are smooth," Stender said. "The feet are maybe a tick behind, but that's just because the hands are so advanced. He's got a good feel defensively."

"He's primarily (a shortstop), but he's been working quite a bit, especially in early work, defensively at second base. He's going to have to play multiple positions, and he can handle them."

—JACK ETKIN



## Talent Runs Deep In Double-A Rotation

Dodgers president of baseball operations **Andrew Friedman** called the pitching staff that started the season at Double-A Tulsa the "deepest and most talented" group he has ever seen in the minor leagues.

"I think up and down the staff there are a great number of guys who are going to pitch in the big leagues for a number of years," Friedman said.

The group didn't stay together for long. Righthanders **Emmet Sheehan** and **Landon Knack** were promoted to Triple-A Oklahoma City in June.

Before he could throw a pitch in Triple-A, Sheehan was called up to Los Angeles and pitched six hitless innings in his debut.



When the Brewers' Jacob Misiorowski commands all of his pitches, it's more often than not lights-out for opponents.

Still in Double-A and dominating hitters were righthanders **Nick Frasso**, **River Ryan**, **Nick Nastrini** and **Kyle Hurt**. Eighty-one games into the season, Drillers pitchers led the Texas League in ERA (4.00), strikeouts and opponent average (.214).

"The first and most obvious thing is ... they're all bringing major league stuff to the table," Friedman said. "All do it in slightly different ways and are at varying stages of their development."

Friedman called the 26-year-old Knack the most advanced of the group with a better handle on some of the "finer points of pitching." But it was the 23-year-old Sheehan who won the race to the majors with "some of the best stuff I've seen in the minor leagues," including a fastball that hitters have found uniquely difficult to hit.

The Dodgers collected the talented group in a variety of ways. None were first-round picks. Just three were even Dodger draft picks—Knack the highest of the trio as a 2020 second-rounder. Nastrini and Sheehan were 2021 draft picks in the fourth and sixth rounds.

Frasso, Hurt and Ryan were acquired in trades with the Blue Jays, Marlins and Padres.

"But them all being in our organization at the same time speaks to our amateur scouting group, our pro scouting department, our player development group and just how talented each of them are and how well they work together."

—BILL PLUNKETT



## Milbrandt Impresses With Stuff, Athleticism

Marlins fans are sure to take notice of what **Glenn Dishman** has to say about 6-foot-2, 190-pound righthander **Karson Milbrandt**.

The Low-A Jupiter pitching coach heaps praise on Milbrandt's makeup. According to Dishman, the 19-year-old is "goofy" and "fun" in the dugout and a great teammate.

But "it's time to work" when Milbrandt gets on the mound.

"Karson has a calmness," Dishman said. "It's his ability to absorb information and implement it in games."

Milbrandt is a Kansas City native whose father **Chad** was briefly a walk-on wide receiver for Northern Iowa. He is an impressive athlete who at one point thought his game would be basketball after making all-district at Liberty (Mo.) High.

In football, he played wide receiver, like his father, as well as safety and kicker. His range on field goals was 40 yards.

Milbrandt was a quick learner who didn't start pitching until his freshman year of high school. The Marlins drafted him in the third round in 2022 and signed him to an overslot \$1.5 million bonus.

"As a kid, you'd have to drag him off the field because he never wanted to stop practicing until whatever he was working on was perfect," Chad Milbrandt said. "That stubbornness was often difficult to deal with as parents, but it has helped him

become successful in baseball."

In 12 starts for Jupiter, Milbrandt recorded a 5.33 ERA with 52 strikeouts and 26 walks in 52.1 innings. The Marlins promoted him to High-A Beloit in early July.

"Karson continues to show he may be a big-time prospect," said Marlins scouting director **DJ Svihihlik**, who compares Milbrandt with former Marlins prospect **Chris Paddack**. "While Karson's command appears shaky on paper, he's learning to harness his new stuff."

"His fastball has exploded, and he's comfortably pitching at 95-98 (mph) with ride. His new spike-curve is developing well, and he has great temperament."

Dishman said Milbrandt throwing his hard curve with downward action "will be key to putting away hitters."

—WALTER VILLA



## Misiorowski Tantalizes With Big-Time Arsenal

The Brewers eased 21-year-old righthander **Jacob Misiorowski** into his first full pro season at Low-A Carolina this spring.

Since then, the 6-foot-7 fireballer has taken off.

The Brewers promoted Misiorowski to High-A Wisconsin in early June and to Double-A Biloxi in mid July. In six Midwest League starts he recorded a 1.90 ERA with 28 strikeouts and 14 walks in 23.2 innings.

That came on the heels of a nine-start stint in the Carolina League, where he recorded a 3.04 ERA in 26.2 innings that included 46 strikeouts and 12 walks.

It was the type of performance Milwaukee hoped for when it went way over slot to sign Misiorowski, a second-rounder last year out of Crowder (Mo.) JC.

"Jacob has been as advertised this year," Brewers vice president of player operations and baseball administration **Tom Flanagan** said. "He developed a great routine at Carolina and has carried that along with him during his first (few) outings for Wisconsin."

Misiorowski's four-seamer has been clocked as high as 102 mph and stands as the best in the Brewers' minor league system. He also possesses the top slider, and when he commands those two pitches, it's more often than not lights out for opposing batters.

Control is another matter. Misiorowski had walked 4.6 per nine innings through 15 starts this season.

A nine-strikeout start of five innings in Misiorowski's penultimate start with

Carolina sent him to Wisconsin with confidence—and greater endurance. After topping out near 50 pitches per start through early May, he had worked up to 86 pitches by the time he reached Double-A.

Every inning moving forward will also represent a new high-water mark for Misiorowski, so expect the Brewers to be judicious with his deployment.

But make no mistake: The expectations are sky high for him.

"The pure stuff is obvious, and he's overmatched a lot of hitters this year," Flanagan said. "He has some big-time weapons in his arsenal, and it's been great to see his progress and watch him grow."

—TODD ROSIAK

### Scott Shines After Delivery Adjustment

**Christian Scott** refined his delivery during a stint on the injured list to open the season.

Since his return in early May, the 24-year-old righthander had been among the most successful pitchers in the Mets' system.

The 2021 fifth-rounder out of Florida recorded a 2.98 ERA with 58 strikeouts and 10 walks in 51.1 innings through his first 11 starts, the final four for Double-A Binghamton.

The 6-foot-4, 215-pound Scott was throwing his fastball in the 94-96 mph range, demonstrating that he can maintain his velocity throughout his outings.

"He has shown the ability to utilize where his fastball plays a lot more than he did in the past," Mets farm director **Kevin Howard** said. "He's obviously shown the ability to throw it there more often."

Howard credited the minor league rehab staff for helping Scott develop a delivery that relies on building momentum with his lower body to maximize velocity instead of rotating his upper half.

Scott has downplayed the sinker he favored in college and gotten results with a mix focused on his four-seam fastball, slider and changeup.

"What I see from him now is, through that whole process, he has learned to get the same amount of velo with less effort on the things that were causing the injury," Howard said. "I really think he's one of those guys where a minor injury turned into a blessing in disguise."

Scott worked as a reliever in college and worked in a hybrid role last season at Low-A St. Lucie and High-A Brooklyn.



The Mets' Christian Scott got results in pro ball with a pitch mix focused on his four-seam fastball, slider and changeup.

"I don't think he's a major surprise," Howard said. "He was a high draft pick for us, and he's shown the big velo in the past and the good stuff."

"It's just a really good job by the rehab group that helped him, and a really good job by our pitching group, especially our Double-A pitching coach **A.J. Sager**, just getting the most out of him."

—MIKE PUMA

### Rojas Gets Results With Improved Swing

Outfielder **Johan Rojas** has long been known for his elite baserunning and outfield defense. But his ultimate success has always hinged on his offense, specifically his ability to get the ball in the air.

The 22-year-old Rojas had a 50% groundball rate for Double-A Reading this season and typically has hovered near 50% since the Phillies signed him out of the Dominican Republic in 2018.

This year, the Phillies decided to try something different. In spring training, Rojas began working with Reading hitting coach **Tyler Henson**.

Henson gave the young righthanded hitter a new hitting program that was centered on one goal: cleaning up his bat path.

"We're trying to get it to be more direct," Henson said. "The whole focus is to turn the barrel the right way. One of his biggest flaws was that his barrel gets too deep in

his swing, behind him, and that's the reason why in the past he's had a super high groundball rate."

Rojas has stuck with it since, and the Phillies were starting to see improvements.

Henson concedes that Rojas isn't where he needs to be yet, but he has seen his line-drive rate jump from 14.8% at Reading in 2022 to 21.4% this year.

Rojas also hit nine home runs in 76 games while batting .306/.361/.484 with 30 stolen bases. The Phillies called him up to big leagues in mid July.

