

The TBL Baseball Annual

A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

Realignment



2017 Edition

Walter H. Hunt

Robert Jordan

Mark H. Bloom

**All 24 Teams Analyzed
Using the T.Q. System**

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A publication of the Transcontinental Baseball League

by

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with contributions from TBL's managers

and extra help from:

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the TBL baseball annual

Welcome to the 2017 *TBL Baseball Annual*. This is the twenty-second year of the *Annual* in the book format. This year we're looking at realignment, and all the consequences; more than half of the teams in our league have changed addresses. There are new rivalries and new configurations, and thus new story lines for our magazine.

Our most senior manager brings us a great historical overview of our previous divisions and pennant races – how we came to our present arrangement. For our veteran managers, it's a walk down memory lane; for our newer friends, it's evidence of the depth and strength of our league.

A brief apology: time and gaps in knowledge have forced us to skip over the playoff descriptions this year. There were two epic series that went seven games, both mentioned in Year in Review articles: Melrose came within one key pitch of going to the World Series instead of Munich; and Maracaibo took Las Vegas in seven games before bowing to the Marauders.

Enjoy the *Annual* and enjoy the season.

Walter, Robert, Mark
May, 2017

The T.Q. System

Shamelessly stolen from the Mazerowski annual, the T.Q. System assigns points to each area of the team's expected performance and totals the result. The maximum score under the T.Q. System is **50**, divided as follows:

Pitching:	20 points
Offense:	17 points
Defense:	8 points
Bench:	5 points

The T.Q. System does not take age or prospect value into account, only present capability. It does, however, consider usage (available games, at bats and innings).

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future drafts

In many cases, what's on the field isn't the whole story. Some of our teams have quite a bit to say in future drafts, and any evaluation should properly take that into account.

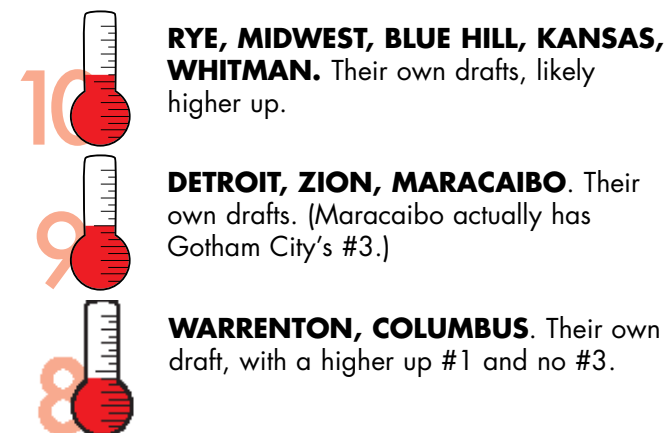
The graphical displays below show how much each team has in the tank. The middle mark on the thermometer (9) represents a full draft (picks #1-#3) in 2017; above the middle line is excess, while below means something's missing.



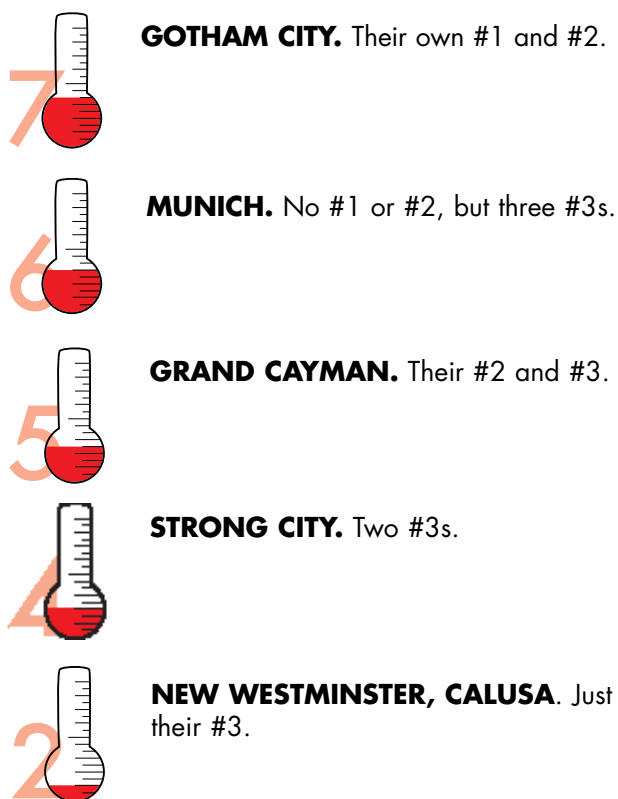
haves



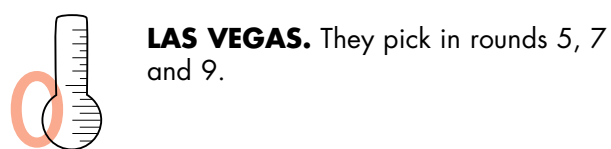
balanced



have nots



all in



These indicators also appear at the bottom of each team article, for your convenience.

t.q. summary

TEAM (DIVISION)	OFFENSE	DEFENSE	PITCHING	BENCH	TOTAL
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The Cream of the Crop



