

The Great First Pitch Survey 2019

Speaker Notes

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Introduction

SHANDLER: I started running reader polls on BaseballHQ from the moment it launched in 1996. I personally find them fascinating. They give us a good read of public opinion on topics that are important to us.

Some of those early polls were pretty interesting.

I asked readers their opinion about player dumping,
50% - All's fair in fantasy baseball
26% - Dumping is okay, but not too early in the season
24% - Dumping is never acceptable under any condition

During a time when there was labor unrest, I asked readers what their relationship was with baseball.
50% - Unconditional devotion
29% - Benign tolerance
18% - Jaded exhaustion
2% - Unforgiving contempt

More recently, with the rise of high stakes games and DFS, I asked readers what their core motivation was for playing fantasy sports.
13% - The sense of control in owning a team
39% - The challenge of proving your knowledge
30% - The thrill of competition
12% - The social and camaraderie aspect
5% - The chance to win money

So I wondered... what could we compile if we crafted dozens of relevant questions for 2019 and sent them out to the world?

- Nearly 100 questions
- Divided up into smaller mini-surveys of 10-15 Qs
- Promoted to BHQ readers but also via social media through our partners
- Got back nearly 2000 responses
- Tossed out the least interesting results
- What we're left with is about 30 very interesting questions that we'll look at in depth over the next 3 hours
- And another dozen that we'll review quickly during a lightning round at the end.

Important to note that these results don't necessarily reflect the correct answer to any question. They represent what the public thinks. And just like you use ADPs and experts leagues auction values to gauge the marketplace, these results may provide you with some food-for-thought when searching for profit opportunities.

Section 1: It's a round bat and a round ball, but ya gotta hit it square

Here is the BHQ projection for Adalberto Mondesi: .256 BA; 16 HR, 39 SB, which comes in at \$26. Would you take the Over or Under?

SHANDLER, MURPHY, HERSHEY

Table:

Player A 10-44-.272-21 SB (Trea Turner: 2H 2018)

Player B 13-33-.288-29 SB (Mondesi: 2H 2018)

Player C 12-37-.309-16 SB (Byron Buxton: 2H 2017)

So, is Mondesi more Turner, or Buxton?

PRO:

- speed is unquestionably elite, and the green light is safe as long as Ned Yost is around
- speed can cover up for (some of) the awful plate approach
- hard-hit rate was actually elite (Gallo comp)
- that HH% plus lack of a GB tilt says the power might not be totally fluky

CON:

- 4% bb%, 72% -- AWFUL, and right in line with what he did in minors
- low OBP limits running opps, he can only sustain big SB total by being hyper-aggressive on the basepaths (66% SBO in 2nd half 2018!!)

But over 550 AB, even after significantly downgrading these power and speed skills, you basically can't get to a projection that values him as less than \$25.

So, in some sense, the biggest risk in drafting him is loss of job... which seems possible, but is a very strange discussion to have on a guy with a 3rd-round ADP.

Which SS are you rostering between picks in the teen rounds?

Ketel Marte
Andrelton Simmons
Willy Adames
Marcus Semien

BECKEY: Andrelton Simmons, with his MLB-leading 92% ct% in 2018, is my clear-cut favorite out of this group. More importantly, Simmons has demonstrated elite contact skills throughout his career. In fact, his ct% has never dipped below 87%.

- Possible move to centerfield adds to **Ketel Marte's** overall value as a potential 20/20 threat.
- **Andrelton Simmons** also has 25 SB upside, according to the *2019 Baseball Forecaster*.
- Although **Willy Adames** made a strong MLB debut in 2018, he hasn't hit more than 11 home runs or stolen more than 13 bases in the minors.
- **Marcus Semien** might appear to be a lock for double-digit home runs and steals in 2019, but his 8% hr/f is trending in the wrong direction.

POTTS: Huge pool of pretty good shortstops this season. When in doubt, I like to look at plate discipline and track record, this leaves Willy Adames (67% CT%, 288 career AB) out in the cold. Ketel Marte's move to the outfield opens up playing time, but Arizona just hasn't let him run (6% and 5% SBO% last two seasons) and he hits too many ground balls to develop more power. Marcus Semien has four straight seasons of double digit homers and steals and an everyday job. His power comes more from sheer number of at bats and fly balls, not so much actual power (93 career PX). Speed also good, not great (106 SPD in 2018), so he needs every bit of the 12-14% SBO% for those steals and there's not much upside. With the fly balls and middling contact, average will never be an asset. Andrelton Simmons in a league of his own in terms of contact within this group. 92% contact in 2018, HctX up to career high, has quietly stolen double digit bases three straight seasons. The contact and guaranteed playing time keeps his floor high.

ZOLA:

- Ketel Marte – should pick up OF eligibility, emerging power but still latent speed, maybe he runs more with Pollock and Goldschmidt gone
- Andrelton Simmons – little of everything, solid floor, glove keeps him in lineup
- Willy Adames – Contact an issue but working on eliminating toe tap. Decent patience to help mitigate, if not improve contact. Has power/speed combo to maintain high BABIP. Could have highest ceiling but is a risk. OTOH, middle is deep so there will be fallbacks
- **Marcus Semien** – No longer defensive liability. One of only nine batters with double-digit HR and SB each of the past four seasons. Could hit second vs. LHP

PODHORZER:

Ketel Marte

- Strong plate discipline metrics; power breakout fully supported by surging Statcast metrics **BUT...**
- Above average speed, but stole just 6 bases in 2018
- Expected to move to center field, raising risk he fails to pan out defensively and loses playing time

Andrelton Simmons

- Makes fantastic contact, Statcast says HR/FB still has further upside, plus Hard% spiked to career high
- Excellent basestealer last 3 years (81% success rate); elite defender **BUT...**
- Merely average speed, so steals could drop back to mid-single digits like from 2013-2015
- Will be difficult to move up any higher than 6th in Angels lineup

Willy Adames

- History of strong BABIP; high line drive and low pop-up rates in MiLB; Highly ranked prospect **BUT...**
- 2H strikeouts; never posted double digit HR/FB rate or ISO above .160 in minors
- Above average speed, but poor basestealer throughout pro career (60% success rate)
- Brutal defensively; Batted ball profile suggests major regression potential from .378 debut BABIP

Marcus Semien

- Stable plate discipline metrics coming off best strikeout and whiff rates of career
- High fly ball rate makes most of below average HR/FB rates **BUT...**
- Boring? Except for power breakout in 2016, same HR/FB rates and ISO marks entire career

ADLER:

Ketel Marte, 25

- Elite contact skills in MiLB; 85% in majors in 2018; rising bb%, HctX, PX, hr/f; elite speed – 155, 149 Spd
- Improved in second half. 1H 6-31-2-.245, 2H 8-28-4-.278; If CF experiment pans out, could get more AB
- Negatives – still at 50%+ GB%, not getting the green light (5% SBO)
- Projected: 532 AB, .276, 15 HR, 10 SB. R\$ \$16.

Andrelton Simmons, 29

- Led majors with 92% ct%; much better hard contact in 2018 - 122
- Good speed (136 Spd), success (83% SB%), could steal more bases if ran more (8% SBO)
- Negatives – always around 50%+ GB%, low power (65 PX) limits HR output.
- Projected – 607 AB, .280, 11 HR, 13 SB, R\$ \$21

Willy Adames, 23

- Good speed (164 Spd), but poor success rate (51% SB%).
- Took walks in the minors (11% bb%), translated to majors (10%)
- Negatives: Struggled w poor contact (67%), didn't hit the ball hard (86 HctX) or in the air (52% GB%).
- Projected: 490 AB, 14 HR, 9 SB R\$ \$9

Marcus Semien, 28

- Earned R\$ \$19 last year, highest in career; made better contact (79% ct%), hit more line drives (23% LD%)
 - Slightly above average speed (110, 108, 107 last three years)
 - Negatives: declining power (119-92-83 PX), low SB% in 2018 (70%)
 - Projected: 556 AB, .250, 16 HR, 12 SB. R\$ \$12
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Which San Diego outfielder ends 2019 with the highest R\$:

Franchy Cordero
Travis Jankowski
Manny Margot
Hunter Renfroe
Franmil Reyes

BECKEY: Would it be cheating to say that the *2019 Baseball Forecaster* projects Hunter Renfroe (\$17) to finish with the highest R\$ of this group in 2019? Maybe. However, with only a \$3 separating four of the five players on the list, could the difference really come down simply to at-bats or playing time opportunity?

- Franchy Cordero (*Proj. 360 AB*)
- Travis Jankowski (*Proj. 288 AB*)
- Manuel Margot (*Proj. 493 AB*)
- Hunter Renfroe (*Proj. 494 AB*)
- Franmil Reyes (*Proj. 412 AB*)

Maybe not.

Consider this: In 2018, Hunter Renfroe matched Ronald Acuna, Jr.'s home run total of 26. However, both players hit exactly 7 HRs before the All-Star Break and 19 HRs after the break. The *2019 Baseball Forecaster* says "there's something big lurking here" when discussing Hunter Renfroe...