The 5-foot-11, 165-pound Rojas is in the midst of his best season. Henson said he's matured as a hitter.

"Obviously, it's a work in progress," Henson said. "We'll look at video, and when he sees the bad swings, he can identify why. We've dug into his stride length, too, and how it dictates how deep his barrel gets at times. The longer he strides, the deeper his barrel gets."

"But when his swing does break down, he can feel it now. And in the next at-bat he cleans it up."

—ALEX COFFEY

### Tweak Helps Jones Throw More Strikes

Righthander **Jared Jones** takes a small step across his body on the mound and pauses. His left foot rests one step ahead of his right foot, which braces on the rubber.

From the plate, his position is turned slightly, almost closed off toward the hitter. After pausing to get set, Jones begins the process of his delivery.

The step across to start his delivery is a new adjustment for the 22-year-old Jones this year, aimed to get him in a better starting position.

"It's nothing like a drastic change," Jones said. "It's more of just where I'm comfortable. Picking my leg up right from that position leads me straight toward the plate."

Jones had already seen better results. In 10 starts for Double-A Altoona, he posted a 2.23 ERA with 47 strikeouts and 16 walks in 44.1 innings.

That earned him a late-June promotion to Triple-A Indianapolis, where he maintained rates of 30% strikeouts and 10% walks.

The Pirates drafted Jones in the second round of the five-round 2020 draft, signing him for an over-slot \$2.2 million to keep him away from a Texas commitment. The La Mirada (Calif.) High product had the potential to emerge three years down the line.

Jones' fastball sits mid 90s and has hit triple digits. His slider has a chance to be a plus offering, and his changeup has made positive strides this year. His new starting point is aimed at keeping all of that average-to-plus stuff in the strike zone more frequently.

His mentality, which is not new, is to attack the opposing hitters without fear, aiming to throw strikes and get out of the inning quickly.

"I try not to change my mindset too much," Jones said. "I'm a competitor. It's who I am. Just wanting to throw the ball through the catcher. It's really what I've been focused on the most."

—TIM WILLIAMS



### Scott Loves The Art Of Stealing Bases

A few hours after meeting with former Cardinals speedster **Vince Coleman** for a midnight chat about what it takes to steal a base when everyone in the ballpark knows you're going to try, outfielder **Victor Scott II** did just that.

Twice.

In his Futures Game debut, Scott singled and then stole second base easily. Then he snagged third, too.

Through 78 games this season, Scott stole 55 bases in 63 attempts. He has his eyes set on 100.

Scott hit .285/.361/.401 with three

home runs, primarily at High-A Peoria. The Cardinals promoted the 2022 fifth-rounder from West Virginia to Double-A Springfield in late June.

"A lot of guys compete in the box. He competes in the box and always on the basepaths," said **Tink Hence**, Scott's Springfield teammate. "He loves the art of stealing bags . . .

"He feels like each (time he gets on base) he's supposed go out and come back with at least a bag."

In college Scott thought power and run production would be his ticket to the big leagues. He now realizes that stealing bases has put him on the expressway.

The Cardinals were drawn to Scott's athleticism in the draft. St. Louis regularly brought the 22-year-old over for late-inning appearances during big league spring training because he had gained a reputation for reliable defense in minor league camp.

By embracing speed, Scott has worked to make more contact and outrun grounders while not expanding his strike zone. His 9% walk rate and 17% strikeout rate with Peoria reflect that, as did his low flyball rate of 37%.

The night before the Futures Game, Scott met in the hotel lobby with Coleman, who stole 100 bases in a season three times for the Cardinals. They talked about reading pitchers and preparing for their tendencies before getting on base.

Scott showed that he is a quicker learner. He spied a pause in Twins prospect **David Festa's** delivery and was off to the races.

—DERRICK GOOLD



## Lesko Gets Back On Mound After Rehab

The Padres invested heavily in pitching in the 2022 draft.

Supplemental first-round lefthander **Robby Snelling** pitched his way to High-A as a 19-year-old. Second-round righthander **Adam Mazur** met the challenge of starting his career at High-A.

Now, the prize of the class was off and running.

First-round righthander **Dylan Lesko** began his professional career on June 20 in the Arizona Complex League. It wasn't a clean start, but it was a start nonetheless.

After rehabbing from Tommy John surgery for more than a year, Lesko just getting on the mound was a victory for the 15th overall pick out of Buford (Ga.) High.

Lesko recorded only one out—a strikeout—while allowing three runs on two hits



After a yearlong rehab from Tommy John surgery, Padres 2022 first-rounder Dylan Lesko made his pro debut in Arizona.

and a walk. He also threw two wild pitches, but the Padres were happy that he was back and healthy.

"It's been a long 14 months," Padres assistant farm director **Mike Daly** said, "so this is a huge day to celebrate—he being back on the mound and competing."

The Padres signed Lesko, now 19, for \$3.9 million, jumping at the chance to select a player who had been viewed as a potential top-five selection before having surgery in the spring of his senior year.

The organization viewed Lesko as an advanced prep pitcher before the draft, and he throws an exceptional changeup—"a superpower of his," according to Daly—so it's conceivable that he could reach Low-A Lake Elsinore by the end of the season.

"It's mid 90s," Daly said of Lesko's fastball velocity. "It's a bunch of strikes. The feel for the changeup is there. We'll look to build him up from there."

—JEFF SANDERS



## Teng Shows Promise, Needs More Control

**Kai-Wei Teng** has progressed as a pitcher who is effectively wild. For the Taiwanese righthander to become more effective at the highest levels, he probably needs to become a little less wild.

The Giants promoted the 24-year-old Teng from Double-A Richmond to Triple-A Sacramento in mid June.

Teng's numbers in Double-A this season clearly illustrate the promise and the drawbacks. The good: He racked up 68 strikeouts and allowed just 38 hits in 47.1 innings. The bad: Twenty walks combined with 10 hit batters contributed to a 4.75 ERA.

"He's still someone who's trying to figure out how to best repeat his delivery," Richmond pitching coach **Paul Osegueda** said of Teng, who is listed at 6-foot-4, 260 pounds. The Giants acquired Teng from the Twins in the 2019 trade that sent reliever **Sam Dyson** to Minnesota.

Osegueda said Teng possesses "tremendous stuff," beginning with a "free and easy fastball. He can just so effortlessly go to another gear and pump in 97 (mph)—and it looks like he's just throwing it at 50%."

The other three pitches Teng uses are a split-changeup, curveball and slider. "When things are really clicking for him," Osegueda said, "hitters have to worry about so many different pitches."

Osegueda said the Giants have encouraged Teng to rely on his fastball more often.

Osegueda said that in the lower levels of the minor leagues, a pitcher "can throw some offspeed stuff off the plate and you're going to still get those (swings), whereas the more mature hitters are going to start laying off (those pitches) and have better approaches."

Osegueda and the Giants were heartened by Teng's final start with Richmond. On June 14 at Bowie, he worked five shutout innings with five strikeouts and no walks but one hit batsman. He threw a mere 49 pitches.

"For him to be that efficient," Osegueda said, "challenging hitters with his fastball more often and seeing his delivery, just repeating it over and over . . . was fun to see."

—STEVE KRONER

## W Healthy House Quickly Rebuilds Stock

Nearly a year to the day **Brady House's** season ended in 2022, the 20-year-old third baseman earned a promotion to High-A Wilmington.

After a back injury cut short his 2022 season, House was typically playing four days per week this summer. In his first 12 games at High-A, he hit .354/.392/.625 with three home runs for Wilmington.

"He hit one to straightaway center (on June 22) for his first home run with them, but he could have so many more most places," Nationals farm director **De Jon Watson** said.

"I was there last week, and he hit three that would've been out of the park (at Low-A Fredericksburg). One was a double, one was run down (by an outfielder) and the other one was a long single because the baserunner had to hold up."

Watson praised House's work in batting practice, particularly his adjustments at hitting toward the middle of the field and at backspinning the ball.

House, the 11th pick in 2021 out of high school in Georgia, was a sensation in Rookie ball in his draft year and then again early in his full-season debut at Fredericksburg. Through his first 36 games last year, he hit .296/.370/.504 with six homers.

But that's when a back injury—and later a bout with Covid struck—and House's production flat-lined. Back in Fredericksburg to start this season, he hit a strikingly similar .297/.369/.500 with six homers in 36 games. His walk rate rose from 5.9% to 10.1%. His strikeout rate fell from 29.1% to 21.5%.

"I don't think he had a bad year last year," Watson said. "His body just broke down on him."

The Nationals were managing House's workload while he moves from shortstop to third base. The 6-foot-4, 215-pound House has an above-average arm, and he is working with infield coordinator **Cody Ransom** on his new position.