Grand Cayman (Williams)	13.5	6.0	15.0	2.5	37.0
Brobdingnag (Ruth)	14.0	6.0	14.0	3.0	37.0
New Westminster (Mays)	11.5	6.0	16.0	2.5	36.0
Hudson (Mantle)	11.0	4.5	13.5	2.0	31.0
Northboro (Williams)	10.0	3.5	13.5	3.0	30.0
Las Vegas (Aaron)	11.5	6.0	11.0	1.5	30.0
Munich (Mantle)	9.5	6.5	11.5	2.0	29.5

The Solid Performers



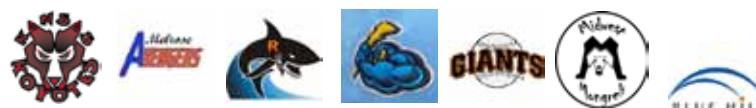
Gotham City (Mays)	8.0	5.0	9.5	2.0	27.5
Maracaibo (Aaron)	8.0	5.0	12.0	2.5	27.5
Zion (Williams)	11.0	3.0	10.5	3.0	27.5
Calusa (Mays)	12.5	3.0	8.0	3.0	26.5
Hoboken (Ruth)	8.0	6.5	6.0	3.5	25.0

The Transitional Teams



Detroit (Mantle)	8.5	3.5	8.5	2.0	24.0
Strong City (Aaron)	8.0	7.0	7.5	1.5	24.0
Whitman (Clemente)	7.5	7.0	5.5	2.0	22.0
Rye (Mays)	6.5	3.0	5.5	2.5	21.5
Columbus (Clemente)	7.5	3.5	8.5	2.0	21.5

The Rebuilders



Kansas (Aaron)	6.0	5.0	7.0	1.5	18.5
Melrose (Aaron)	6.5	5.0	7.0	2.0	18.0
Riverwoolf (Clemente)	7.0	3.5	4.5	2.5	17.5
Knoxville (Ruth)	7.5	3.5	3.0	2.5	16.5
Warrenton (Williams)	5.5	4.5	4.0	2.5	16.5
Midwest (Ruth)	7.0	3.0	3.5	2.5	16.0
Blue Hill (Clemente)	7.0	4.0	2.5	2.0	15.5

National	322.5 (26.9 average)
International	291.5 (24.3 average)

Division Totals

Williams (NC)	115.5	Mays (IC)	105.5
Aaron (NC)	111.0	Ruth (IC)	94.5
Mantle (NC)	106.0	Clemente (IC)	81.5

manager roll call

Munich Marauders	Mantle Division	<i>Paul Montague</i>	34th year
Hudson Generals	Mantle Division	<i>Clay Beard</i>	33rd year
Elders of Zion	Williams Division	<i>Richard Meyer</i>	33rd year
Gotham City Batmen	Mays Division	Anton Greenwald	32nd year
Knoxville Outlaws	Ruth Division	Pat Martin	31st year
Maracaibo Rumrunners	Mays Division	<i>Walter Hunt</i>	31st year
Brobdingnag Barbarians	Ruth Division	Joe Auletta	29th year
Hoboken Zephyrs	Ruth Division	Steve Powell	28th year
Grand Cayman Havens	Williams Division	Mark Bloom	27th year
Melrose Avengers	Aaron Division	Mark Freedman	24th year
Blue Hill Mudslides	Clemente Division	Mark Ludwig	22nd year
Whitman River Rats	Clemente Division	Brian Hanley	22nd year
Las Vegas Gamblers	Aaron Division	Paul Harrington	21st year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Robert Jordan	18th year
Midwest Mongrels	Ruth Division	Darrell Skogen	16th year
Northboro Phoenix	Williams Division	Steve Stein	15th year
Strong City Statesmen	Aaron Division	Eric Sheffler	14th year
Rye Herons	Mays Division	Craig Musselman	13th year
New West Whiskeyjacks	Mays Division	Jim Jeatt	13th year
Columbus Jets	Mantle Division	Vic Vaughn	11th year
Kansas Koyotes	Aaron Division	Bill Schwartz	10th year
Warrenton Giants	Williams Division	Jack Chapman	9th year
Detroit Stars	Mantle Division	Dave Jaskot	6th year
Calusa Indians	Clemente Division	Gordon Rodell	3rd year
Riverwoolf Sharks	Clemente Division	Daniel Dumont	1st year

Ray Murphy is serving his second year as our non-playing Commissioner.

Hall of Fame managers in ***Bold Italic***.



2017 computer pre-play

by Clay Beard

Here's the setup for this thing. I used Duke Robinson Jr. to manage all the teams. I checked Fatigue only under Fatigue and Injury Rules. I also checked all three of the options at the bottom; Automatic AIM Subs, Enforce BFP, and that No PR > 930 thing, which provides some innocuous usage. Something new this year is some "platoon awareness" thing which I checked. All players were active for the whole season. These settings basically allow the season to be played with usage similar to that of the MLB season with some innocuous help.

Then I just pushed the button and played the season 10 times. The won/loss records below indicate the average of the 10 seasons. As always take this with a grain of salt as Duke is basically the village idiot.

The only tight division race appears to be in the Williams where Grand Cayman edges out Northboro. The incredibly inconsistent Generals have a chance to push Munich in the Mantle. Hudson had a 34 game spread between their

best and worst seasons. That's a wide spread even for this exercise. By contrast Las Vegas and Brobdingnag were incredibly consistent, keeping it within 12 and 11 games respectively.