POTTS: With the loaded San Diego outfield, we're evaluating both playing time and skills. Mayberry Method shows the skills well, with power for Renfroe, Reyes and Cordero, speed for Margot and Jankowski. Renfroe's contact crept up to 73% in 2018, along with 127 HctX and 155 PX. Over 40% fly balls and that kind of power, he will hit home runs. Franmil Reyes has similar power to Renfroe with a little more patience, but doesn't have the experience to say he can pick up where he left off. More of a ground ball hitter gives him higher average than Renfroe, but 30% HR/FB% almost certainly unsustainable for now. I'm more interested as a keeper than for 2019. Franchy Cordero had awful 35% K rate in 40 games, 28% in last full Triple-A season. Far more speed than Renfroe/Reyes, natural platoon option with one of the righties. Travis Jankowski steady speed, with 154 SPD and 29% SBO% in 2018. No power (53 PX), least likely path to regular playing time. Manuel Margot sophomore slump with .281 BABIP despite his speed and a solid 118 HctX. 20% SBO%, if he gets on base more (BABIP), SB go up. Have to think they want a regular center fielder, helping his prospects for playing time.

ZOLA:

- Franchy Cordero – great combo of power and speed
- Travis Jankowski – upside 30-plus SB with near regular play
- Manuel Margot – arguably best defender could keep bat in lineup, power/speed with a lean to speed
- **Hunter Renfroe** – big power and with the chance other OF spots are more speedy types, Padres could use a bopper. Can handle defense in right
- Franmil Reyes – HUGE power but fighting uphill battle. Poor glove and RHB so could platoon

PODHORZER:

Franchy Cordero

- Mammoth power; led in avg HR distance; strong batted ball profile that supports high BABIP
- Can play center field **BUT...**
- Whiffs A LOT; awful against LHP (small sample); low fly ball rate for hitter with elite power

Travis Jankowski

- Excellent speed; strong BABIP; 3-spot OF and above average defensively **BUT...**
- Career .288 wOBA

Manuel Margot

- Elite speed; above average defensively in center field **BUT...**
- Career .298 wOBA; poor basestealer (64% career success rate, 52% in 2018)

Hunter Renfro

- Excellent power; improved strikeout and whiff rates in 2018 **BUT...**
- Low walk rate → sub-.300 career OBP; poor defender

Franmil Reyes

- Elite power (hit seventh farthest home run in 2018) **BUT...**
- Low fly ball rate given power potential; poor defensively

ADLER:**Franchy Cordero, 24**

- Elbow surgery in June; high exit velocity, rising power, great speed, runs a lot.
- Negatives: makes poor contact, lots of ground balls (46% GB%), struggles against LHP

Travis Jankowski, 28

- Big jump in ct% (70 – 77% in 2017/18), walks a lot; High GB% (58%)
- Superlative speed (Spd 175, 152, 138, 148 last four years). Runs a lot. 25+ SB 3 of last 4 years.
- Negatives: struggles vs LHP, low power (53 PX)

Manuel Margot, 24

- Made gains in contact rate (78-82%) and HctX (80-118) in 2018.
- Low 81 PX, but 106 xPX in 2018.
- Great speed (173-167-148 last three years), runs a lot (SBO 19-20%). But success rate low (52%)

Hunter Renfro, 27

- Big power in 2H (36% FB%, 11% HR/F, 113 xPX, 4 HR in 1H; 46% FB%, 24% HR/F, 148 xPX, 22 HR in 2H)
- Big improvement vs RHP (.636 OPS in 2017, .803 in 2018); needs to improve contact (73% ct%).

Franmil Reyes, 23

- Fly ball distance not great, so 30% hr/f likely to regress
 - Good power (135 PX), but 115 xPX.
 - Poor ct% skills (68% ct%)
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Section 2: Aces, Kings and Jacks

Who will be more valuable to your fantasy team?

Mike Trout

Max Scherzer

SHANDLER:

I ran this poll on my website a few months ago and was interested to find over 30% of respondents indicating that they thought Scherzer was more valuable. Certainly a case can be made:

<u>Trout</u>	<u>No. players at this level</u>
500 AB	102
105 Runs	9
35 HR	15
85 RBI	40
25 SB	15
.310 AVG	6

<u>Scherzer</u>	<u>No. players at this level</u>
200 IP	13
17 Wins	11
280 K	2
2.75 ERA	6
0.95 WHIP	3

There are fewer pitchers who approach Scherzer's numbers and the drop-off is severe. Also:

- Scherzer is one of 9 players; Trout is one of 14
- If we divided the draft dollars equitable among the 10 categories, Scherzer is a \$70 player; Trout about \$37.
- Admittedly, Scherzer contributes to 4 categories and Trout 5, but the pitching impact is huge.

So, here is the money question: **For those who believe Scherzer is more valuable, why aren't they drafting him #1 overall?** Part of it is the groupthink positioning of Trout atop the ADPs like he's been for the past 6 years. The similar groupthink resistance to drafting a pitcher #1. But maybe we need to rethink our lemmingness. The statistical landscape is changing.

Which Phillies starter finishes 2019 with the lowest ERA??

Jake Arrieta

Zach Eflin

Vince Velasquez

OLSON:

- The case for Velasquez involves lighting a candle and praying for good health. One could argue that in the all-too-rare stretches he has been healthy, his skills have been the best of this bunch (2016 BPV, 117; 2018 1H BPV, 120). If you get lucky and get those skills for an entire season, maybe he could emerge the winner. It's probably not the best bet, though.
- Arrieta's 52% ground ball rate raises his floor, and if he returns with the skills he displayed in 2018's second half, he has a fighting chance of keeping his ERA under 4.00 for a sixth straight season. That may be enough to win this battle, I suppose. But age and overall trend say much more than that would be a tough ask.
- Eflin is the intriguing player of this trio for me. His command stands out, as does the improvement of his arsenal in 2018 (added velocity to FB, movement on slider). If you give him a slight pass for blister issues causing some of second half struggles, not unreasonable to hope it's just onward and upward from here, given his age.

CARTY:

- **Arrieta:** Most boring, but also the most stable. Talk of Arrieta's demise is mostly just that: talk. He's not the elite pitcher he was his first two years with the Cubs, but he's still firmly above average with an ERA projection around 4.00 – the best of the group.
 - **Velasquez:** Easily the most electric stuff of the group, but also the most control issues. Big upside, but also considerable downside.
 - **Eflin:** Awful MiLB track record, weak 2017 season. This creates plenty of downside, but his 2018 season was quite good. Probably the weakest option with a similar ERA projection and fewer Ks than Velasquez... but this could go either way.
-

Which of these players do you prefer at their current ADP?

Sonny Gray (296)

Marcus Stroman (326)

Trevor Cahill (388)

Robbie Erlin (540)

OLSON:

- Yankee Stadium was a house of horrors for **Gray** (6.98 ERA, 11 HR in 59.1 IP vs. 3.17 ERA, 3.5 Cmd on road). But with a move to Great American Ballpark, he's pretty much going from the frying pan to the fire. But maybe it's not just the dimensions. Yankees brass did completely lose faith in him, when skills say he wasn't quite that bad. His skills have been consistently good, not great. Maybe he does belong at the head of this pack. Here's to a fresh start.
- Between the injury problems and lack of strikeouts, there isn't much to get excited about with **Stroman** (aside from where he went to college). xERAs have been consistently under 4.00, ground-ball rates always 60% plus, so he isn't going to hurt you. But at this stage of the draft, many teams may want to swing for more upside.
- At least some of **Cahill's** skills make him look like a good buy (though it's perhaps worth noting that 2018's 2.4 Cmd was the best he's ever done). But that "F" is a hard-earned one. While his role has shifted back and forth a bit over the years, his season high in IP the last five years has topped out at 111. He's another guy whose ground ball rate will probably minimize any damage, and if you have a deep enough bench to cover for his inevitable absences, maybe he's someone to roster, fully anticipating the future absences.
- **Erlin's** Cmd is not a misprint, and he's had above-average control throughout his career. A 65% strand rate made the results look worse than they should have been in 2018. It does look like he has got a rotation spot for now with what should be an improved Padres team, and if improvement vR sticks (6.7 Dom, 8.1 Cmd), he should be able to hold on, even if a youngster like Chris Paddack gets an early call. Could be top earner among this group at a far lesser price.

CARTY:

- **Sonny Gray (296):** ERA looked like bad luck in 2018 (4.90 ERA/4.10 xFIP), and he gets a favorable move to the NL and a strikeout-friendly park in 2019. He technologically optimized his repertoire over the off-season, leaving plenty of room for optimism.
 - **Stroman (326):** ERA looked like **very** bad luck in 2018 (5.54 ERA/3.84 xFIP). Isn't moving to the NL, but Rogers Centre has become more of a neutral park than a hitters' park at this point. Most boring; you know what you're getting here.
 - **Cahill (388):** Seems to go through periods of awesomeness and periods of awfulness. Could be random, but could create risk. Still, the end-result numbers are always pretty good, and his projections aren't much worse than Gray or Stroman. The pick discount is enticing.
 - **Erlin (540):** Needs to do the least with such a low ADP, but he also projects the worst. Missing 2017 creates uncertainty, and plenty of innings in relief has boosted his numbers beyond what they'd be as a full-time starter, but there's enough upside at his price.
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You're one of the last owners to take their SP1 in the draft; who do you choose once the consensus "aces" are off the board?

Jameson Taillon
Jack Flaherty
Mike Clevinger
Mike Foltynewicz

DENNIS: Taillon is the ADP choice. Flaherty has the better xERA/WHIP projection from HQ. Clevinger has the best HQ\$ value at \$16 over Flaherty's \$15, with Taillon last at \$11. Steamer likes Taillon at 3.64 FIP and Flaherty at 1.24 WHIP. So a very mixed bag and your staff composition/strategy will dictate how you select one. For my part, I am always chasing xERA and FIP (even with their flaws) so here that's Flaherty and Taillon over Clevinger and Foltynewicz, and probably Flaherty over Taillon, but it is razor close.