"His reads and jumps are so much better," Watson said. "He's laying out for balls to his left and showing a lot of range when the shortstop is up the middle on a lefthanded hitter. He's scooting well to both sides."

—LACY LUSK

# DEPARTMENTS

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Guardians lefthander Joey Cantillo shined at the Futures Game with a swing-and-miss fastball and three secondary pitches.



MAJORS

# STATE OF THE GAME

Commissioner Rob Manfred and union head Tony Clark weigh in on pressing topics

by KYLE GLASER

**C**ommissioner Rob Manfred and MLB Players Association executive director Tony Clark met the media in Seattle during all-star week. The two touched on a number of topics, including this year's rule changes, the automated ball-strike system and the possibility of an international draft.

## RULES CHANGES

Prior to Manfred's address, league officials provided information sheets detailing the effects of this year's rule changes. Among the highlights:

- Pitch clock: The average nine-inning game is 26 minutes shorter, dropping from 3:04 in 2022 to 2:38 this year.
- Pickoff limits: Stolen base attempts increased from 1.4 per game in 2022 to 1.8 this year. Success rates increased from 75.4% to 79.4%, and the number of pickoff attempts per game dropped from 6.0 to 4.9.
- Shift restrictions: The batting average on balls in play for lefthanded hitters increased by 14 points, from .283 in 2022 to .297 this year. Lefties have seen their BABIP on pulled ground balls (up 40 points) and pulled line drives (up 33 points) increase.

Also of note: attendance had increased 8.1% from 2022 and the average age of a ticket buyer was three years younger, dropping from 46 to 43.

Manfred's opening statement highlighted these points in declaring the rules changes a success.

"The biggest thank you goes to the players," Manfred said. "I understand how important routines are to players. When you say to a professional athlete, 'You've done this a certain way your whole life and we're going to change it because we're going to have a rule change,' that's a big deal. The game's players have adjusted quickly and effectively."

Manfred also singled out umpires for helping implement the changes.

"We had a very challenging year because we had 10 new people on staff. That's a huge number for us in a single year. Combine that with probably the most aggressive set of rule changes in the history of the game. (The umpires) took on all these new responsibilities and they've done a heck of a job in terms of managing the game, avoiding confrontation and using discretion in places where it's necessary and appropriate to avoid problems."

During his address, Clark voiced a desire for "a few more seconds" to be added to the pitch clock for the postseason. Manfred said he would hold discussions with the MLBPA about altering the rules for the postseason but noted that he and the league are satisfied with the status quo.

League officials noted there have been an average of 7.4 seconds remaining on the pitch clock with runners on base and 6.6 seconds remaining with the bases empty when pitches are delivered, suggesting additional time is not needed. The rate of pitch clock violations has dropped over time, and 60% of games had no pitch clock violations at all.

## THE AUTOMATED BALL-STRIKE SYSTEM

MLB has continued to experiment with the use of an automated ball-strike system, colloquially known as robo umps, in the minor leagues. At



ABOVE LEFT: Players' union head Tony Clark chats with Paul Goldschmidt during the Cardinals' series in London.



LEFT: Commissioner Rob Manfred.

pick compensation for free agents in return.

The sides exchanged proposals on an international draft but could not come to terms. Clark said that despite the union's willingness to negotiate, he is not in favor of an international draft.

"We don't believe an international draft is necessary," Clark said. "We believe ... that attention being given to some of the challenges that otherwise exist would be beneficial, such that pounding the (table) on 'draft, draft, draft' is not necessarily the answer."

Clark has previously expressed his opposition to all drafts.

"I've gone on the record and I have no problem offering it here: I'm not a fan of the draft," Clark said. "Not an international draft, not a domestic one ..."

"The idea that we're simply going to drop a draft in the international markets without certain things being addressed, including the value proposition associated, including the infrastructure around it that would otherwise need to be in place to make sure that those players are protected ..."

"All of those things were part of what we proposed back, and there wasn't much interest in engaging on the things that we thought needed to be a part of that equation."

"As with any number of issues, it's going to take two to tango." ■

## INTERNATIONAL DRAFT

MLB and the MLBPA engaged in negotiations for an international draft last season as a spill-over from the 2022 CBA, with the league offering the elimination of the qualifying offer and draft

MINORS

## FUTURES GAME SUPERLATIVES

The sharpest tools by the top prospects in this year's exhibition

by GEOFF PONTES

**T**he Futures Game took place on July 8 in Seattle.

Futures Game MVP Nasim Nuñez of the Marlins hit a three-run double to lock up the 5-0 victory for the National League. Offense was subdued overall in this year's game. There were just 11 total hits—including two for extra bases—and five runs.

Brewers righthander Jacob Misirowski was the data standout of this game. He hit 100 mph 10 times and threw 11 of the 12 hardest pitches. Red Sox righthander Luis Guerrero was the only other pitcher to hit 100 mph. While Misirowski easily locked up the best fastball superlative, a number of other Futures Gamers also opened eyes.

### BEST PLAYER

#### Nasim Nuñez

SS, Marlins

The 22-year-old middle infielder came to the plate once and connected for an RBI double that plated three runs. While an unlikely hero, Nuñez came through in a clutch moment to deliver a death blow to the American League's chances of mounting a comeback.

### BEST HITTER

#### Colt Keith

3B, Tigers

The 21-year-old was one of the hottest hitters in the minor leagues entering the break, and that didn't stop at the Futures Game. Keith connected for a single in the fourth inning and then walked in the sixth, getting on base twice without making an out.

### BEST POWER

#### Brady House

3B, Nationals

The 20-year-old House showed his ability to impact the ball before the game in batting practice and then reinforced that fact during the game by hitting a 104.2 mph single off Blue Jays righthander Sem Robberse. This was the hardest hit non-out of the game, and it came during an inning when the National League scored three runs.



In what has been a major rebound season, Nationals third baseman Brady House showed his impressive raw power, especially in batting practice.

### BEST BATTING PRACTICE

#### Brady House

3B, Nationals

What a difference a year has made for House. Drafted 11th overall out of high school in 2021, House tailed off dramatically in 2022 as he contended with a back injury and a bout of Covid, but he has returned to health this season and has impressed. During the Futures Game BP session, no player matched House's power output—he slugged eight home runs. At one point during his first round of BP, House hit a home run on three consecutive swings. He didn't cheat any of his home runs over the wall, either. He hit multiple home runs into the upper deck.

### BEST DEFENSIVE PLAY

#### Jonatan Clase

OF, Mariners

The 21-year-old Clase made a diving catch in the top of the second inning to rob Justin Crawford of a hit with the bases loaded. Clase showed off his 70-grade speed as he motored forward to make the play.

### BEST ARM

#### Drew Gilbert

OF, Astros

The former Tennessee star and 2022 first-rounder made a number of tremendous throws from center field during outfield warm-ups. He showed excellent carry and strength on his throws without overthrowing the intended target.

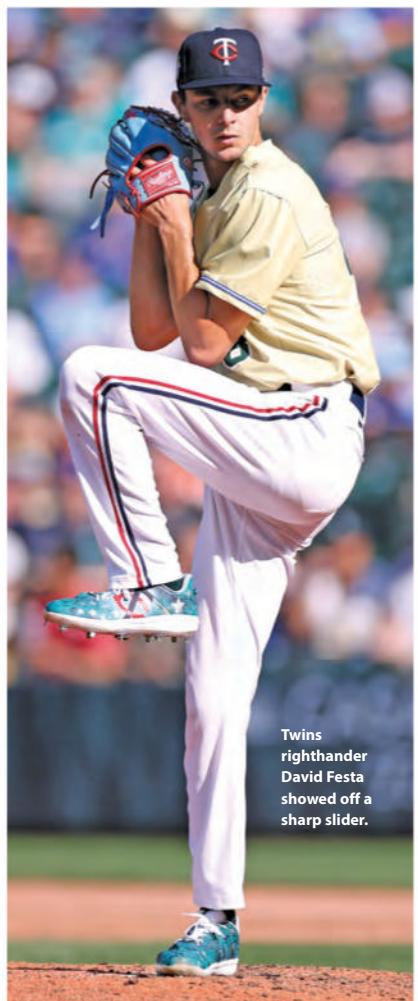
### BEST PITCHER

#### Joey Cantillo

LHP, Guardians

Going to a pitcher for five outs in the Futures Game is rare, but Cantillo did it in style. His fastball topped out at 97.9 mph, which was his season high, and he generated four of his five whiffs with the pitch.

Cantillo used four pitches—his four-seam fastball, slider, changeup and curveball—and threw 24 pitches total. Cantillo came on for Will Klein in the top of the second inning, striking out two and walking one. He allowed no hits or runs in 1.2 innings.