As usual the best races look to be the wild cards. The Williams second place team looks to be a lock and Hudson looks like a solid 2nd, but there are Zion, Columbus, Kansas, and Detroit all lurk on the periphery with a real shot. How come after the alignment shuffle, the Mantle still looks treacherous, top to bottom. It looks like Whitman may be eating Calusa's dust, but the good news is they look like a solid wild-card. The best race may end up being for the second wild-card in the IC, with Maracaibo, Gotham City and Hoboken all in the scrum.



International Conference TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Clemente	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
CALUSA	100	62	--	106	95	9	1
WHITMAN	87	75	13	99	74	1	5
RIVERWOOLF	67	95	33	73	60	0	0
BLUE HILL	59	103	41	71	50	0	0

Mays	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
NEW WESTMINSTER	93	69	--	101	88	7	3
MARACAIBO	84	78	9	91	70	2	3.5
GOTHAM CITY	83	79	10	93	71	1	3.5
RYE	68	94	25	78	55	0	0

Ruth	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
BROBDINGNAG	107	55	--	111	100	10	0
HOBOKEN	80	82	27	88	70	0	4
KNOXVILLE	65	97	42	77	54	0	0
MIDWEST	52	110	55	67	44	0	0

National Conference TYPICAL SEASON (rounded off)

Aaron	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
LAS VEGAS	95	67	--	102	90	10	0
KANSAS	81	81	14	94	71	0	2
STRONG CITY	71	91	24	78	58	0	0
MELROSE	69	93	26	80	62	0	0

Mantle	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
MUNICH	95	67	--	104	89	10	0
HUDSON	88	74	7	102	68	1	5.5
COLUMBUS	81	81	14	88	67	0	0
DETROIT	80	82	15	92	70	0	0.5

Williams	W	L	GB	Hi*	Lo†	Div‡	WC§
GRAND CAYMAN	99	63	--	107	91	6.5	3.5
NORTHBORO	97	65	2	102	91	2.5	6.5
ZION	83	79	16	95	71	1	2
WARRENTON	60	102	39	75	50	0	0

fractions reflect ties.

* Highest number of wins recorded
† Lowest number of wins recorded

‡ Division Championships (in 10 seasons)
§ Wild Card appearances (in 10 seasons)

hall of fame enshrinees 2017



Mike Piazza, C 1994-2008
*Minnesota/Knoxville, Maracaibo, Oklahoma City/
Lewiston-Auburn, Rochester/Columbus*

Like many other players in TBL, Mike Piazza's services were in demand; he played for several different teams, adding punch to contending lineups. He hit more than 30 home runs eight times, ending with a career total of 409, tops among catchers. His best season was 1998, when he led the league with 200 hits and a .354 average to go with 34 homers.

Manny Ramirez, OF 1995-2008
Portland, Rye

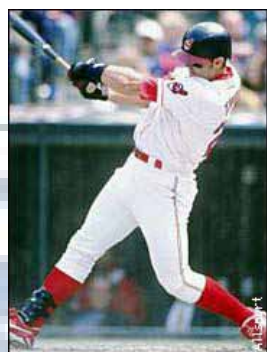
One of the most dominant power hitters in TBL, Manny Ramirez recorded 2,302 hits and 1,136 walks in his 17-year career, mostly spent in the middle of the Portland Possum lineup. He had 8 seasons with 100+ RBI, with his .297-52-164 season in 2004 the biggest standout. He is among career leaders in HR, RBI, SLG and OBP.



Curt Schilling, SP 1991-2004
Munich, Statesmen/Overland Park, Whitman, Knoxville

One of the most durable starters in recent TBL history, Schilling posted a 216-132, 3.46 record in 17 seasons mostly spent with Whitman, who selected him in the expansion draft. He won 20 games three times, including 24-8 and 24-6 seasons. He twice topped 300 Ks. His 136 CG is fourth overall; he recorded 10 or more in 8 seasons.

for your consideration



Left to Right: Mariano Rivera, Jim Thome, Chipper Jones, Jason Giambi

Mariano Rivera, RP 1996-2014
East Anglia, KnoxSox/Richmond, Maracaibo

A top flight closer, Mo notched 464 saves in his 19-year career, making him the all-time leader by a considerable margin; nine times he exceeded 30 in a season and twice exceeded 40. He averaged a strikeout an inning over more than 1,100 innings, allowing only 645 hits and only 58 home runs and recording a 1.74 lifetime ERA. *This is his second year of eligibility.*

Chipper Jones, SS-3B-OF 1996-2013
Council/Summit Glen/Oklahoma City, Mahopac, Maracaibo

One of the steadiest performers in TBL for a decade and a half, he hit 452 HR and drove in 1,617 runs, with a career slash of .283/ .370/ .499. He hit .301-45-128 in 2000, .308-51-121 in 2002 with 203 hits, and .335-36-98 in 2003 with 224 hits. Four times he hit 40 or more doubles. *This is his first year of eligibility.*

Jim Thome, 1B-DH 1994-2013
Munich, Rochester/Columbus, Brobdingnag.

For many years Thome was one of the most dangerous lefthanded power hitters in the game. He hit 568 homers, drove in 1,629 runs, and walked 1,602 times with a lifetime slash of .270/ .391/ .542. His two best seasons were 2002 and 2003 with Rochester; in 2002 he hit .319-51-170; in 2003, .278-51-141. He drove in 100 or more runs 7 times and walked 100 or more times 6 times. *This is his second year of eligibility.*

Jason Giambi, 1B-DH 1996-2012
East Anglia, Brobdingnag, Munich, Whitman.