COLLETTE:

- Very similar grouping of pitchers based on skills, no one guy separates from the pack
- Park factors: not a factor
- Divisional factor: three of these guys play in very competitive divisions (on paper) while one guy has a very favorable unbalanced schedule in his favor – Clevinger

OLSON:

Do we knock Clevinger for being in the American League?

Difference among team context of Flaherty, Folty and Taillon negligible

Taillon

- Debuted brand new slider mid-season, and it goosed his SwK (12%) but not his strikeout rate... yet.
- His second-half results (2.55 ERA, 1.14 WHIP) seem to be fueling hype train this preseason. Normally, we might say "resist," but the skills are there. In other words, the bandwagon may be right, somewhat for the wrong reasons.

Clevinger

- Had some struggles vs. LHB resurface in the second half, but his overall skills and results were more than fine, perhaps thanks in part to a nice bump in his velocity. In other words, if he can lick that once and for all, he may enter the "ace" conversation.
- As HQ's Derrick Boyd pointed out in a preseason write-up, Clevinger has shown he can miss bats with two different off-speed pitches (curve 20% SwK & slider 19% SwK), and his control sub-indicators often lead to control levels in the mid-2.0s.

Flaherty

- Don't overlook the fact that he had a bit of hit rate help in 2018 (27%).

CARTY:

- **Flaherty:** 10.9 K/9, 3.58 xFIP in nearly a full season, Flaherty projects as the most talented of this group. Pitchers' park, good offensive support, plenty of Ks. Looks like the best choice to me.
 - **Taillon:** "Safest" bet here, you more or less know what you're getting, but he's at a disadvantage with the relative lack of strikeouts compared to the other three. Only one who doesn't project for a K per IP
 - **Clevinger:** Peripherals have lagged behind surface numbers two straight years, and Progressive will do him no favors. It's a weak division for opposing hitting, though, and he comes with good stuff and a lot of strikeouts. Even with regression, his ERA would still be in the range of these other three.
 - **Foltynewicz:** 2018 was his first truly good season, and much of it looked like smoke and mirrors. Projections are closer to his 3.77 xFIP than his 2.85 ERA. That said, he has the best raw stuff of the group and throws the hardest, giving him upside. Personally, I'd pass at the price. He's not a true SP1.
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Which pitcher/hitter combo attracts you most coming out of the first two rounds of the draft (15-team mixed league, 5x5):

Max Scherzer / Javy Baez

Jacob deGrom / Manny Machado

Aaron Nola / Jose Ramirez

HERSHEY:

- In some industry drafts, more pitchers going higher, so some of these combos
- Q: What are the biggest pluses / minuses of these pairs
- Q: Do you think in terms of one hitter/one pitcher when looking at early choices?
 - And what factors into your decisions
- Q: When you think about these specific pairs, how do you separate them to finding the most value?
- BHQ \$ values
 - Scherz/Javy: \$69
 - Nola/Ramirez \$64
 - deGrom/Machado \$62
- Track record: Baez and Nola – only one season at this top-earner level

Section 3: The Fleet of Feet Elite

Rank the Royals speedsters by end-of-season SB totals: (highest -> lowest)

Hamilton — Merrifield — Mondesi

Hamilton — Mondesi — Merrifield

Merrifield — Hamilton — Mondesi

Merrifield — Mondesi — Hamilton

Mondesi — Hamilton — Merrifield

Mondesi — Merrifield — Hamilton

MURPHY:

- Merrifield: most well-rounded, .367 OBP, 45 SB
- Mondesi: covered earlier
- Hamilton: 2014-17: 56-57-58-59 SB. Then 34 in 2018. Career OBP .298
 - OF competition: Gordon, Soler, Goodwin, Phillips, Owings, Bonifacio

DODGE:

Lineup positions 2018

- Hamilton 112 games batting 9th, 33 batting 1st
- Mondesi 29 games batting 9th, 25 batting 2nd
- Merrifield 112 games batting 1st, 30 batting 2nd

Hamilton (age 29)

- <.300 OBP 4 of last 5 seasons, BA driven (8% bb%); declining SBO%, SB%
- highest Spd rating by far (191. 130 Mondesi, 107 Merrifield)

Mondesi (age 24)

- .273 OBP in 463 MLB AB over 3 years (other two had more AB than that in each of last 2 seasons)
- 4% bb%, 68% ct%; 68% SBO% in 2018 highest of the 3 by far (32% Hamilton, 28% Merrifield)

Merrifield (age 30)

- Best on-base skills (.367 OBP), far better hitter (bb%, ct%, HctX)
- Needed in a run-producing lineup spot?

Which hitter has the best chance to return to their 2017 SB total?

Byron Buxton

Elvis Andrus

Jose Altuve

Billy Hamilton

MURPHY:

- Buxton: 29 SB in 2017, age 25
- Andrus: 25 SB in 2017, mid-20s history, now age 30
- Altuve: 32 SB in 2017, 5 straight years 30+, now age 29
- Hamilton: 34 SB in 2017, 4 straight 50+ before that. Age 28

DODGE:

Byron Buxton (29 in 2017, 5 in 2018, 15 (proj) in 2019)

- poor plate skills 2015-8 (65% ct%, 7% bb%, 67 HctX), 2018 toe injury
- SBO% increased each year; new manager? (Baldelli), age 25 (all others are 29-30)

Elvis Andrus (25 in 2017, 5 in 2018, 15 (proj) in 2019)

- SBO% collapsed mid 2017 from 9 years of 20+% to 8%; April 2018 elbow injury
- TEX stopped running in Aug 2018
- 2018 SB attempts Mar/Apr 20, May 22, Jun 19, Jul 25, Aug 14, Sep/Oct 9. those were 2 of the lowest months in the last 3 years under Mgr Jeff Bannister (Jul 2017 12 SBA)

Jose Altuve (32 in 2017, 17 in 2018, 23 (proj) in 2019)

- 2018 knee injury, may not have been fully recovered? (BA, HctX, xBA, LD% & FB% all depressed in 2H)
- declining SBO%, ct% trends

Billy Hamilton (59 in 2017, 34 in 2018, 45 (proj) in 2019) -- see above

Amed Rosario: 30 SB. Would you take:
Over
Under

MURPHY:

- 24 SB in 2018, 20 in 2H
- .304 OBP in 2H, .285 in 1H
- can he stick near top of lineup? Nimmo, Cano, Lowrie, etc

DODGE:

- Current projection 27 in 582 AB (one SB every 22 AB)
 - 13 SB in his last 209 AB in 2018 (one SB every 16 AB)
 - "prospect growth is not linear"
 - Hechavarria provides an alternative if he struggles; could lose a little PT?
 - 2H2018 PRO: +3% ct%, +5% LD%, +21% SBO%, +24% SB% (50->74)
 - 2H2018 CON: 5% bb%, 82 HctX, .304 OBP all still below average
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Section 4: We had too many good starting pitcher questions so we added a second section with them

How will the rise of the Opener MOST affect your draft strategy?

- I don't plan to make any adjustments
 - I plan to spend more for 180+ IP starters
 - I plan to backfill my staff with high-skill openers
 - I plan to backfill my staff with 2nd men out
-

MURPHY:

Openers:

- TAM
- OAK
- SF?
- TOR?
- PIT?

Trick is who will be in the Chirinos/Yarbrough role?

There were 10 pitchers in 2017 who tossed at least 200 innings and struck out at least 200. That number dropped to eight in 2018. How many will there be in 2019?

- Eight or more
 - Fewer than eight
-

MURPHY: 200/200 pitchers: our projections only have 8 guys > 200 IP, 7 of them > 200 K

Which pitcher is most at risk of falling short of 15 wins?

Max Scherzer
Cory Kluber
Jacob deGrom
Justin Verlander
Chris Sale

VANRIPER:

Max Scherzer

- Really hard to make a case against him
- Maybe we underestimate the possibility of injuries destroying this team?
 - Anthony Rendon, Trea Turner, Adam Eaton, Ryan Zimmerman, Sean Doolittle
- NL East only has one pushover right now (Marlins), so that adds a degree of difficulty

Corey Kluber

- Injuries could be more of an issue with his back
- He got 'deGrom'd' in 2015 (9 wins, despite being a top-end SP)
- Bullpen isn't great; lineup looks like it has taken a step back, at least projections-wise

Jacob deGrom

- Seeking extension; contract situation could make things weird
- deGrom has made the fewest total starts in this group since the start of 2016
- It happened last year; Mets gonna Met

Justin Verlander

- Oldest pitcher in this bunch; hasn't happened in a healthy season since 2008 with the Tigers (!)
- Houston's strong bullpen makes it easier to pull a starter early if he's struggling

Chris Sale

- It happened last year; Injuries (shoulder) and lost velo in September are a concern
- How do you feel about the bullpen protecting leads in Boston right now?

POTTS: These are the top 5 pitchers on my board for this season. I don't question the skills on any of them, though if we're going that way it would be Kluber with the significantly lower strikeout ability of this group. But for wins, his low walks help his innings and don't hurt his ability to win games. The easy answer here is Chris Sale, not because he isn't the best pitcher, but because the Red Sox have plenty of reason to treat him with caution even if he looks healthy. I would project him for the fewest number of starts and innings here, therefore the fewest wins. Something I want to point out on Verlander is his 34.8% K rate in 2018 looks a little like a 2017-Kluber career year outlier. Not enough changed to make me think he can sustain going from 28.1% in 2016 to 25.8% in 2017 to 34.8% in 2018. I think he wins 15 games, but I don't think we see a repeat of those strikeouts. Jacob deGrom's low win total from 2018 was a fluke, he wins 15.