## BEST FASTBALL

### Jacob Misiorowski

RHP, Brewers

Misiorowski's fastball was electric. The 21-year-old hit 102.4 mph and touched 100 mph a total of 10 times during his inning of work. His fastball generated three whiffs on seven swings, and his softest fastball of the game was still harder than all but one fastball—Luis Guerrero also hit 100—by any other pitcher.

## BEST BREAKING PITCH

### David Festa

RHP, Twins

Festa threw his slider four times during his inning and generated three whiffs on three swings. The 23-year-old must have had the scouting report on Jackson Chourio—he threw him nothing but sliders, striking out the Brewers' top prospect on three pitches.

## BEST CHANGEUP

### Carson Whisenhunt

LHP, Giants

This award likely comes as no surprise to those who saw Whisenhunt prior to the Futures Game. He possesses a truly dominant changeup, and the pitch performed as intended, generating two whiffs on two swings. The 22-year-old generated a left-on-left whiff against his changeup when he got Orioles shortstop Jackson Holliday to swing through an 81.8 mph change that generated 17 inches of armside run. ■

## National League 5, American League 0

Futures Game | T-Mobile Park, Seattle | July 8

### NATIONAL LEAGUE

#### Player, Pos

	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO
Pete Crow-Armstrong, CF	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
a-Victor Scott II, DH	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Jordan Lawlar, SS	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
b-Jackson Merrill, SS	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jackson Chourio, LF	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
James Wood, RF	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Yanqui Fernandez, RF	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Noelvi Marte, 3B	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Brady House, 3B	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Endy Rodriguez, 1B	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
BJ Murray Jr., 1B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Jackson Quero, C	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Dalton Rushing, C	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ryan Bliss, 2B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nasim Nuñez, 2B	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	0
Justin Crawford, DH-CF	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>

a-Singled for Crow-Armstrong in the fifth.

b-Popped out for Lawlar in the fifth.

### BATTING

TB : Fernandez; House; Nuñez 2; Quero; Scott II.

SF : Crawford.

Team RISP : 2-for-9. Team LOB : 5.

### BASERUNNING

SB : Marte (1, third base off Klein/Ford); Scott II (2, second base and third base off Festa/Quero); Nuñez (1, third base off Zulueta/Quero).

### FIELDING

E : PB: Quero (1).

Pitcher	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR	NP
Mick Abel (W)	1.0	1	0	0	0	2	0	23
Tink Henc	1.0	1	0	0	1	1	0	24
Carson Whisenhunt	1.0	1	0	0	0	2	0	10
Jacob Misiorowski	1.0	1	0	0	0	3	0	18
Spencer Schwellenbach	1.0	1	0	0	0	2	0	13
JP Massey	1.0	0	0	0	3	1	0	27
Mike Vasil	0.1	0	0	0	1	1	0	8
Patrick Monteverde	0.2	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>128</b>

### AMERICAN LEAGUE

#### Player, Pos

	AB	R	H	2B	3B	HR	RBI	BB	SO
Jonatan Clase, CF	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Spencer Jones, CF	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Marcelo Mayer, SS	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jackson Holliday, SS	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Kyren Paris, SS	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Heston Kjerstad, RF	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Drew Gilbert, RF	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Harry Ford, C	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
a-Edgar Quero, C	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lawrence Butler, LF	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Junior Caminero, 3B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
b-Colt Keith, 3B	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tyler Soderstrom, 1B	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Justyn-Henry Malloy, DH	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Nick Yorke, 2B	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>

a-Grounded into a forceout for Ford in the third.

b-Singled for Caminero in the fourth.

### BATTING

TB: Gilbert; Keith; Kjerstad; Mayer; Soderstrom; Yorke 2.

Team RISP: 0-for-8. Team LOB : 10.

### BASERUNNING

SB: Mayer (1, second base off Abel/Quero).

Pitcher	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO	HR	NP
Owen White	1.0	0	0	0	0	1	0	8
Will Klein (L)	0.1	1	2	2	2	0	0	20
Joey Cantillo	1.2	0	0	0	1	2	0	24
Jonathan Cannon	1.0	0	0	0	1	1	0	15
David Festa	1.0	1	0	0	0	1	0	19
Sem Robberse	0.1	2	2	2	0	1	0	9
Yosver Zulueta	0.2	1	1	1	0	2	0	21
Clayton Beeter	0.2	0	0	0	0	1	0	9
Luis Guerrero	0.1	0	0	0	0	1	0	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>130</b>

COLLEGE

# TEAM ABOVE SELF

## Coach of the Year

### Jay Johnson

got his star-studded LSU squad to commit to a total team effort—and it paid off with a championship

by TEDDY CAHILL



**T**he buzz around the 2023 LSU Tigers built steadily over the course of last summer.

Louisiana State was a 40-win team in 2022 and was returning outfielder Dylan Crews, the Southeastern Conference co-player of the year and the early favorite to be the first overall pick in the 2023 draft. No one was ever going to overlook them.

Over the course of two months, coach Jay Johnson kept adding piece after piece to the team. All-Americans Paul Skenes and Tommy White transferred in. The Tigers brought in the top-ranked transfer and traditional recruiting classes. Draft-eligible players like Cade Beloso and Ty Floyd decided to return for another season in Baton Rouge.

Johnson hired Wes Johnson, then the pitching coach for the Twins, and Josh Jordan, the 2018 Assistant Coach of the Year, to replace Dan Fitzgerald (Kansas) and Jason Kelly (Washington), who had both been hired away to be head coaches.

When the dust settled at the beginning of August and the players began returning to campus, the hype only intensified. LSU was the clear choice as the No. 1 team in the preseason. At the team's preseason banquet, alum Alex Bregman introduced Johnson and charged him with winning the 2023 national championship. This was what Johnson's success as a recruiter and the built-in lofty standards of one of the sport's biggest brands had wrought.

Having built the monster, Johnson now had to manage it through a challenging five-month season. Many wondered how he could keep everyone happy when there were still just 27 outs a game and nine spots in the batting order to go around. Others questioned how the Tigers would handle the losses that are inevitable in a baseball season, losses that might test the team's bonds and ratchet up the noise in Baton Rouge and beyond.

In the end, the 2023 season was largely drama-free for LSU. The Tigers ranked No. 1 in the first 12 iterations of the Top 25, the longest such streak to start a season in a decade. They lost just two series and had only one losing week—the SEC Tournament.

Players were moved in and out of the lineup and the rotation without public complaint. While many questions were raised outside the locker room about the quality and depth of the team's pitching staff, the Tigers stuck together and in Omaha proved just how good they were by holding opponents to six total runs in four must-win games.

As well as Johnson recruited and organized the Tigers' player development for the 2023 season, he also deftly managed the team's chemistry and makeup. With LSU executing in all phases, it went on to win the national championship—the program's seventh and first since 2009—in Johnson's second season as head coach.

For those reasons and more, Johnson is our College Coach of the Year. He is the third LSU coach to win the award, joining Skip Bertman (1986 and 1996) and Paul Mainieri (2009). LSU is the first program to have three different men win the award in its 43 seasons of existence.



Johnson, 46, has long been known as an elite recruiter, dating back to his days as an assistant coach at San Diego. His ability to build a team as talented as the 2023 Tigers was just the latest example of that prowess.

Johnson's skill as a motivator and team builder has typically flown more under the radar, but it was evident throughout this season. Managing a team that had 13 players drafted and the top-ranked recruiting class required a deft touch. Johnson laid the foundation for getting the Tigers to buy in early.

He said that started with getting strong leadership from players like Crews and ace Paul Skenes.

"The first phase was player leadership," Johnson said. "Foundational, we always place the needs of the team above our own. It was more than a saying. I felt like the team lived that out. The other thing that I think we tried to do was when we set goals, we talked about being selfless."

Johnson also tapped into LSU's history, showing the team examples of times when players had to wait before getting their own star turns. Warren Morris, for instance, redshirted in 1993 before developing into an All-American. In 2009, Austin Nola and Mikie Mahtook weren't starters at the beginning of the season but played their way into the lineup and helped LSU win the national championship.

The 2023 team has its own versions of those stories that future Tigers will undoubtedly hear, such as Gavin Guidry starting the year expecting to play infield, only to end up on the mound to get the final out of the College World Series, or the way catchers Alex Milazzo and Hayden Travinski traded off games behind the plate down the stretch.

"For us to win a championship we had to do the same kind of things (as Morris or the 2009 team)," Johnson said. "The concept of team was greater than self throughout the entire year. It happened, that's who we were."

"They emulated team above self and placed the team above their own selves all year."

Johnson also worked to get the team to jell in their own way. The Tigers were a loose bunch all season, often showing a lighter side and a genuine enjoyment of playing with each other.