A dangerous power hitter, Giambi hit 451 home runs in his TBL career, and walked 1,214 times. From 2000 to 2003 he hit 30 homers or more, and from 2001 to 2006 walked 100 times or more five times. His best season was 2001, when he hit .321-55-168 with 151 walks, slugging .687, leading East Anglia to a 114-win season. *This is his fourth year of eligibility.*

Players with carryover votes: Mariano Rivera 6, Gary Sheffield 5, Ivan Rodriguez 5, Jim Thome 5, Chipper Jones 4, Chuck Finley 3, Juan Gonzalez 2, Todd Helton 2, 13 players with 1.

the vegas line

by Paul Harrington



Mr. Harrington's short takes on our TBL teams also appear in the team articles for your convenience.



BLUE HILL MUDSLIDES. This franchise can't seem to catch a break! They haven't seen above .500 since 2008. This year's version has 45 starts at Grade 8 and higher. The rest are innocuous. Only Matt Bowman (Grade 11*) and John Axford (Grade 10*) have more than 50 innings available from the bullpen. Another 100+ losses seem more than likely.



BROBDINGNAG BARBARIANS. The 2017 edition of the Barbarians should bring a smile to Vlad's lips (if that's even possible). 113 starts of Grade 12 and above. Over 150 relief innings of Grade 21* or more and 230 of Grade 18* and above! There is an All Star at almost every position. Should have the best record in TBL in 2017 and is the favorite to win it all.



CALUSA INDIANS. Calusa Chief Gordon Rodell is entering his 2nd full season as a TBL manager and would like to improve on last year's 92-70 record. His rotation is very good and deep, but is supported by only 50 innings of Raisel Iglesias (Grade 22*) and a cast of thousands in the Grade 12* to 10* range. Bullpen help at the trading period would be useful.



COLUMBUS JETS. The Jets' rotation is the envy of TBL! 114 starts of double grade starts. Too bad there's no back end to the bullpen and the defense is subpar. They should still improve on last year's performance.



DETROIT STARS. The Stars' 52-110 record from 2016 was, hopefully, the bottom of their fall and that 2017 will be the 1st step upward. Will Myers turned into a nice surprise at 1B. There is good young talent here that should only improve.



GOTHAM CITY BATMEN. The Batman have averaged almost 98 wins these past

three seasons, but that success ends in 2017. Verlander & King Felix are solid, but only for 59 starts. Phenom Alex Reyes will make use of his Grade 21 (and only 46 innings) as the closer. Offense is still OK, but weak in spots. Won't be pushing new division mate New West much in 2017.



GRAND CAYMAN HAVENS. Whitey Bulger's former henchman associate, Boomer Wells, has turned around this moribund franchise and made it into a playoff contender. Now someone needs to talk to Mr. Wells about his habit of shipping out traded players in burlap sacks and car trunks!



HOBOKEN ZEPHYRS. Dr. Steve, then owner of the Dallas Eagles, finished the 2014 season at 48-114, one of the worst records in Eagles history. That offseason the franchise relocated to Hoboken, and every year since their record has improved. 54 wins in 2015 and 76 last year. 2017 is the year they break .500! Yeah!



HUDSON GENERALS. The Generals could be a potent foe in 2017. Good rotation, a deep pen, good hitting and power in the regular lineup. Their defense is somewhat suspect, but certainly a wild card contender.



KANSAS KOYOTES. The Koyotes were really hit hard by the injury bug in MLB 2016 and it shows in their rotation for this season. Harvey, Gray and Keuchel are all mere shadows of their former glory. Let's hope it's only a one year setback for Mr. Schwartz.



KNOXVILLE BLUE THUNDER. Pat Martin is another in a long line of veteran TBL managers beginning an arduous rebuild. Many long time vets were shipped out and young talent took their places. Score cards will sell well in the Thunder Dome in 2017! A top five draft choice is all but assured.



LAS VEGAS GAMBLERS. In true Vegas fashion, the Gamblers pushed everything into the pot for 2017. It's a good, solid team that should dominate the Aaron. But we have no margin for error. Win now is the Gamblers' motto for this year. We'll worry about tomorrow...tomorrow!



MARACAIBO RUMRUNNERS. Walter's warriors won the Aaron in 2016, held down a good Las Vegas team and fell to a ridiculously good Munich team. The Rumrunners are back in 2017 and are a wild card favorite and will contest their new division with New West all season.



MELROSE AVENGERS. The Avengers may be run by superheroes, but their players have felt the ravages of advancing age. Mark Freedman has dealt veterans and had a decent 2017 draft, but he didn't strip them down completely...yet.



MIDWEST MONGRELS. The Guru is about to enter the first year of the *Trea Turner Era* in Midwest. There's less than half a season there, but what a half season! With only 38 starts at Grade 8 and above and nobody in the pen above Grade 14*, another top five draft pick seems likely.



MUNICH MARAUDERS. 2016 TBL Champion Munich is still enjoying the offseason, rubber chicken circuit, but there is still plenty left in the tank for 2017. 100+ wins, a Mantle Division crown and a deep playoff run seem all but guaranteed. No pressure, Monty!



NEW WEST WHISKEYJACKS. After years of picking near the top of every draft, the Whiskeyjacks seem poised to finally reach the combustion stage of ignition. Over 100 starts of Grade 13 and higher is backed by a good, if not great bullpen. The lineup has a good blend of young talent and solid veterans. Should win the Mays and make a deep playoff run.