ZOLA:

Max Scherzer – Father Time has to catch up at some point. Offense could be less potent than last season

Corey Kluber – Slid in 2H, drop in velo, offense suspect

Jacob deGrom – Offense better but needs to stay healthy, and gel

Justin Verlander – Lots of innings on that right arm. Could run away with division and have workload tempered

Chris Sale – Injury and workload concerns

ADLER:

Max Scherzer

- Eight straight years of 188+ IP, 14+ wins.

Cory Kluber

- Five straight years of 220+ IP; Relatively weak AL Central helps chances
- Only 9 wins in 2015 - but this CLE offense is better

Jacob deGrom

- Skills unquestioned, but won't repeat 2018 ERA (84% strand rate)
- Mets better – but can they challenge WAS or ATL; Despite skills, never won more than 15 games

Justin Verlander

- Three straight years of 206+ IP, but only 15-16 wins/year
- 36 years old; Yes, Cy Young – but that was 2011

Chris Sale

- Unquestioned, dominant skills
 - But left shoulder, diminished velocity are question marks – missed a month in 2018.
 - No Kimbrel – bullpen issues?
-

Which pitcher is the best bet to win more than 15 games?

Blake Snell

Zack Greinke

Miles Mikolas

Mike Clevinger

Rick Porcello

VANRIPER:

Blake Snell

- Most dominant starter of the group
- Rays might push him even more in his second full season in their rotation
- Gets several freebies against the Orioles

Zack Greinke

- Still a better pitcher than many give him credit for
- Humidor at Chase Field should keep HR/9 from soaring
- Continues to limit walks, which opens up higher volume of deep starts

Miles Mikolas

- Extremely low walk rate limits high-stress innings
- Other starters have more durability concerns, might get deeper into his starts than other STL arms
- Run support should be good

Michael Clevinger

- The Tigers, Royals and White Sox are all bad
- Reached 200 IP last season; short starts may be less of a concern now

Rick Porcello

- Pitching for the defending WS Champs; Plenty of run support
- Has taken the ball for 33 starts in three straight seasons

POTTS: This is an interesting group to compare in the search for wins. My initial reaction is Miles Mikolas. The elite control (1.3 Ctl) gives him such a cushion for everything else. It adds innings, it lowers runs, and add to it potential for a moderate bump in strikeouts from second half SwK increase, and a good offense, I see 15 wins here. I can say the same for Rick Porcello, that type of control (Ctl 2.3 or lower, Cmd of 3.8 or higher four straight years) behind that offense, I'd expect another 15 win season. The Mike Clevinger upside is 2017 Dom (10.1 K/9) with 2018 Ctl (3.0 BB/9). But if they don't come together, and he's due a bad BABIP season, I like him more for fantasy than for real life. Blake Snell is certainly my top 2019 fantasy pitcher of this group, but for projecting wins, it's the worst team on the list, plus his walk rate is not yet out of the woods, which can affect his innings. I appreciate Zack Greinke's durability and consistency, but declining velocity at age 35 and no obvious reason why his BABIP will stay this low. 15 wins? Probably, barely.

ZOLA:

Blake Snell – no workload restrictions, Tampa does great job of managing bullpen

Zack Greinke – Can still go deep into games

Miles Mikolas – Solid club, good bullpen, doesn't get beat by walks

Michael Clevinger – no workload restrictions, soft division, decent bullpen

Rick Porcello – pitches deep into games, solid run support

ADLER:

Blake Snell

- Big K's, but 86% S% helped in 2018; Only done it for one year
- Tough division, other than BAL

Zack Greinke, 35

- Decreased velocity; But 15+ wins in 8 of last 10 years.

Miles Mikolas

- Only done it one year; Not very dominant, but great control – only 29 BB in 200 IP
- CHI/MIL, but CIN/PIT, too

Mike Clevinger

- Weak division; Lots of swinging K's and first pitch Ks, so should stay dominant

Rick Porcello

- Good in odd years (13/15/4/17/7 wins last four years, so is due!)
 - 27+ starts the past 10 years; Great control
-

Which pitcher is the most over drafted among this group?

Chris Archer (ADP: 129)

Kyle Freeland (ADP: 130)

Shane Bieber (ADP: 155)

Rick Porcello (ADP: 161)

VANRIPER:

Chris Archer (129 ADP)

- Has three years of likely Freeland ratios in 2019 already under his belt
- Pirates might be the worst team in a tough division
- Even a smart team (TB) couldn't figure out how to get him deep into his starts regularly, and he's never won more than 12 games in a season despite four campaigns with 190+ IP

Kyle Freeland (130 ADP)

- Every projection system I've seen has him over a 4.00 ERA and 1.30 WHIP
- Command is very good, but allows a lot of contact in league's most hitter-friendly park
- Needs a very high IP volume to be an asset in the K category

Shane Bieber (155 ADP)

- Only had one "positive" value pitch in 2018 (slider)
- Had the 14th-highest hard-hit rate allowed (43.9%) among qualified pitchers (min. 50 IP)
- Home Park boosts left-handed power, and he lives in the zone (16th/336)
- Bullpen protecting his leads is suspect

Rick Porcello (161 ADP)

- 4.28 ERA was second-best in last four seasons (4.65 in 2017, 4.92 in 2015)
- FIP says he's deserved it
- Fastball gets hammered when he loses command of it

POTTS: The obvious answer is Kyle Freeland. The obvious answer is not always the right answer, but for me, it is in this case. He does some things very well, but there's no way he gets that kind of luck on batted balls at Coors Field again. Strikeouts are average at best, control isn't even anything special and he really didn't even keep the ball on the ground that well. Easy fade at his current price. I've given up expecting Chris Archer to match his xERA, but still so much to like here. His 'down' 2018 was still a 9.8 Dom and 3.0 Ctl. If that's him when he's bad, I sure want him when he's good. We don't know yet if Shane Bieber can reign in the hard hits, and his ERA with it, but a 1.8 Ctl and 5.1 Dom for a 24-year old rookie is awesome. His highest walk rate at any minor league level was 3.4% at Triple-A and his lowest strikeout rate ever posted at any level was 22.4% at Double-A. Maybe the 24.3% K was on the high side, but with his elite control, even average strikeouts is plenty good. We've seen big swings from Rick Porcello, after a crazy good/lucky 2016, and a crazy bad/unlucky 2017, he settled on a 4.28 ERA/3.79 xERA with 8.9 Dom and 2.3 Ctl, good for an \$11 season in 2018. I can't find any reason to expect anything worse than that. The price is about right.

ZOLA:

Chris Archer – how long can we assume he's been unlucky?

Kyle Freeland – Coors Field is undefeated, low K-rate makes him susceptible to rough outings

Shane Bieber – Shiny new toy, assuming regression monster kicks in

Rick Porcello – wins and K's are nice, but a risk to ratios

ADLER:

Chris Archer (ADP: 129)

- Great Command, as usual; xERA 3.50-3.70 past three years, but ERA over 4.00 each year
- Move to NL didn't seem to help; Never more than 12 wins; Tough division

Kyle Freeland (ADP: 130)

- Coors Field – what could possibly go wrong?
- Not a big K guy; Skills don't match sub-3.00 ERA; 80% S% helped. xERA over 4.00

Shane Bieber (ADP: 155)

- Only 115 major league IP; 4.55 ERA...but 3.55 xERA; Big Ks, few walks; Lots of ground balls

Rick Porcello (ADP: 161)

- ERA over 4.28 three of past four years
-

Which of the following categories of players would you be most inclined to overdraft/overpay for in 2019?

Ace (top-12) starting pitcher

Top-tier closer

40+ SB source

Top catcher (Realmuto/G. Sanchez)

MURPHY: pretty straightforward

Advantages of each:

- SP: extra IP/K from top guys, relative to mid-tier all 150-160 IP types
 - CL: fracturing saves market, "stable" saves sources valuable if you find right one
 - SB: trending downward in the game, only three 40+ SB sources last year, eleven 30+
-

Section 5: Freshman Hazing and Sophomore Slumps

Which rookie hitter will be the most profitable at his draft price this season?

Vlad Guerrero, Jr. (ADP: 40)

Victor Robles (ADP: 100)

Danny Jansen (ADP: 228)

Nick Senzel (ADP: 229)

HERSHEY: Context is startup, one-year draft

- What's your feeling on rostering rookies? Do you invest? Does anyone have a no-rookies policy?
- Q: Show of hands for each
- Whys—or why nots—moving back from Senzel
 - Senzel: // trouble staying healthy, not yet a set position. But strong bat: short swing, plus-BA in MiLB; answered Qs about power; athletic //
 - Jansen: // Good ct% in MiLB; VG walk rates; low bar as a catcher. Has a job; 15-18 HR guy? Position points? //
 - Robles: // secure job; 'D' will keep him in the lineup; skills highest upside other than Vlad; #4 on HQ100; fatigue b/c inj; just 21 //
 - Vlad: to Emily Is Vlad a generational talent? What makes him different than others in top 10s recently: Corey Seager, Miguel Sano, Kris Bryant, Joey Gallo etc?
 - This is 3rd round – before Khris Davis, Rendon, Bellinger, Suarez

BLESSING: Victor Robles has the best potential of this group to be valuable. Sure, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. is the sexy name. He shouldn't struggle to badly orienting himself to MLB pitching. He'll give owners average and home runs. However, the home run totals may not be as great as Acuna in his in rookie campaign. I like Robles because he's a potential stat stuffer in the same amount of categories as Guerrero. However, SB are so valuable right now and Robles' ability to pile on SBs makes him the best potential rookie contributor and the best value at draft position.