Skenes, who was named College Player of the Year, warmed up on the days that he pitched wearing a T-shirt with a picture of one of his teammates on the front. In Omaha, White gifted a Buzz Lightyear jersey to Josh Pearson, who some Tigers thought bore a resemblance to the "Toy Story" character, and he wore it to practice.

Johnson said establishing that kind of bond is critical to a team's success.

"I really want players to be themselves, but to become a team," he said. "For them to develop as a team, they have to be together. So part of that, they have to take ownership in. So, if you let them be themselves, obviously within reason, with class and character and all those types of things, I've always just found the buy-in goes up tremendously."

It worked with the Tigers. They felt the support from Johnson and the coaching staff throughout the season.

"He's behind us 100% every day," White said. "He's an awesome coach. I couldn't ask for a better one."

While Johnson is relatively young—he was the third-youngest coach in the SEC—he's been building to this point for nearly his whole life. He grew up in Oroville, a small town in Northern California, where his father Jerry was a high school teacher and coached track and football. In the 1980s, when Jay was growing up, the Oroville track team went undefeated in dual meets for seven straight years.

While Johnson dreamed of being like the speedy running backs his father coached in football, he eventually found his athletic home on the diamond. He played at Shasta (Calif.) JC before transferring to Point Loma Nazarene, then an NAIA school.

When his playing career ended, he moved straight into coaching. Scott Sarver, who took over the Point Loma program before Johnson's senior season, offered Johnson his first job as a coach and he stayed at his alma mater after graduating.

"Becoming a coach was really the only option," Johnson said. "I'm addicted to winning. I'm addicted to developing programs and helping players achieve their goals. It was just the route that it was going to be."

Sarver gave Johnson a lot of leeway, especially for a coach who had just finished college. He let Johnson jump right into numerous aspects of running a program, setting him on the fast track.

"He gave me a chance right away, making me the recruiting coordinator, running the offense, planning practice," Johnson said. "I had amazing autonomy to learn and make mistakes."

Johnson was an assistant coach for four seasons before he was promoted to head coach in 2005. He spent one year in the role, going 37-16, before joining Rich Hill's staff at San



Diego. Johnson says getting to work with Hill was his biggest break, and he spent eight years on staff at USD. The Toreros made the NCAA Tournament five times in those eight seasons and Johnson recruited players like Kris Bryant and Connor Joe.

From USD, Johnson was hired as the head coach at Nevada. After two seasons, including a Mountain West Conference title in 2015, he was hired away by Arizona. He took the Wildcats to the CWS finals in his first season, losing the finals in three games to Coastal Carolina.

Johnson spent six years at Arizona and took the Wildcats back to Omaha in 2021. After that season, with Mainieri retiring, LSU was looking for a new coach. That search ultimately led athletic director Scott Woodward to Johnson.

In Johnson's first season, LSU went 40-22 and flipped its SEC record from 13-17 to 17-13. But the Tigers lost in the final game of the Hattiesburg Regional to Southern Mississippi. In the wake of that loss, Johnson went to work on the 2023 team, calling Skenes, who had just entered the transfer portal from Air Force. It was only the beginning of a whirlwind year that ended with the Tigers dogpiling in Omaha.

Looking back on it all, Johnson said what he'll remember the most from the 2023 Tigers is not their talent, though they became the

first program ever to produce the first and second picks of the draft when Skenes and Crews were selected back-to-back by the Pirates and Nationals, or any specific win. Instead, he said what stands out the most to him is the team's consistency. From the time they first gathered as a team last August until they hoisted the trophy at the end of June, the Tigers built a team that wouldn't be denied, overcoming every obstacle thrown in their path.

"The consistency of the team being who they needed to be, when they needed to be," Johnson said. "It was phenomenal. It was so much more than talent. We lost a lot of talent. We had four major pitching injuries. We shifted the lineup throughout the season, and it didn't seem to matter. The self-discipline to play near our potential often throughout the year, keep our head in the right place and our heart in the right place all the time."

Johnson's ability to engineer that consistency, both through recruiting and development is a big part of why he's been successful throughout his career and especially so in 2023. And it's why the Tigers are feeling good about their future with him at the program's helm.

"This program is so lucky to have coach Jay Johnson," Beloso said. "He's not stopping, I promise that." ■

**Jay Johnson guided Louisiana State to the program's seventh national championship. He joins Skip Bertman and Paul Mainieri as LSU Coach of the Year winners.**

DRAFT

# THREE KEY THEMES

The 2023 draft will likely be remembered for the quality of the top five picks, plus two other Day One trends

by CARLOS COLLAZO

## 1. CHALK UP TOP

All year we heard the same five names at the top of the board: Dylan Crews, Paul Skenes, Wyatt Langford, Walker Jenkins and Max Clark.

As it played out, each of the top five players were selected among the top five picks, making the 2023 draft similar to the 2019 class, which was notable for its top six: Adley Rutschman, Bobby Witt Jr., Andrew Vaughn, JJ Bleday, CJ Abrams and Riley Greene.

Teams drafting at the top didn't play games and simply took the best available talent. That seems to be the way the industry operates when there's a standout group at the top of the draft.

The first five picks went like this: Skenes (Pirates), Crews (Nationals), Clark (Tigers), Langford (Rangers) and Jenkins (Twins).

In fact, with just two exceptions, every player selected among the first 30 picks ranked inside the top 45 of the BA 500 draft ranking. Astros first-rounder Brice Matthews, a Nebraska shortstop, went 28th but ranked No. 57, and Mariners supplemental first-rounder Tai Peete, a Georgia high school shortstop, went 30th but ranked No. 99.

Once the anticipation of who the Pirates were taking at No. 1 was resolved, it was mostly an expected group of players picked in the first round. Perhaps that's simply what happens when the industry is picking from one of the best draft classes in years.

## 2. A RECORD YEAR FOR FIRST-ROUND SHORTSTOPS

One of the biggest strengths of the 2023 class was the quantity of up-the-middle hitters, especially at shortstop.

On both the college and high school side, there were many players who had the bats to go in the first round and the defensive profiles to project for well-rounded profiles.

In fact, according to our partners at Pramana, the 10 shortstops who were drafted among the top 28 picks tied 2021 for the most shortstops selected within that range of any draft.

The top college shortstops were drafted first: Jacob Wilson (Athletics, sixth overall), Tommy Troy (D-backs, 12th), Matt Shaw (Cubs, 13th), Jacob Gonzalez (White Sox, 15th) and Brayden Taylor (Rays, 19th).

Then the preps followed: Arjun Nimmala (Blue Jays, 20th), Colt Emerson (Mariners,

22nd), George Lombard Jr. (Yankees, 26th) and Aidan Miller (Phillies, 27th). The Astros chose Matthews 28th, as noted above.

Granted, three players listed here—Troy, Taylor and Miller—actually played third base for most of the spring but were simply announced as shortstops.

Other shortstops like Shaw, Gonzalez and Nimmala have at least a reasonable amount of risk to move off the position as they mature.

## 3. A 44-YEAR DRAFT STREAK COMES TO AN END

While the depth of offensive talent up the middle was a clear strength of the 2023 class, the college lefthander demographic was a notable weakness.

In fact, we wondered earlier this spring whether a college lefthander would be selected in the first round in order to keep alive a 44-year draft streak.

That didn't happen.