NORTHBORO PHOENIX. This here is another team that's on the upswing. One of the best rotations in TBL is supported by a

versatile bullpen. Their offense is good enough to contend in the new look Williams, or for a wild card spot.



RIVERWOLF SHARKS. New TBL member Daniel Dumont has taken a Taylorville franchise that won 94 games in 2016 and missed the playoffs by a single win and stripped it down to remake in his own image. Their win total will, probably, drop about 25-30, but they could be trouble by 2019.



RYE HERONS. It took longer than expected, but Craig Musselmen has finally begun The Rebuild in earnest. Many established vets were sent away and were replaced by guys from the 2017 draft. Matt Kemp, Jeff Samardzija and Kendrys Morales could be gone by the midseason trading period. May contend for No. 1 pick.



STRONG CITY STATESMEN. A new venue for a team on the rise! Eric has done a great job revamping an aging Portland team into a promising young group. They'll still take their lumps in 2017, but don't ignore them either.



WARRENTON GIANTS. Trader Jack is not exactly living up to his moniker lately. His team definitely looks ready for a rebuild, yet players like MadBum and, especially, Aroldis Chapman, who is completely superfluous, are still here. Chapman might leave at the midseason trading period for future considerations.



WHITMAN RIVER RATS. Clayton Kershaw is the leader of a staff with 105 starts above Grade 9. The bullpen doesn't have a closer grade available, but lots of opportunities for mixing and matching. The offense is reduced from 2016, but we all know how much Brian can squeeze from lesser talent. Whitman should give Calusa a run for the Clemente crown.



ELDERS OF ZION. Rich Meyer's 2016 team lost 100 games for the 1st time in franchise history. This after dropping 98 games in 2015. They are much improved for 2017, but still will have trouble staying in contention. Somewhere around the .500 mark seems likely.



[Welcome to the 2017 TBL Baseball Annual! As always, we're glad to have the chance to bring you the best of current analysis and future prediction. This year's issue focuses on the realignment of our divisions, after a dozen years of stability. It means more work for us, but we're equal to it. Here's a terrific leadoff article from the dean of TBL managers, Paul Montague. – Ed.]

Lions and Tigers and Realignment, Oh My!

*A Short History of TBL's Divisions
and Competitive Balance*

We are entering the first season in a long time with significant divisional realignment in TBL, so Walter thought we needed an article that looked into the effects of TBL's structure as it relates to competitive balance. Thanks to Steve and Clay's yeoman work in preserving and web-izing our league records, there is a *lot* of information available. After a bit of number-crunching some patterns emerged. This article is the capsule summary of this research.

Laying the Land

Let's start by defining some terms and measures we'll use. It is fairly easy to define a league's structure with three numbers – number of teams, divisions, and playoff slots. Likewise, it is easy to identify things that produce significant changes to the structure – expansion, realignment and teams changing divisions (“moves”), and GMs entering or leaving the league (“newGMs”).

Measuring “competition” is more difficult. I looked at a number of potential measures for this: teams repeating in the playoffs (“repeats”), maximum and minimum wins

in a season (“maxW” / “minW”), maximum wins for a team not in the playoffs (“first out” in March Madness terminology) vs minimum wins for a team in the playoffs (or “last in”), spread of division races (i. e., the games-behind between division winner and second place teams - minimum and maximum across all divisions for a given season – call these “minGB” and “maxGB”). I also looked at how many teams won 100+ and 110+ games, or won less than 60 or less than 50.

So, using these definitions and measures, what does TBL history look like? (Note – for consistency, *when referring to franchises, I will use the current names or abbreviations unless otherwise noted.*)

1981-88 - Planetary Formation

I originally thought about calling this time the “Wild West” – you know, “trades flowed like cheap gin in the town saloon”, “owners dropped like greenhorns before a practiced gunman”, that sort of thing. But. No.

A bit like the solar system congealing out of swirling gases, the first seven years saw TBL being founded, and growing from an initial six owners with 12 teams playing 106-game seasons, almost entirely face to face, to a fully ‘by-mail’ league with 20 teams (and owners) in four divisions with a full 162-game schedule. Teams changed hands and moved to new divisions frequently, trading was very active, and there were two expansions – after the 1984 season moving from 12 teams in three divisions with only division winners making the playoffs to 16 teams in four divisions with six playoff teams; then in

1987 and 1988, to 20 teams in four divisions, still with six in the playoffs. (*This took two years because we committed to expanding in '87 only to discover that we wouldn't have 20 owners... So, the expansion teams were drafted, but four teams 'sat out' the '87 season, entering play in 1988 when we had a full cadre of owners.*) So new were we that the records of the first three seasons have been lost: our version of MLB's 19th century.

Still, a few observations can be made about this period. Perhaps because of the structural volatility, it "felt" competitive. If we look at the measure of "last in" wins versus "first out" wins, we find that there was never a "first out" team with more wins than the "last in" team. The "minGB" was 1 or 2 in four of the five years, and was only 4 in the remaining year, indicating that at least one division had a tight race each year. In fact, in 1986, CAL won the Ruth Division with a record of 82-80, while the other three teams tied with 80-82 marks – competitive balance in spades!