Which hyped rookie will provide the LEAST 2019 value?

Peter Alonso

Keston Hiura

Kyle Tucker

Nick Senzel

HERSHEY: These obv late picks, reserve rounders in many drafts. But final 3 in our Top 20 prospects overall. And all close to the majors

Which one are you most wary of not returning value in 2019?

- Alonso: not good on D, swing / miss, but can hit the ball a country mile // Mets looking for change?
- Hiura: big skills; hit w/ some power; but will need some dominoes to fall (Moustakas signing)
- Tucker: 20 HR/20 SB last two seasons; struggled in MLB debut; place to play
- Senzel: cov prev

BLESSING: It was Peter Alonso earlier this week, given the Mets off-season and his inability to play a defensive position with adequacy. Now, with the signing of Mike Moustakis, it's Keston Hiura. Hiura could use the time in the minor leagues. His batting average and hard contact rate are great but the CT%, which was 71% in the AFL, keeps falling due to his inability to read breaking pitches. Senzel could be a real wildcard least 2019 value choice. He has suffered through several injuries the past 2 seasons and some scouts have questioned his temperament

Which of these pitchers do you prefer at his current ADP?

Forrest Whitley (ADP: 219)

Jesus Luzardo (ADP: 262)

Julio Urias (ADP: 281)

Brent Honeywell (ADP: 506)

HERSHEY:

My quick study last yr on rookie SP, and the return rate was awful in their rookie seasons. 3 of these 4 are rooks. But you HAVE to pick one

- Q: Is there any difference between how you treat (roster) rookie pitchers vs. hitters?
- Whitley: (15th rd) Houston RHP; 6-7 240; three pitches plus (FB, CB, CH) and will mix cutter/SL. Advanced; few questions. Top ranked pitching prospect (#7)
- Luzardo (18th): Athletics, left-hander; FB/CH, but CB really good also. Shot up charts in 2018
- Urias (19th): looked good in playoffs; only one here with MLB experience, role?
- Honeywell (29th) – now 432 ADP, but coming off TJS. (But latest by far) Another multi-pitch guy before the injury

<<After reveal, updated ADP has Whitley and Luzardo at same (231 v 233). Which one do you prefer? And/or, why the movement? (Honeywell also moved; from 506 to 427)>>

BLESSING: A few years ago, I delved into the necessary ingredients to predict rookie pitching success. I identified advanced FB command as the primary ingredient predicting success. Excluding Ohtani, who only threw 51 plus innings in his rookie campaign, the last 3 pitchers to win Rookie of the Year were Michael Fulmer, Jacob deGrom and Jose Fernandez. Each pitcher, had advanced FB command, as observed by scouts before their debuts, and statistically once the debuted. With this group, two pitchers meet the advanced fastball command criteria. Unfortunately, Honeywell's recovery from TJS makes it difficult to prefer, even at 506. I believe Jesus Luzardo is the best bang for your buck at 262, over the flashier Forrest Whitley at 219.

BREAK

Section 6: On the mound with the ball in the 9th and the game on the line, sometimes

Which top 6 closer is most likely to bust?

Edwin Diaz
Blake Treinen
Craig Kimbrel
Kenley Jansen
Aroldis Chapman
Roberto Osuna

DENNIS: Here we are looking for the most likely to disappoint. Worst ADP is Osuna after a tumultuous 2018 with a DV suspension and angry fanbase to face in 2019. Chapman (with his own DV history) has the lowest HQ\$. Terrific xERAs across the board with Osuna the “worst” at 3.01. Steamer likes Osuna the least (3.49 FIP) and Jansen not so great at 3.30 FIP. Jansen also has the heart condition to consider. We don’t yet have a landing spot for Kimbrel (at this writing). Treinen was superb in 2018, but 2017 struggles were not *that* long ago. Even Diaz had a not-great start to 2017. Relievers are volatile; water is wet. For me, I am attracted to the lower ADP: I can get Diaz or I can get someone great 3 rounds later. And we haven’t even mentioned Brad Hand or Felipe Vazquez. To answer the actual question, Houston will not let Osuna struggle and they have lots of viable replacements. So I’d vote Osuna today. But be mindful of the ADP cost.

COLLETTE:

- Osuna’s results outpaced the quality of his contact as his numbers should have been much worse.
- Osuna is an oddball that can generate swinging strikes, but cannot put away guys at the same rate his peers do
- Flyball closer in a home park with a short porch – how long can he suppress homers?
- Treinen had similar gap between actual and expected, but even his expected numbers were amazing

OLSON:

What could go wrong with...

Diaz

- Overuse? Injury? He’s a Met now? (Sorry, Ron.)
- No, seriously. This guy is a stud, even more so in second half (14.0 K/BB, 287 BPV). Would be pretty stunning if he were the bust.

Treinen

- He was a 4+ bb/9guy in 2015-2016, and FpK hasn’t improved (actually, it’s gotten a little worse).
- 4% HR/F probably not going to last, either, especially since his once-elite GB ball rate has receded a bit.
- Still, his GB rate returned in second half, and if he can sustain that 19% SwK, potent combo
- While he’s 31, too, there’s a bit less tread on these tires.

Kimbrel

- Last memory of him was a pretty shaky post-season,
- Shaky control was no fluke, so says FpK, but walk rate has spiked before, and he’s been able to turn the corner (2017: 1.8 Ctl, 61% FpK; 2016: 68% FpK)
- He also has the most severe flyball tilt of this bunch, which makes HR a bigger issue

Jansen

- Injury factor— offseason surgery to treat irregular heartbeat — not present with others
- Loss of tick off his fastball may have contributed to skills dip from previous seven years. If velocity comes back, maybe skills do, too.

Chapman

- Like Kimbrel and Jansen, he, too, is 31, but he may be showing his age a bit more than the others (fought knee tendinitis for months, then hit DL in Aug)
- He's never been a control artist, relying on straight gas, but maybe health will bring walk rate back to more acceptable career norms
- Does fastball get back to triple-digit territory, though? That's a lot to ask of any mortal arm, isn't it? "Mere" 98.9 mph average fastball still generated plenty of whiffs, however.

Osuna

- At first blush, outlier, given low strikeout rate, but SwK says K/9 should rebound in a big way.
- His control is great. If something befalls Osuna, it probably won't be him being his own worst enemy.
- May be a slight threat that A.J. Hinch decides to do something unconventional with the usage of his relievers, but I don't think I would fret this too much.

GIANELLA:

Edwin Diaz – He's an elite reliever any way you slice it. Outside of a brief stretch in May 2017 when Diaz struggled with command, he's been pure filth.

Blake Treinen – Treinen will slip this season and probably be overdrafted, but "bust" is too strong a word. I expect a solid low 3s ERA with a good WHIP and plenty of saves.

Craig Kimbrel – Are you a "bust" if you don't sign? You are if your ADP is as high as Kimbrel's. Maybe he signs in the next week or two and gets to 30 saves but I won't be taking him anywhere, especially at this late stage.

Kenley Jansen – Jansen is a close second to Kimbrel. The velocity is alarmingly down in Spring Training, and while he could be fine the health risk over the last two seasons gives me pause.

Aroldis Chapman – Chapman isn't likely to hurl 75-80 innings but he'll strike out enough batters and get enough saves to avoid the bust label.

Roberto Osuna – Could be the second best reliever in the majors this season behind Diaz. His reduced innings in 2018 weren't health or performance related, and Osuna should be fine.

GARDNER:

Edwin Diaz

- Has the highest expectations after 57-save season; Changing teams, leagues
- 1.36 HR/9 rate from 2017 could resurface (was 0.61 last year)

Blake Treinen

- He IS 30, ya know; Impossible to repeat a 0.78 ERA and 0.83 WHIP
- 92.3% strand rate and .232 BABIP also scream regression

Craig Kimbrel

- He IS 30, ya know; Changing teams?
- Only 5 pitchers in history have had more than eight 30-save seasons (only 2 consecutively – Rivera & Hoffman)
- 3.17 FIP/3.16 xERA last year was the highest of his career

Kenley Jansen

- Offseason heart surgery; Allowed 13 homers last year in 71 2/3 IP (1.63 HR/9)
- 4.07 FIP/3.62 xERA last year was the highest of his career

Aroldis Chapman

- Yankees have built a mega-bullpen; many other possible closers can share workload
- Injury risk; fewer than 60 IP in each of the past three seasons
- Walk rate at 5.3 BB/9 last season is a concern despite elite strikeout rate; Fastball only averages 99 mph now ;)

Roberto Osuna

- One off-field slip up ...
 - Strikeout rate went from 11.7 K/9 in 2017 to 7.6 K/9 last year; Two words: Ryan Pressly
-

Pick your favorite mid-tier closer:

Jose Leclerc (ADP: 110)

Kirby Yates (ADP: 114)

Ken Giles (ADP: 124)

DENNIS: Leclerc is the ADP preference. But skills-wise, Yates and Giles have far better xERA and FIP projections. Steamer in particular is not a fan. And it is hard to pitch in Texas. HQ\$ favors Yates then Leclerc. There is a risk that Yates gets traded mid-season, especially if Jose Castillo pitches well. Yates has also had some HR/9 problems in his past (before 2018) which makes him better in San Diego than most venues. Giles struggled with consistency in Houston. Will that self-correct in Toronto? So they all have some questions, but the best skill-set is usually the right answer and here that is Yates.