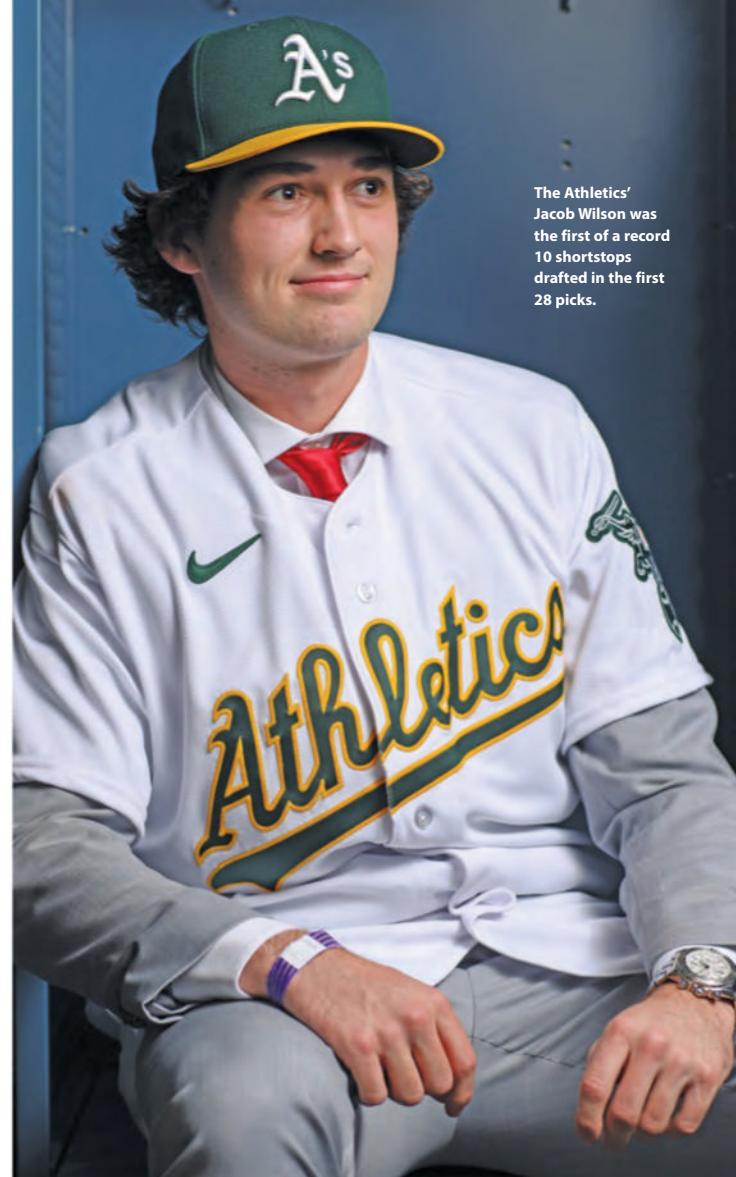
Not a single lefthanded pitcher—college or high school—was drafted in the first round, with No. 19 prospect Thomas White, a Massachusetts prep, being the first southpaw selected when the Marlins chose him in the supplemental first round at No. 35 overall.

Lefthanded pitching is a commodity in any draft because southpaws are so hard to find in the general population, and then harder still to find with comparable stuff to righthanders on the mound.

Kent State lefthander Joe Whitman seemed to be the late favorite to maintain the streak of college lefthanders going in the first round, and he sounded like a potential fit in the back of the first leading up to the draft. He fell to the second round when the Giants chose him with pick No. 69. He was the fifth of five total lefthanders drafted on Day One.

White went first at pick 35, followed by Wake Forest's Sean Sullivan (Rockies, 46th overall), Rhode Island prep Alexander Clemmey (Guardians, 58th), Clemson's Caden Grice (D-backs, 64th) and Whitman at pick 69.

Another draft record was set this year when Noble Meyer, a righthander from Oregon, was the only high school pitcher drafted in the first round. According to Pramana, that is the new record for the fewest number of high school arms in a first round. ■



The Athletics' Jacob Wilson was the first of a record 10 shortstops drafted in the first 28 picks.

## 2023 FIRST ROUND RESULTS

No.	Team	Player	Pos	School	Source	State
1.	Pirates	Paul Skenes	RHP	Louisiana State	4YR	LA
2.	Nationals	Dylan Crews	OF	Louisiana State	4YR	LA
3.	Tigers	Max Clark	OF	Franklin Community HS	HS	IN
4.	Rangers	Wyatt Langford	OF	Florida	4YR	FL
5.	Twins	Walker Jenkins	OF	South Brunswick HS	HS	NC
6.	Athletics	Jacob Wilson	SS	Grand Canyon	4YR	AZ
7.	Reds	Rhett Lowder	RHP	Wake Forest	4YR	NC
8.	Royals	Blake Mitchell	C	Sinton HS	HS	TX
9.	Rockies	Chase Dollander	RHP	Tennessee	4YR	TN
10.	Marlins	Noble Meyer	RHP	Jesuit HS	HS	OR
11.	Angels	Nolan Schueler	1B	Florida Atlantic	4YR	FL
12.	D-backs	Tommy Troy	SS	Stanford	4YR	CA
13.	Cubs	Matt Shaw	SS	Maryland	4YR	MD
14.	Red Sox	Kyle Teel	C	Virginia	4YR	VA
15.	White Sox	Jacob Gonzalez	SS	Mississippi	4YR	MS
16.	Giants	Bryce Eldridge	RHP/1B	Madison HS	HS	VA
17.	Orioles	Enrique Bradfield Jr.	OF	Vanderbilt	4YR	TN
18.	Brewers	Brock Wilken	3B	Wake Forest	4YR	NC
19.	Rays	Brayden Taylor	SS	Texas Christian	4YR	TX
20.	Blue Jays	Arjun Nimmala	SS	Strawberry Crest HS	HS	FL
21.	Cardinals	Chase Davis	OF	Arizona	4YR	AZ
22.	Mariners	Colt Emerson	SS	Glenn HS	HS	OH
23.	Guardians	Ralph Velazquez	C	Huntington Beach HS	HS	CA
24.	Braves	Hurston Waldrep	RHP	Florida	4YR	FL
25.	Padres	Dillon Head	OF	Homewood Flossmoor HS	HS	IL
26.	Yankees	George Lombard Jr.	SS	Gulliver Prep	HS	FL
27.	Phillies	Aidan Miller	SS	Mitchell HS	HS	FL
28.	Astros	Brice Matthews	SS	Nebraska	4YR	NE

**Note:** The Mets and Dodgers had their first-round picks pushed back 10 places for exceeding the competitive balance tax threshold by more than \$40 million. The Mets drafted Georgia high school shortstop Colin Houck with pick No. 32, while the Dodgers selected Texas high school shortstop Kendall George with pick No. 36.

# Scout Spotlight

SCOUTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS. THE PLAYERS. THE JOURNEY. THE STATE OF THE GAME.

## REDS SCOUT WINS BIG BY SIGNING UNSUNG ELLY

by KYLE GLASER

**R**ichard Jimenez has made a habit of unearthing under-the-radar players in his nearly 14 years of scouting for the Reds. Jimenez signed Jose Siri, Aristides Aquino, Wandy Peralta and Dauri Moreta all for less than \$125,000 out of the Dominican Republic when few other teams were interested.

Those signings set the stage for Jimenez's greatest coup of all: signing Elly De La Cruz for \$65,000 in 2018 as a rail-thin 16-year-old who few teams even knew about.

"(Our scouts) took me to Carlos 'Niche' Batista's academy and they put a workout together," said Jimenez, who was then the Reds' director of Latin American scouting.

"Elly De La Cruz wasn't a part of it because he was too weak. He was in a development program. But his trainer Niche . . . approached me and told me, 'Hey man, I got this kid, he's still weak, but he knows how to play and he's an athlete.' So I said, 'Put him in there.'

"Elly ran a 6.9 (60-yard dash time in seconds), had loose actions at shortstop, but what really caught my attention was how twitchy he was. He had so much energy at the plate."

De La Cruz hit a liner to drive home the winning run that day. Jimenez called De La Cruz over after the game, talked to him for 10-15 minutes and, based on just that one-day look, called his superiors and got the approval to sign him.

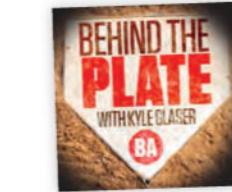
"He wasn't ready to participate in workouts because he was so skinny," Jimenez said. "But the way he played—his actions—it was like, there's opportunity here."

De La Cruz blossomed even more than Jimenez could have predicted.

He got stronger, maintained those same actions and energy. He made his pro debut in the Dominican Summer League in 2019 but didn't make much of a ripple.

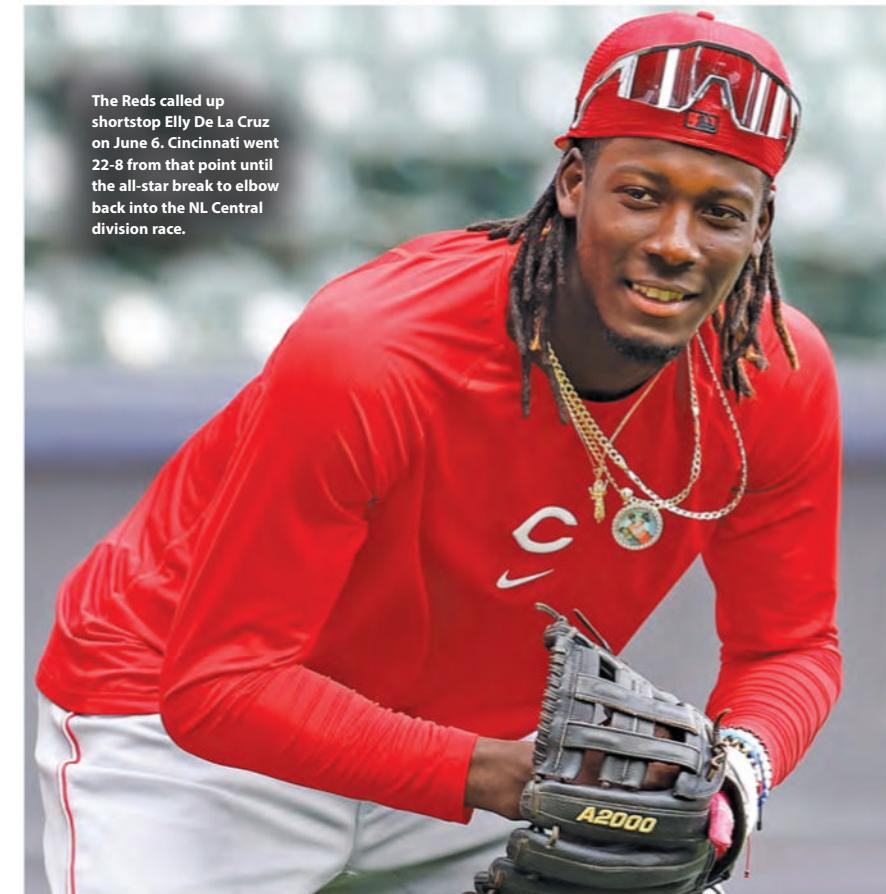
De La Cruz took advantage of pandemic downtime in 2020 to build up his physique. When he got back on the field in the Arizona Complex League in June 2021, he looked like a different player.