Notable during this time were two 'dynasties' – Tim Holmes' Brazil Hurricanes (now STA) made the playoffs in four of the five years; but MAR stole the show, being a playoff team from 1985-88 and winning a record three titles in a row (1986 and '87 under Rich Meyer, 1988 under Walter Hunt when Rich took on the expansion Elders of Zion).

By The Numbers:

Expansions: 2 (12 teams to 20; 3 divisions to 4; 4 playoff teams to 6)

Moves (average per year): 4

newGMs (average per year): 6.25

Repeats (average): 2.25

>100 W (average): 1.16

<60 W (average): 1.8

Seasons with "first out" > "last in": zero

1989-2003 - Tectonic Shifts

Just as planet Earth, having formed, went through a period of tectonic shifts as the current continents formed, in similar fashion, TBL had a decade and a half of 'settling down' as the 20th century moved into the 21st. By 1989, it was clear the league was not likely to fold (although I doubt any of us foresaw our current 36-and-counting longevity). But, as we absorbed the outcome of our second expansion, there were still some changes coming.

On the side of stability, teams changed owners and divisions much less. We welcomed at least one new owner every year during this period, but never more than five – whereas it had never been *less* than six in a season during the early years. Similarly, there was still some non-expansion-related movement to different divisions, but in seven of the 15 years, no teams asked to move. This would seem to argue for a more stable situation that intuitively might seem to encourage 'fair competition'. But ...

The 20-team / 4-division / 6-playoff macro structure lasted for seven seasons, then from 1996 to 1998, we moved to the current 24-team / 6-division / 10-playoff structure. This happened in part because of consternation over a competitive-balance issue – a multi-year pattern emerged of "first out" teams having more wins (sometimes a *lot* more wins) than the "last in" teams. The 1996-98 expansion was intended in part to try to address this; but was only partially successful. While "last in" teams still won less than "first out" teams in most years from 1998-2003, at least the left-out "first out" teams weren't 100+ game winners, which had happened *five* times from 1989 to 1997.

There were some other factors that militated against competitive 'balance' during this period. Most significant perhaps was the "Brobdingnag Factor" – Joe Auletta joined TBL in 1989, proceeded to trade off every player on the roster he took over who even had a pulse, and lost a staggering 126 games in each of his first two seasons. He had introduced us to the Massive Deliberate Build-down (MDB), and TBL would never be the same. Joe had gotten our attention, and several other owners began their versions of the MDB. In 1991, seven teams had 99 losses or more. In 1993, when BRO began its period of sustained winning and playoff appearances, KAN lost 138 games to break BRO's record, and in 1995 RYE did the same.

Obviously, if some teams are choosing to lose a lot, some others are going to win a lot, and we saw a notable increase in both major winning and major losing. Before 1989, there had never been more than two teams in a season that won less than 60 games; during 1989-2003, there were never *fewer* than two such teams, and the average was over four. Conversely, before 1989, TBL had never had more than two teams win 100+ games in a season; from 1989-2003 we never had *fewer* than three of those, peaking at seven in 1997 (and in 1994 an astounding four teams won more than 110 games).

The other non-structural factor that appeared during this period was the increasingly astute owner base that TBL attracted. As a multi-year league, we were unusual in APBAdom, and were attracting new owners who were more knowledgeable and more inclined to join the league for the long haul. This led to a form of inertia that tended to stabilize rosters over the years (fewer 'trades just for the sake of trading', fewer total overhauls of rosters) – except when owners chose to do an MDB.

In those cases, teams could and would tend to move toward extreme winning (or losing), in ways that exceeded the effects of the league's structure. Unlike planet earth, TBL's "plates" can choose to shake themselves!

Anecdotally, it is easy to see results of this new tendency, with odd "bunching" of good or bad records. In 1989, the Mantle Division had three teams win more than 100 games, with Don Nipps' East Anglia Pirates (now RYE) becoming the first TBL team not to make the playoffs while winning at least 100 games; there would be four more such cases in the next eight years. In 1993, the Aaron Division had both of that year's teams who won at least 110 – and also three teams that lost 100 or more. In 1996, the *most* competitive division saw an 11-game divide between first and second place. 1998 saw the formation of the Clemente Division, and MID (which was in the midst of at least a mini-MDB) won the division with only 68 wins – and proceeded to take 114-win BRO to a seventh game in the playoffs! That same year, DAL also made the playoffs with a sub-.500 record, while the "first out" team had 94 wins – two sub-.500 playoff teams is still a league record, as is the 26-game gap between "last in" MID and the "first out" team. In 2002, Dave Suter's Rochester Express (now COL) won a still-record 124 games.

Still, by 2003, there were signs that the pattern was changing for the better. In part, the long-term impact of the last expansion had settled out. And on the other hand, while the "win or bust" mantra was still widely accepted, the increasing longevity of owners in the league had led some to follow other paths, helping to mitigate the wild swings that this period had seen.

By The Numbers:

Expansions: 1 (20 teams to 24; 4 divisions to 6; 6 playoff teams to 10)

Moves (average per year): 2.06

newGMs (average per year): 2.6

Repeats (average):

2 (with 6 playoff slots);

5.4 (with 10 playoff slots)

>100 W (average): 4.8

<60 W (average): 4.07

Seasons with "first out" > "last in": 13 of 15

we're less inclined to accept the "agony of defeat" by choice?

Division races have also tightened a bit. In 10 of these 13 seasons, at least one division runner-up was within three games of the division winner. Repeat playoff appearances have declined. The combination of these observations tends to indicate that more of us are willing to try to be competitive even in years when we know we're not a threat to win it all.