COLLETTE:

- Leclerc's numbers improved as the season wore on, and few are able to square him up. Texas will be out of contention before Mother's Day
- Yates gives up harder contact, but fewer walks and a better team that will be playing meaningful games in September
- Giles is easier to hit, and also in a division that is mostly filled with favorable run environments and loaded lineups

OLSON:

Jose Leclerc

- Main question: Can he sustain his 2H, particularly his 63% FpK, 2.6 Ctl, which had been missing piece? Because that 2H guy was about as good as they come (196 BPV, 5.5 Cmd, 20% SwK)
- Did have some luck in 2H, too (20% hit rate, 94% strand)
- Fly ball tilt (47% FB) is a little scary, particularly in Arlington

Kirby Yates

- After second year of elite BPV, it's a little easier to believe in this late bloomer.
- Improved Ctl and cut FB% while maintaining elite SwK.
- might think he faltered upon taking closer role (3.72 ERA in second half), but skills were as good as ever.
- If he stays in San Diego all year, he's got the skills to hold the job... but how big is that "if"?

Ken Giles

- Those hung up on surface stats may think "does he even belong with those other two?" In a word, yes.
- Skills have been steady... really. Most of his problems have been hit-rate driven.
- 26-for-26 in save opportunities

GIANELLA: They're all good and I'd be fine with any of them. Going backwards, Ken Giles is ranked the lowest due to lack of consistency from season to season. The overall numbers have generally been fine, but a bad month from your closer can ruin your season. LeClerc is a close second to Yates. The stuff and performance markers are elite; my only concern is if the rebuilding Rangers don't use him in a traditional role. Yates is on a better Padres team this year and outside of a brief slump in 2018 he kept hitters guessing with a newly found splitter. The ratios are elite and the park is great. Yates as a top five overall closer wouldn't surprise me.

GARDNER:

Jose Leclerc (ADP: 110)

- Yes yes yes. Elite strikeout rate (38.1%, 13.3 K/9) backed up by MiLB track record
- Just 25 years old; Not threatened by Shawn Kelley or Jesse Chavez

Kirby Yates (ADP: 114)

- Was even better than the man he replaced, Brad Hand with 2.14 ERA, 12/13 in saves
- Gotta love that 12.9 K/9 rate; Petco Park suppresses homers

-- Will have Manny Machado playing 3B behind him!

Ken Giles (ADP: 124)

-- High-profile failures, 4.65 ERA will push his price down even further

-- Major improvement in walk rate last year. (53 K, 7 BB in 50 1/3 IP)

Which late-round dart throw are you choosing for possible saves?

Craig Stammen

Trevor Hildenberger

Tayron Guerrero

Ryan Brasier

Anthony Swarzak

DENNIS: The key words in this question are “for possible saves.” ADPs favor Swarzak, despite injury/starting March behind the other relievers, presumably because Seattle is a free-for-all for saves. HQ\$ favors Stammen and the skills bear out why, with Stammen having the better xERA and Steamer agreeing with the better FIP and WHIP. If the Red Sox do not figure out a free agent for the bullpen, then Brasier will be in the conversation, although he is not the skill set that Matt Barnes is. Be wary of relievers like Tayron Guerrero and his high velo and potential opportunity in a volatile pen on a bad team. The skills are a 4.74 xERA—for a reliever. Steamer likes him a lot better. Despite the seeming opportunities for throwing darts, you want a reliever with the skills to do the job. Here, that looks most like Stammen, so that would be my answer, even where Swarzak *might* have a clearer path.

BONUS skill sets in this ADP range: Diego Castillo, Greg Holland, Brad Boxberger, Jose Castilo, Hector Neris, Serio Romo, Dakota Hudson, Steve Cishek, Shawn Armstrong, Tanner Scott.

These are all relievers who have a shot at *some* saves. Holland, Boxberger and Romo are all primary, but Holland and Boxberger in particular are skills-challenged (see Steamer, especially). Diego Castillo and Jose Castillo both look terrific, skills-wise, and will get saves at some point in the season. True dark horse/flyers lists should include Shawn Armstrong because Seattle is a free-for-all and he can strike hitters out, and also Tanner Scott because Mychal Givens is not sure thing and Scott can be a force if he gains just a little bit of command. Neris, Hudson and Cishek are just solid relievers who could convert in the short-term if called upon. I might rather take a shot with anyone on this second list over Guerrero or Swarzak.

COLLETTE:

- Only two guys worth consideration IMO, but only one of them has a good shot at double-digit saves
- Stammen is a terrific real like reliever, but he also pitches behind arguably one of the best Tier 2 closers in the league
- Brasier just needs to be told he is the closer, and a late round speculation right now could net him 30 saves if he holds the job on the season. He doesn't K guys like Kimbrel, but he also does not walk them like Kimbrel either.

OLSON:

Stammen

- From a straight skills perspective (“buy skills, not roles”), the best bet, if opportunity comes his way.
- Healthy risk;, and 5% HR/F should rise, but FpK, SwK and GB% (49%) point to good chance of success.
- Biggest problem may be that, as a 35-year-old in the last year of a cheap contract, he may be even greater of a trade risk than the guy in front of him, Kirby Yates.

Brasier

- Opportunity, unless Tyler Thornburg magically returns to his pre-thoracic outlet syndrome form (or the Red Sox re-sign Craig Kimbrel); in a heads-up battle with Matt Barnes, and has pinpoint control
- Brasier did come out of nowhere Whether he can duplicate the best skills of career he showed in a half-season in 2018 is an open question.

Hildenberger

- best combination of skills and opportunity. Poor second half was due largely to bad hit rate and strand rate luck (39% and 54%, respectively).
- Control did get a little wonky; HR became a bigger problem as his ground ball rate dropped.
- Also, Trevor May and Addison Reed,
- New manager Rocco Baldelli is a bit of a wild card, but he has pledged allegiance to analytics

Guerrero

- Guerrero's 98.8 mph fastball may intrigue Mattingly more than most.
- very much control challenged; Can't totally buy the strikeouts, either, given relatively low SwK.
- Incumbent Steckenrider is nowhere near a sure thing,

Swarzak

- Shoulder discomfort, one of the two injuries that cost him 14 weeks last season, is bad news.
- Even though he repeated his 2017 strikeout rate, SwK suggests that may have been a mirage.

Between Swarzak's age and injury, I'm pretty much ready to aim my darts here at **Shawn Armstrong** (minor league closing experience, saved 2018 season finale for Mariners) or **Dan Altavilla** (96 mph fastball, and while he struggled mightily with control, a 65% FpK says all hope is not lost; this year's Jose Leclerc?)\

GIANELLA:

Craig Stammen – I want Stammen on my teams regardless of role. His sinker generates grounders and the volume he provides makes him playable in almost any format. Unfortunately, Kirby Yates is in front of him and profiles as an elite reliever.

Trevor Hildenberger – The opportunity is certainly here if May falters, but an increase in walk rate and a mediocre DRA last year make it unlikely Hildenberger is next in line in Minnesota.

Tayron Guerrero – The walk rate prevents me from pulling the trigger, and Guerrero hasn't been mentioned as a possibility in Miami, but I'd watch Guerrero closely. The fastball averaged almost 100 MPH in 2018 and Guerrero would dominate in the ninth if he could harness that command.

Ryan Brasier – Brasier is my choice in this group, especially with Craig Kimbrel unsigned and Boston expressing little if any interest. Neither he nor Matt Barnes is an "established" choice and it could be a committee /split

Anthony Swarzak – He'll have opportunity in a soft bullpen but outside of deep or AL-only leagues I'll pass. Relievers like this are available on the wire all season long, even if we can't identify who they are right now.

GARDNER:

Craig Stammen

-- Fabulous peripherals last year. 10.0 K/9, 1.9 BB/9, allowed 3 HR in 79 IP.

-- Kirby Yates only has a half-season of closer experience; Skills, not roles

Trevor Hildenberger

-- Historically heavy ground-ball pitcher, which can help get out of jams

-- Consistently effective changeup; He's better than Tyler Duffey </doug dennis voice>

Tayron Guerrero

-- He's physically imposing (6-7, 214 lbs.); Throws really hard (98.8 mph avg. FB)

-- One skill away (albeit, command) from being a dominant reliever

Ryan Brasier

-- Craig Kimbrel isn't around anymore; Extremely impressive as 30-year-old rookie:1.60 ERA, 0.77 WHIP in 33 2/3 IP

-- Excelled under playoff spotlight (1 ER in 8 2/3 IP)

Anthony Swarzak

-- Will be dirt-cheap after shoulder issues and last season's 6.15 ERA

-- Only one year removed from 2.33 ERA, 1.03 WHIP, 10.6 K/9 with Chisox, Brewers

-- Kept his 10.6 K/9 rate intact last season, despite physical problems; Two words: Hunter Strickland

Section 7: The point in the draft when the beer is gone

It's your final, 23rd pick of the draft. Who are you likely selecting?