Then 19, De La Cruz earned a promotion to Low-A Daytona after hitting .400 with 11 extra-base hits in 11 ACL games. Scouts raved about his power, speed, arm strength and overall baseball IQ.



### LISTEN NOW!

Scan the QR code to listen to Richard Jimenez on the "Behind The Plate" podcast and hear more about how the Reds signed Elly De La Cruz



JOHN FISHER/GETTY IMAGES

He entered 2022 ranked as the No. 77 prospect in baseball—and just kept getting better. He hit 28 home runs and stole 47 bases in a season split between High-A and Double-A.

This season De La Cruz became one of the top prospects in baseball before earning his first big league callup in June.

Already, his electrifying skill set has made him the face of the Reds' youth movement and

one of baseball's most recognizable young stars.

If not for Jimenez being willing to take a chance, De La Cruz's rise may never have happened in Cincinnati.

"In a humble way, you have to be like, 'I was there, and God gave me the ability to be aggressive,'" Jimenez said.

"I credit all my guys who worked there. I'm thankful man. I'm enjoying his career." ■

### MLB DEBUTS WITH THEIR SIGNING SCOUTS

We highlight the scouts who signed this year's major league debuts, with this installment covering the period June 16 to July 15.

Player, Pos.	Debut	Team	Signing Scout(s)
Emmet Sheehan, RHP	June 16	Dodgers	John Pyle
Matt Krook, LHP	June 16	Yankees	Larry Casian (Giants)
Carmen Mlodzinski, RHP	June 16	Pirates	Cam Murphy
Zach Remillard, 2B	June 17	White Sox	Kevin Burrell
Samad Taylor, OF	June 17	Royals	Mike Bradford (Guardians)
Kolton Ingram, LHP	June 17	Angels	Bryson Barber (Tigers)
Bryan Hudson, LHP	June 17	Dodgers	Stan Zieliński (Cubs)
Jacob Amaya, SS	June 18	Marlins	Dennis Moeller (Dodgers)
Jordan Balazovic, RHP	June 18	Twins	Walt Burrows
Spencer Horwitz, 1B	June 18	Blue Jays	Coulson Barbiche
Connor Kaiser, SS	June 19	Rockies	Jerry Jordan (Pirates)
Shawn Dubin, RHP	June 19	Astros	Travis Coleman
Grant Hartwig, RHP	June 19	Mets	Chris Heidt/Moises De La Mota
Henry Davis, OF	June 19	Pirates	Adam Bourassa
Jose Rodriguez, 2B	June 20	White Sox	Ruddy Moreta
David Hamilton, SS	June 21	Red Sox	K.J. Hendricks (Brewers)
Gavin Williams, RHP	June 21	Guardians	Pete Loizzo
Brandon Walter, LHP	June 22	Red Sox	Reed Gragnani
Nick Gonzales, 2B	June 23	Pirates	Derrick Van Dusen
Matt Waldron, RHP	June 24	Padres	Kyle Bamberger (Guardians)
Randy Wynne, RHP	June 25	Reds	Greg Baker

Jordan Westburg, 3B	June 26	Orioles	David Jennings
Jake Wong, RHP	June 26	Reds	Chuck Hensley (Giants)
James McArthur, RHP	June 28	Royals	Mike Stauffer
Jared Triolo, 3B	June 28	Pirates	Wayne Mathis
Amos Willingham, RHP	June 28	Nationals	Eric Robinson
Alec Marsh, RHP	June 30	Royals	Kenny Muñoz
Victor Mederos, RHP	June 30	Angels	K.J. Hendricks
Clayton Andrews, LHP	July 1	Brewers	Dan Huston
Jose Ferrer, LHP	July 1	Nationals	Moises De La Mota
Chris Vallimont, RHP	July 3	Orioles	Alex Smith (Marlins)
Daniel Palencia, RHP	July 4	Cubs	Juan Carlos Villanueva/Argenis Paez (Athletics)
Dane Myers, OF	July 4	Marlins	Matt Lea (Tigers)
Colton Cowser, OF	July 5	Orioles	Thom Dreier
Justin Martinez, RHP	July 7	D-backs	Cesar Geronimo/Jose Ortiz
Angel Felipe, RHP	July 7	Athletics	Miguel Richardson/Daniel Santana (Rays)
Isaiah Campbell, RHP	July 7	Mariners	Ben Collman
Kyle Leahy, RHP	July 7	Cardinals	Mauricio Rubio
Jose Fermin, 2B	July 7	Cardinals	Ramon Peña/Erick Nivar (Guardians)
Dominic Canzone, OF	July 8	D-backs	Jeremy Kehrt
Abner Uribe, RHP	July 8	Brewers	Elvis Cruz
Tyler Soderstrom, C	July 14	Athletics	Kevin Mello
Zack Gelfof, 2B	July 14	Athletics	Tripp Faulk
Robert Garcia, LHP	July 14	Marlins	Josh Hallgren (Royals)
Trey Cabbage, OF	July 14	Angels	Alan Sandberg (Twins)
Johan Rojas, OF	July 15	Phillies	Carlos Salas
Alek Jacob, RHP	July 15	Padres	Justin Baughman

## In Memoriam

### TOP PICK MIKE IVIE OVERCAME MENTAL BLOCK TO REACH MLB

Being the first overall pick in the draft carries expectations that sometimes shadow a player's career.

Mike Ivie reached the major leagues young, played in parts of 11 seasons and once hit 27 home runs in a season while playing half his games in San Francisco's Candlestick Park.

Ivie also was the No. 1 pick in the 1970 draft by the Padres as a high school catcher from Atlanta. He had a powerful righthanded bat and, according to Hall of Fame catcher Johnny Bench, the softest hands behind the plate.

Padres scouting director Bob Fontaine Sr. is quoted in BA's Ultimate Draft Book as saying that Ivie "could have caught at the major league level the day we signed him. He was the best kid catcher I ever had seen, and I haven't seen anyone better since."

The trouble for Ivie was that early in his pro career he developed a mental block about throwing the ball back to the pitcher and did not live up to expectations. He resisted playing the position that made him the first overall pick and did not play



catcher regularly above the Class A California League.

When Ivie reached San Diego for good as a 22-year-old in 1975 he was primarily a first baseman. He started just five games at catcher in the big leagues, four of them during a six-game cup of coffee with the Padres in 1971.

Ivie produced at a league-average rate for the Padres from 1975 to 1977. A trade to the Giants in 1978 set the stage for his best MLB run. Ivie pro-

duced a 126 OPS+ with the Giants in 1978 and 1979, in the latter season belting 27 homers with 89 RBIs.

That offseason Ivie cut a tendon in his hand with a hunting knife and was never the same hitter for the Giants, Astros or Tigers. He retired at age 31 following the 1983 season in Detroit. Ivie opened a pro shop for hunting and fishing outside Atlanta after his playing days.

Ivie died July 21 in North Augusta, S.C. He was 70. ■

### WARMTH SET SCOUT DAN HUSTON APART

Longtime scout Dan Huston died unexpectedly in his sleep at his home in Redmond, Ore., on July 18. He was 63.

Huston was an area scout for more than 30 years for the Astros, Reds, Padres and Brewers. He spent most of his career scouting the Pacific Northwest before finishing as the Brewers' area scout for Central and Southern California from 2009 to 2019. He signed two-time American League stolen base champion Brian Hunter and current major leaguers Mitch Haniger, Tyrone Taylor and Clayton Andrews, among others.