2004-2016 - The Era of Stability

No more expansions after 1998 – TBL's continents have settled in place. And, after 2003, we have seen far fewer team moves and owner changes. In four of the past 13 seasons, there have been *no* changes of *any* of these types. 2003 was the last time TBL has had as many as five teams change owners, and 10 of the 13 seasons in this period have seen one or no team with a new GM. The combination of structural and "psychological" stability has had a positive effect on the competitive situation.

For five of the past seven years, the "last in" team had more wins than the "first out". In addition, in seasons where "first out" had more wins than "last in", the gap has been narrower (excluding the blip of 2015 and '16 when BRO won the Ruth division with only 73 and 84 wins, while the entire Ruth was rebuilding). While we still see several teams per season winning more than 100 games (sometimes quite a bit more, with a couple serious threats to the league record in wins during this period), we have also had significantly fewer teams willing to lose more than 100 by choice (at least until 2014, when there were clearly several conscious MDB efforts under way). Perhaps as we age together,

By The Numbers:

Expansions: none

Moves (average per year): 0.3

newGMs (average per year): 0.92

Repeats (average): 4.55 (with 10 playoff slots)

>100 W (average): 4.0

<60 W (average): 2.7

Seasons with "first out" > "last in": 7 of 13

2017 - The Great Shift

That brings us to today. We enter 2017 having significantly realigned – 13 teams are in new divisions to start this season. We are also examining the impact of having one division whose owners voluntarily forsake the use of the DH at least for games within the division. We've never had a realignment this major without also undergoing expansion at the same time. We've never played without the DH. We've never done a major realignment that hasn't coincided with a number of new owners entering the league.

So, what will this bring? Who knows – we're in uncharted territory. My bet, though, is that this great shift may not significantly affect things; the stability and longevity of all y'all is greater than any uncertainty the "great shift" might otherwise have brought. Let's play ball!

Whole New Ballgame



Gordon Rodell's *Calusa Indians* tackle their sophomore campaign in a new location – the Clemente Division, which has been the almost exclusive do-

main of *Brian Hanley* and the *Whitman River Rats* for its entire existence.

But while Calusa is building up and is our consensus choice to take the division this year, Whitman is taking a needed step back after going all the way to the World Series against Munich in 2016. It's hard to think of any team with Clayton Kershaw on it as an also-ran, but that's the Clemente in 2017 – a whole new ballgame. We know that Mr. Hanley gets as much as anyone can get out of his roster, but there is only so much he can do with them, and there is some reason to expect them to regress to the mean.

Daniel Dumont joins TBL, bringing the *Riverwolf Sharks* to our roster of managers. It seems almost cliché to observe how new managers feel compelled to remake their team in their own image; the Sharks



2016 Clemente Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Whitman*	106	56	.654	—
Warrenton†	86	76	.531	20
Blue Hill	66	96	.407	40
Columbus	64	98	.395	42

* Lost TBL World Series to Munich.

† Lost to Calusa in the Wild Card playoff.

have certainly done that in the extreme – not only dealing away veterans but also players that might have been the cornerstones of the next contender. This has drawn some tut-tuts from TBL cognoscenti: a species of criticism that sometimes turns out to be prophetic, but occasionally shows that the new manager is more canny than anyone expected. The *Annual* feels obliged to wait and see.



Mark Ludwig's Blue Hill Mudslides come back for another year of work in progress. Last year was a difficult year, and 2017 might well be more of the same; yet we continue to like the names on the roster, and once again the *Annual* suggests that the slow and steady effort by Mr. Ludwig should ultimately lead to success. . . just not much in 2017.



- 
- A full-page photograph of baseball player Freddie Freeman in mid-swing. He is wearing a white Calusa Indians uniform with the number 5 and his name 'FREEMAN' on the back. He is wearing a black helmet and red cleats. The background shows a blurred crowd of spectators in a stadium.
1. Calusa 26.5
 2. Whitman 22.0
 3. Riverwoolf 17.5
 4. Blue Hill 15.5

Freddie Freeman,
Calusa Indians

Clemente Division

2016 calusa INDIANS in review



Apologies to the 5th Dimension.

by Gordon Rodell

2016 in Review

Final Record: 92-70 (2nd, Mays)

"When the Cruz is in the Seventh House. And Freeman aligns with Mars. Then Thor will guide the planets. And Archer will steer the Stars. This is the dawning of the Age of Calusa, Age of Calusa!!!! CALUUUSA!!!"

(Apologies to the 5th Dimension)

The seesaw continued for the Franchise named after a plant and now an Indian tribe. Rebounding from 59 wins in 2015 to 92 wins in 2016 the goal of a winning season was accomplished. The Indians started slowly, the team played at or below .500 through the end of June. First round pick Noah Syndergaard and veteran Chris Archer became a dynamic duo in July and the Indians started playing winning baseball. The team survived August "the month of doom" when it had to play Munich, Maracaibo, and Las Vegas. Calusa sprinted to the finish going 42-20 and came within a whisker of stealing the division. The highlight of November was a nine game winning streak.

Cayman's 'Big Fat' Bartolo Colon ended the streak and Calusa's pipe dream of winning the Mays Division. Despite this disappointment, qualifying for the playoffs, as a Wild Card, ended a very satisfying season.

What went right?

Three things; Pitching, 2016 Draft Class, and the mid-season trade acquisitions.