Your 2nd catcher

Your 5th OF

A possible closer-in-waiting

A speculative minor league prospect (any position)

SHANDLER:

The first question is, how many people plan out their draft in advance so that they have a pretty good idea what types of players they'll be targeting at different stages? It's a helpful way to evaluate the talent pool in advance.

The large percentage of people who selected #2 catcher astounded me. Yes, the catcher pool is a wasteland, but why would you deliberately draft a dead spot onto your roster? In a 15-team mixed league drafting 30 catchers, let's assume that 20 of them have some redeeming quality (and that might be generous). That leaves 10 catchers who are going to do nothing except hurt your bottom line. Why guarantee yourself one of those by waiting until the end-game? Yes, you'll have to push some catchers upward to avoid those bottom 10, but you don't have to reach way up for Realmuto. There are catchers who have some positive asset – Robinson Chirinos' power, low-AB guys like Mitch Garver and Kevan Smith who have higher BA floors – who are better than the end-game chaff.

The rest of the survey results were expected. However, I thought it would be interesting to go back to the last five years' ADPs to see what types of players were ACTUALLY drafted in the 23rd round. Those results were nothing like the survey results.

9%	#2 catcher (thank goodness for this)
21%	#5 OF
16%	Possible closer-in-waiting
25%	Speculative minor league prospect

That still leaves 29% unaccounted for. The rest of those picks went to starting pitchers, which does make sense.

It's the 20th round and you need another SP. Who is your choice?

Jacob Junis

Anibal Sanchez

Freddie Peralta

Luke Weaver

VANRIPER:

Jake Junis

- Pros: Good control, plenty of job security, slight uptick in K's last season
- Cons: Only one above average pitch, run support and bullpen behind him are sketchy

Anibal Sanchez

- Pros: Increased cutter usage generated a lot of weak contact, signed with a good team
- Cons: IP < 150 three of the last five seasons

Freddie Peralta

- Pros: The Brewers are ahead of the curve with pitching development
- Cons: Lacks premium velocity, mixed different fastballs, but limited use of curve (19.5%) and change (2.7%) in 2018 debut; might end up in the bullpen

Luke Weaver

- Pros: He's not a fringe Top 100 guy in ADP this draft season! Chase Field humidior made the park much more manageable for pitchers. Should have job security in AZ rotation after being a key piece in Goldy deal.
- Cons: Mostly a two-pitch guy, changeup needs to be further away from fastball velo-wise, and curveball was a low spin meatball (.562 SLG against)

BLESSING:

I lean heavily towards Jakob Junis over Sanchez, Peralta and Weaver. At round 20, we've exhausted any upside plays. You could look at Freddy Peralta as a speculative play here. However, he's lacking control, his overall command is poor and he relies exclusively on delivery deception for strikeouts, without any true out pitch at his disposal. If the strikeouts help, the walks are going to neutralize any gains. Jakob Junis is a solid, reliable option here, mostly due to his stellar FB control and command, even if he has one pitch generating swings and misses, his slider. The Luke Weaver we saw last year is more likely to return this year than the one who made his debut. The peripherals were garbage. It's really hard to trust Anibal Sanchez can repeat his 2018 success.

ZOLA:

Jakob Junis – hard to find 180 IP this late, good division to stream

Anibal Sanchez – seemed to find himself last season, good team, good bullpen

Freddie Peralta – most whiffs

Luke Weaver – pedigree, good park, replaceable if it doesn't work out

RICHARDS:

- **Junis**, projected BPV 105, K% increased from 19% to 22% last year while BB% stayed steady at 6%. BPV APR-JUN: 100; JUL-SEP: 124; AUG-SEP: 135, so he got better as the season progressed. HRs are an issue, but that also improved later. Great slider, so if two-seamer develops as hinted in his past, he could step up.
- **Sanchez**, projected BPV 102, K% from 2016-2018: 20%, 22%, 24%, while BB% typically 8%. BPV APR-JUN: 89; JUL-SEP: 119. How did he do this after several bad years? Change of pitches, using cutter and change-up more, got more ground balls, plus good luck and healthy. Do you feel lucky a second year?
- **Weaver**, projected BPV 89, K% from 2016-2018: 27%, 29%, 20% and BB% jumped from 7% to 9%. BPV APR-JUN: 75; JUL-SEP: 54. Disappointed us last year, but he's only 25, now with Arizona, he should be back in the rotation, his first pitch K percentage climbed to 60%, and his xERA says he could be decent even with the WHIP risk. Get him late for strikeouts and wins.
- **Peralta**, projected BPV 77, had 30% K% in 78 IP in 2018, but 12% BB%. Skills and results faded in the second half, including velocity down. He throws a four-seam FB most of the time, using deception to help it play, but batters caught on in the second half. He needs to cut down the walks, improve against LHB. Risky.

HERTZ:

- Jacob Junis seems to be offering a high floor. His career xERA is a decent 4.16 and his career BPV is 103. He also offered a late 2019 tease: BPV's last August and September were 138 and 132.
- The high ceiling guy on the list is Freddy Peralta. In 78 2018 innings, he had a Dom of 11 and an Opponents BA of 178; however, his Ctl was 4.6 and his fly ball rate was 52% in a hitters park. Also it's not even clear he'll be in the Brewers' rotation.
- Anibal Sanchez is coming off a solid 2018 although his 3.77 xERA was nearly a run higher than his actual ERA. The problem is that Sanchez was truly awful in the three seasons before 2018, regression is likely and the potential for a low floor could be significant.

- A year ago, Weaver was a sought after commodity, but pretty much everything went in the wrong direction in 2018. If you're looking for something positive, his velocity actually ticked up. Regression is likely to help and a new team may provide a reset, but he's going to need a lot of positive regression to make him useful.

It's late in the draft, and you need a C. Which poison do you pick?

Tucker Barnhart

Robinson Chirinos

Austin Hedges

Jonathan Lucroy

VANRIPER:

Tucker Barnhart

- Might end up playing the most of everybody in this group
- Reds lineup is strong top to bottom
- Good plate skills: 10.3% BB%, 18.4% K% last season

Robinson Chirinos

- AVG is going to be low (32.9% K%)
- Power is steady
- Lineup around him is as good as any of these alternatives

Austin Hedges

- Francisco Mejia might not be a real catcher, but Hedges definitely is
- Steady pop, K% lower than Chirinos too
- Padres lineup got a nice lift with the Machado addition

Jonathan Lucroy

- Was elite once, as catcher bats go
- Maybe there is a Kurt Suzuki post-30 renaissance coming?
- Still puts a lot of balls in play

BLESSING: The easy part is who I stay away from, Robinson Chirinos. He's a .200 hitter who will flirt with 20 HR. I can get my HR from anywhere else. I can't take the loss on AVG or OBP skills, especially with strikeout rates so high. Austin Hedges is a better version of Chirinos. However, with Francisco Mejia nipping at his toes, he's a sub \$3 or lesser play. I like Jonathan Lucroy's contact ability but hate the quality of his contact. He won't lose me value but he won't gain me value either. Tucker Barnhardt is the best option here. It's a sacrifice in HR but you get a solid .250 plus hitter who walks 10% of the time. Not a bad late-round pick up.

ZOLA:

Tucker Barnhart – regular role, has hit higher in the order, won't hurt you

Robinson Chirinos – deep lineup, should be productive with R+RBI

Austin Hedges – good pop, could hit high in order

Jonathan Lucroy – good framer should keep bat in the lineup, decent contact, results should follow

RICHARDS:

What do you need most in the end game, batting average or power?

- If power, go with Chirinos or Hedges, and I'd pick Hedges as he has upside that could lead to a .250 BA instead of .210 (he has three years in a row of climbing XBA). Hedges had a good 2nd-half, and he is on the rise.
- OK with power and need to not harm your BA? Barnhart and Lucroy are your picks, and I'd give the edge to the younger Barnhart in the better park to hit with an improved lineup in front of him for better RBI chances.
- But if Hedges continue to improve, he could give you .250 *and* 25 HRs. That's the kind of 2nd C I want.

HERTZ:

- Jonathan Lucroy has the biggest name, but probably the least to offer unless you're into history. The one time all-star has seen his power evaporate- just a total of 10 homers in 838 at bats in 2017 and 2018. Moving from Oakland to Anaheim May help, but there's only so much one can do with PX's in the 50s.
- With the exception of a couple of bad months in 2018, Tucker Barnhart has settled in as a solid contributor with a modicum of power, at least for a catcher, and his ability to take a walk makes him slightly more attractive in OBP leagues. For owners not wanting a risk, Barnhart is the kind of hitter who generally won't hurt teams.
- Robinson Chirinos' career xBA means he's going to be a drag on batting average (although like Barnhart, a solid walk rate mitigates the issue a little in OBP leagues). He does, however, offer power that plays at any position. His 35 homers over the past two years is more than supported by PX scores that have been at least 142 in each of the past four seasons.
- Austin Hedges' 2018 season got off to a poor start marked by a slump and injury, but after July 1, he was one of the better catchers in baseball (12 homers, .256 xBA). One question about Hedges' 2019 value is the lurking presence of top prospect Francisco Mejia.

Which late round (300+ ADP in 12-team leagues) target is the best bet for profit?