"As a baseball scout, he worked tirelessly for his boys, for his guys," his widow Debbie said. "The guys who he felt had that talent—and he had the eye to spot the talent and he knew it—he fought so hard for them to be drafted where they should have been, where they needed to be in those draft sessions. He worked so diligently for them. He fought so hard for them."

Beyond his scouting prowess, Huston was known as one of the warmest and kindest members of the scouting community. He often took young scouts under his wing and helped teach

them the craft, even when he barely knew them.

"My first year as a part-time guy ... he offered help and always spoke to me," Mets scouting director Drew Toussaint said. "If you're a part-time scout, a lot of times it's hard to get full-time guys to even speak to you. Dan, you go to a game and he's sitting there, he was going to talk to you. He was going to help you out, talk to you about players, just (be) a huge helping hand."

Huston also worked as a coach for the Brewers team at the Area Code Games each year and helped select players for the Brewers' fall ball scout team. His work ethic and diligence, along with his friendly demeanor, made him one of the most respected scouts in the game among his peers.

"He just was a genuine human being, and that reflected in his scouting," said Corey Rodriguez, Huston's former cross-checker with the Brewers. "He left a mark on the organization in a very positive way. He was a guy who loved what he was doing, loved scouting ..."

"He represented the scouting community in a very positive way, not just the Milwaukee Brewers." ■



David Elmore  
with wife  
Donna Tuttle.

#### Former 'King Of Baseball' Elmore Dies At 88

The list of the most significant minor league team owners of the past 50 years is incomplete without David Elmore near the top. The founder of the Elmore Sports Group, he was the owner of numerous minor league teams over the years as well as hockey, football and soccer teams.

Elmore's time as an MiLB owner stretched over multiple decades. He was long one of the top minor league decision-makers. He served on the MiLB board of trustees and the Pacific Coast League's executive committee.

The Elmore Sports Group owned at different times the Eugene Emeralds, Birmingham Barons, Colorado Springs Sky Sox, Idaho Falls Chukars, Lynchburg Hillcats, Inland Empire 66ers and San Antonio Missions.

Elmore was elected to the PCL and Texas League Halls of Fame and was honored as the "King of Baseball" at the 2016 Winter Meetings.

Elmore died on June 7. He was 88.

#### Curator John Odell Helped Shape Cooperstown Experience

For 24 years, John Odell brought history to life for thousands of baseball fans. In his role as curator of history and research for the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Odell worked to turn the Hall's many artifacts into cohesive exhibits and stories to connect with the Hall's visitors.

Recently, he put together the "Viva Baseball" exhibit that examined the impact of Latino players with more than 150 exhibits and multimedia presentations.

"He loved this place so much, and his fingerprints are on everything we've done for a quarter century," Hall of Fame president Josh Rawitch said. "He has left a lasting impact on Cooperstown and all of us here."

Odell died on July 17. He was 62.

#### Frazier Spent A Life In Baseball As MLB Reliever And Broadcaster

George Frazier, a major league pitcher and long-

time MLB broadcaster, died on June 19. He was 68.

Frazier pitched on two College World Series teams at Oklahoma in 1975 and 1976. He broke into the majors with the Cardinals in 1978, but in the early 1980s he found his footing with the Yankees as a durable and reliable righthanded reliever.

Frazier pitched in three games in the 1981 World Series, losing all three to tie a World Series record. He made it back to the World Series six seasons later with the 1987 Twins, this time winning a ring in his final season in the majors.

After his 10-year MLB career had concluded, Frazier became a broadcaster. As a color commentator, Frazier broadcast Rockies games from 1998 to 2015. He then returned to his alma mater to broadcast Sooners baseball games from 2015 until his death.

Frazier's son Parker was drafted by the Rockies in 2007 and pitched professionally for 12 seasons, topping out at Triple-A. ■



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PERSPECTIVE

## A SIGH OF RELIEF

Minor league attendance snaps back to pre-pandemic levels

**J.J. COOPER**  
@JJCOOP36



The last few years have been brutal for many who work in minor league baseball.

There was the lost 2020 season. There were furloughs, layoffs and payroll cuts that proved to be an off-ramp for a number of longtime minor league front office employees.

On the heels of that came the MLB-mandated scaling back of the minor leagues from 160 affiliated ticket-selling teams to 120.

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic didn't end there. When the minors returned in 2021, there were still capacity restrictions for many teams, and there was still a reluctance by some to return to games.

Last year was supposed to be the return to normalcy, but when the season wrapped, teams across the minors faced a new realm of fears. Attendance across the minors was down 380 fans per game per team compared with 2019, the last year before the pandemic. Some expressed concern that the new sea level for minor league attendance had dipped significantly.

Minor league attendance hasn't really grown since 2007, when a record 43.26 million fans came to games, an average of 4,170 fans per night. While there's no hope that the slimmed-down minor leagues will ever again come close

to that 43 million total attendance record, the minors had found a nice equilibrium throughout the 2010s. Most years, the average team drew a little more than 4,000 fans per game.

In 2022, the average team drew just 3,910 fans per game. If that were the new normal, it would mean that it had settled in at a level worse than what Minor League Baseball had seen in any year since the start of the 21st century.

Now, a collective sigh of relief can be heard around the minors. Last year appears to be an aberration. This year looks a whole lot more like 2019 than it does 2022.

As of July 23, MiLB teams were averaging 4,034 fans per team per game. That's up 124 fans per game across the minors when compared with the end-of-year totals for 2022. Even better for MiLB teams, it's a 207 fan per game increase over where they were at this time last year.

Through July 23, that's just seven fans per game fewer than teams drew in 2019.

So what happened? In conversations with front office officials with multiple teams, groups have returned to the ballpark in 2023 in a way they didn't in 2022. While season-ticket sales and single-game tickets returned to pre-pandemic levels last year, civic groups and corporate outings remained hard to book in 2022.

This year, those groups are back.

"This feels the most normal since 2019. We're seeing that group element come back to the ballpark now," Gwinnett Stripers general manager Erin McCormick said. The Stripers are on pace for their best attendance since 2015.

According to McCormick, last year some groups were still hesitant to come back to the ballpark because of the pandemic. Others said they needed a year of steady revenues before they were able to do staff outings. This year, both those concerns have largely evaporated.

"In 2021, it was a short season; (in) 2022 there were still a lot of unknowns," McCormick said. "Now, this is the first year where it's a sigh of relief. We're back. Now we can focus on what we're doing and grow on that."

The gains can be seen nearly across the board. Of the 100 teams that had been full-season clubs in 2019, 62 drew fewer fans per game and 27 drew more than 500 fewer fans per game in 2022 than they did in 2019. Just 16 teams saw bumps of 500 or more fans per game when compared with 2019.

This year, 91 of the 120 affiliated teams have seen attendance gains compared to this time last year, and 10 teams were up 500 fans per game or more. Only New Hampshire had seen a drop of 500 or more fans per game.

There's also something notable afoot. The

Twins' Double-A Wichita affiliate has seen an increase of 1,606 fans per game when compared to this time last year, the biggest increase in the minors. After the Wind Surge, the next three biggest gainers were all Orioles affiliates.

The Orioles have been one of the best success stories in baseball in 2023, and they have spread the prospect wealth around to all levels. Our No. 1 prospect Jackson Holliday has played at three different levels. Triple-A Norfolk, the only team to not see Holliday yet this year, began the year with what we described as the most talented team in the minors.

The Tides lived up to those expectations with the best record in the International League, all while sending a steady stream of prospects to Baltimore throughout the season.

"Previous (Orioles front offices) would send guys straight from Double-A to the majors," Norfolk GM Joe Gregory said. "Manny Machado never played here. Now that we're getting those players for a significant amount of at-bats, the fans in Norfolk see them here longer and then go to Baltimore and make that impact. It's positive all the way around."

The Orioles' ability to keep their farm teams within their geographical footprint has provided a halo effect. Norfolk was up by 1,069 fans per game. Double-A Bowie was up 1,041 per game. Low-A Delmarva had seen a bump of 923 fans per game. High-A Aberdeen cracked the top 20 in attendance growth with an increase of 427 fans per game.

The Orioles' success has helped the big league team draw more than 4,000 additional fans per game when compared to this time last year. That success had trickled down to Baltimore affiliates, which had collectively drawn 3,460 more fans per game this year. ■

## RETURN TO FORM

In 2023, minor league attendance has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Here's a look at what the 120 full-season clubs were drawing in average announced attendance through July 23 in each year.

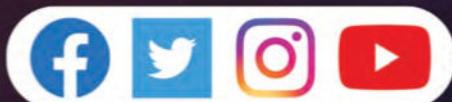
Year	Attendance per game
2023	4,034
2022	3,830
2021	3,065
2019	4,041
2018	4,051
2017	4,185
2016	4,105
2015	4,188
2014	4,149
2013	4,088
2012	4,064
2011	4,118
2010	4,158

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