Jason Kipnis

Leonys Martin

Kole Calhoun

Avisail Garcia

Eduardo Nunez

VANRIPER:

Jason Kipnis

- Might have fewest obstructions to playing time of this group; 600 PA in 3 of L4 seasons
- Still runs a little bit (13-for-16 in SB attempts since start of 2017)
- But...13th percentile in Exit Velocity and 16th percentile in hard-hit rate
- Pretty much below average in everything skills-wise now, other than plate discipline

Leonys Martin

- Best OF option on the depth chart, especially for CF...so plenty of PT against RHP
- Is he going to lead off against RHP in Cleveland?
- Above average in hard-hit rate, xWOPA, xSLG and sprint speed last season
- Hasn't sniffed a full season in either of the last two campaigns, and the bottom fell out completely in 2017 with the Mariners and Cubs

Kole Calhoun

- Had to make big changes to his swing to get back on track last season post-DL stint
- .242/.328/.472 with 18 homers in 367 PA after DL
- Lower fence in RF increased LHH power output in Anaheim last season
- Might have been the worst hitter in the league before that turnaround (.145/.195/.179)

Avisail Garcia

- The Rays are pretty smart, and they brought him in
- Less OF duty could help him stay healthy
- Hit career-high 19 homers last season despite four-year low games played total (93)
- Approach was more flyball-heavy, could be this year's C.J. Cron?
- Hasn't shown ability to hit for high AVG with power in the past
- League could attack him differently now that he's trying to launch

Eduardo Nunez

- Now 31 years old, battled leg injuries last season that likely sapped his contributions on the basepaths
- Has a former elite prospect blocking him at third base (Devers), and isn't a good defender anywhere
- xBA never bought him as a .300+ hitter
- Might have a lot of chances to play at 2B — Boston did nothing to change things on that front this winter

BLESSING: My first instinct was to go with Jason Kipnis here, a guy I seem to own every year. I can't trust him anymore. I'm encouraged Avisail Garcia will have a bounce back year, assuming his legs are healthy. He's a 20 HR bat who will provide a respectable average. The groundball rates are worrisome and could be a deterrent to his value. Leonys Martin will have opportunity and Eduardo Nunez will have a good half. If you are looking for steals in the 300s, they serve as better options than Garcia and Kipnis.

ZOLA:

Jason Kipnis – teens power, SB success rate good and Tribe may need to run.

Leonys Martin – good pathway to playing time, can run

Kole Calhoun – Angels Stadium played 134 for LHB HR last season (lowered HR line in right field)

Avisail Garcia – All round contributor, spot in meat of order

Eduardo Nunez – Pedroia big question, Holt exposed as regular, Nunez can run

RICHARDS:

- **Garcia** put up a \$24 season in 2017, but hamstring and knee injuries derailed 2018. He could bounce back and put up 20 HRs with a .260 BA.
- **Nunez** had injury issues last year, but if healthy now he could give double-digit HRs and SBs and a .280 BA while being eligible at 2B and 3B. Nice flexibility in the end game: a player who won't hurt you anywhere.
- **Kipnis** had a nice 2nd-half, could give 20 HRs and 10 SBs with a .240 BA.
- **Martin**, off to a decent start last year until bacterial infection cut his season off in August. Healthy now, he can provide 15 HR power with 20 SB speed and a .240 BA.
- **Calhoun** came back in the 2nd half and was terrific (16 HRs, 42 RBIs and .330 OBP from JUL-OCT). Could give 20 HRs and .240 BA.

HERTZ:

- Jason Kipnis' numbers for the most part have been trending in the wrong direction — at least until the second half of 2018. After July 1, he had 11 homers, 5 steals, an xBA of .261 and a PX of 113.
 - Leonys Martin had an excellent first half of 2018 before an infection ended his season. There's no reason to believe he can't pick off where he was last season, meaning double digit homers and steals at a minimum.
 - Kole Calhoun was so awful at one point in 2018 that he was exiled to the minors. He returned and hit 14 homers in 193 July and September at bats before turning in another would month in September. When all was said and done, he had 18 homers and an xBA not far off his career mark.
 - Avisail Garcia struggled with injuries for much of 2018, but had 15 homers in 246 at bats after July 1. He's only a year removed from a .327 AVG, but that was a H% mirage. He'll probably hit more than the .236 he hit in 2018, but don't expect anything close to .300.
 - After averaging 32 stolen bases in 2016 and 2017, Eduardo Nunez stole only seven in 2018. His batting average also took a hit in 2018 as his H% was off from his recent levels. Nevertheless, his skills were really not diminished. To quote the forecaster, "if his knee is back to 100 percent, discounted price could lead pretty nice profit".
 - By now, you've discerned a theme. All of these guys had off years or off half seasons, sometimes due to injury; sometimes not.
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Section 8: Potpourri for \$200, Alex

Which injury-prone hitter is the best value at his ADP?

Josh Donaldson (ADP: 106)

A.J. Pollock (ADP: 117)

Wil Myers (ADP: 117)

Aaron Hicks (ADP: 124)

Miguel Cabrera (ADP: 167)

MURPHY:

Josh Donaldson

- 33
- 167 DL, 3 years
- Injuries have been primarily soft-tissue, which we would expect with aging
- His calf injuries have been pretty serious and slow to heal

Wil Myers

- 28
- 81 DL, 3 years
- Was shaking off injury bug until 2018
- Should be okay to go in 2019, but high risk
- PT now a ? with Machado signing

Miguel Cabrera

- 36
- 150 DL, 3 years
- Age alone is a concern
- Should be healed from biceps injury
- Minor issues (hammy, groin) could be a warning that he's starting to break down
- Overall, "injury" risk is moderate, but age added in makes him high risk

A.J. Pollock

- 31
- 245 DL, 3 years
- DL history is awful, but much of it is traumatic injuries (2 elbows, hand, and a thumb)
- Has had groin injuries as well
- Risk is high, but probably not as high as it looks

Aaron Hicks

- 29
- 115 DL, 3 years
- Frequent injuries, but all have been moderate in severity
- Probably highest risk on list; frequency is a big concern, and the next injury could be a serious one

Which injury-prone pitcher is the best value at his ADP?

Eduardo Rodriguez (ADP: 154)

Yu Darvish (ADP: 160)

Hyun-Jin Ryu (ADP: 178)

Rich Hill (ADP: 184)

MURPHY:

Eduardo Rodriguez

- 26
- 194 DL, 3 years
- 2017 knee surgery should take care of knee issues going forward; most studies suggest that outcomes are excellent
- Ankle sprain can be considered somewhat of a freak injury
- Overall health risk is moderate

Yu Darvish

- 32
- 236 DL, 3 years
- Warning flags everywhere: Shoulder, elbow, etc.
- Aside from viral infection, all issues have been arm and back
- Extreme risk

Hyun-Jin Ryu

- 32
- 306 DL, 4 years
- Odd collection on injuries: elbow, hip, shoulder, foot, groin
- With no clear pattern, hard to draw conclusions
- BUT... he is clearly injury prone. Extreme risk

Rich Hill

- 39
 - 149 DL, 3 years
 - Age alone is a concern
 - Blisters, blisters, blisters!
 - Evidence that seams on ball changed in 2015
 - High % of CU may put more stress on fingers
 - Good chance of recurrence
 - Blisters alone are moderate risk; adding in age makes him high risk overall
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Which SP would you prefer?
Miles Mikolas
Zach Wheeler

HERSHEY:

First off, going to give you three choices in how to look at this.

1. Decision is not close, prefer one FAR over the other (which one, why?)
2. Decision is fairly close, but still one comes out ahead (which one, why?)
3. It's razor-thin, very close to call. Out of those .. .how would you decide? IN this case, with these pitchers?

As of last night: Wheeler 92; Mikolas 93; both in the 7th round.

Mikolas (30 y/o): 1 yr track record, but doesn't walk guys, pristine WHIP, 49% GB%

Wheeler: (29): also 1 yr track record, more stuff, but 182 IP after 86 IP in the prev 3 years combined

WALTON:

Mikolas

- pros: Control/ground ball specialist with four pitches; Lowest walk rate in MLB
- cons: Low strikeout rate - < 7K/ 9 IP; xFIP of 3.67; 31-year old with sophomore slump?

Wheeler

- pros: Very strong second half 2018; Velocity and control improved
 - cons: Are health issues behind him?; Doubled IP 2018 vs. 2017 – pro or con
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Which SP would you prefer as your third SP between picks 140-155?

JA Happ
Shane Bieber
Eduardo Rodriguez
Nick Pivetta

HERSHEY: <just ask it out – raise of hands; and then why)

Stability (Happ) vs. what could be (the other 3)

- Pivetta (26, some exper) – 164 IP, much better peripherals than surface
- Bieber (24 v little exper) – 115 IP; unique; strike-thrower; strong skills
- E-Rod (26 w/ exper) – skills VG; but always injury risk; experienced
- Happ (36) – unique mid-30s growth; changed pitch mix; overlooked? Skills say so

Stability play a part in decision here a “safer” guy as 3d SP?

WALTON:

Happ

- pros: Consistent performer late in career; Sinkerball specialist
- cons: 37 years old; Yankee Stadium

Bieber

- pros: Good control – 1.8 BB/9; >1K/IP; .356 BABIP in 2018
- cons: Facing AL lineups; Age 24, second season – pro or con?

E Rodriguez

- pros: Power fastball; Added cutter as third pitch
- cons: Not in post-season rotation; Injury history (knee, ankle)

Pivetta

- pros: Improved CB; Strong start 2018 - 3.26 ERA (11 GS); xERA 3.51 vs. 4.77 actual; 10.3 K/9 IP; 47% GB%
- cons: Rough finish 2018 – no wins last nine weeks; Popular 2019 pick drives up price?