Pitching: Led by its two Aces, the staff recorded a team ERA of 3.79. Syndergaard justified his draft selection winning 14 games. Archer solidified his role as the leader of the staff, notching 15 wins and throwing 251 innings. Additional contributions: John Danks (11 W) and Jake McGee (21 Sv). **2016 Draft Class:** Besides Thor, Jerad

Eickhoff went 7-0 and Rob Schill won five games pitching in relief. Offensive contributions came from Billy Burns (293 / .335 / .377 and 10 steals). Matt Duffy .285 / .337 / .422 and 10 homers. Justin Bour .256 / .316 / .564 and 14 home runs. In limited action, Aaron Altherr .317 / .438 / .517. **Mid-Season Trade Acquisitions:** Nelson Cruz, in 35 games .310 / .375 / .572 and 10 home runs. Shelby Miller 4 wins and Carter Capps 14 saves.

What went wrong?

Modest production from Freeman .240 / .331 / .447 and Evan Longoria .250 / .332 / .443, but Longo did lead the team in homers with 26. First rounder Raisel Iglesias went 5-7, 5.04. Getting swept by the Batmen in the Conference semifinals. After bashing six HR against Warrenton in the playoffs, Cruz went homerless against Gotham City.

3 Things

1. **Mid-Season Trade Brouhaha!** There was a fracas over the Indians' acquisition of Nelson Cruz. The league's sage council of elders pondered and debated the matter in question. Eventually the Commissioner ruled in Calusa's favor and Nelson remained an Indian.

2. **Trade for Daniel Murphy.** The saga to trade for Daniel resulted from my wife's advice. Our core players all had above average seasons and the fact that he was actually available, made Murph an ideal candidate.

3. **Moving Day, Part Two!!!** After moving to Florida the Indians look forward to moving to and competing in the Clemente. The team welcomes the opportunity to compete against and foster rivalries with our new division mates. Hmmmm, let me see, I think Indians hunt sharks and river rats. I'll have to research that.



Archer: Ace

calusa INDIANS



Gordon Rodell (3rd year)

A lot depends on how much Gordon Rodell is Earl Weaver (as opposed to Tony LaRussa).

It is always a pleasure to read managers' analysis of their team's past, present and future. The *Annual* staff particularly enjoys these analyses when they are infused with the personality of the manager and the culture he develops for his team. Gordon Rodell and his Calusa Indians are no exception – in fact, in some ways, he (and they) are the poster boy(s) for it. Indeed, we couldn't even provide the full narrative that Mr. Rodell sent; in particular, we had to slice out his account of receiving advice from his wife about the idea of acquiring Daniel Murphy. Smart wife, and smart guy for listening to her.

Adding a card with 12 hits and five power numbers is, well, a no-brainer, but it points to the entire mood in Calusa, which in turn illustrates the reaction to last year's pretty decent team (with really good pitching) that just didn't have enough offense to get past the division rival and go deep into the playoffs. When the team can't pitch, you go get pitchers; when you don't hit enough, you go get hitters. There was a little bit of that late in the season last year. This year, Cruz will be in the Seventh House from Day 1 (whatever the hell that means), and there's a pretty fierce lineup around him. The pitching isn't quite as good, but this crew might have a chance to go further in its new Clemente Division home than it could last year. If this is the Age of Calusa, there might well be an upgrade to the 92-70 record that didn't quite do it last year.

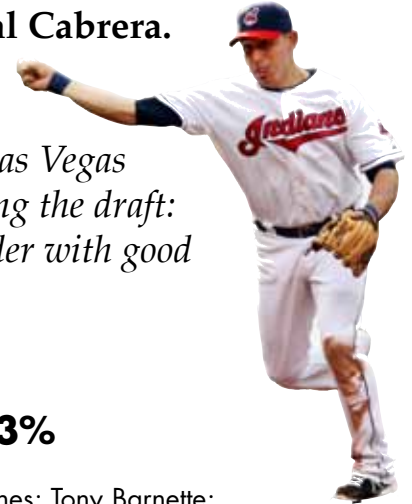
Pitching: 8.0 **Solid rotation; they need to go deep.**

The Indians have put together a great lineup, but that left only a few resources to be committed to the staff. The rotation lacks a dominant ace but it's pretty solid, but Mr. Rodell nails it in his instructions when he calls the bullpen "adequate". That's not a word that a contender uses to describe one of the things that a manager can actually control.

ROTATION. The leader of the pack is second-year starter Noah "Thor" Syndergaard (Grade 12 C+25

SNT: Asdrubal Cabrera.

On offer from Las Vegas before and during the draft: a veteran infielder with good power. Sold.



Turnover Rate: 43%

Arrived: Jacob Barnes; Tony Barnette; Buddy Boshers; Asdrubal Cabrera; Bartolo Colon; Daniel Coulombe; Brett Gardner; Jason Hammel; Luke Hochevar; George Kontos; Daniel Murphy; Austin Romine; David Ross; Steve Selsky; Joey Wendle.

Departed: Justin Bour; Carter Capps; Adam Conley; Zack Cozart; Matt Duffy; Dalier Hinojosa; Ryan Mattheus; Trevor May; Cameron Maybin; Jake McGee; Kris Medlen; Shelby Miller; Brayan Peña; Chad Qualls; Jarrod Saltalamacchia.

HR+36), who is helping to define the New Photogenic now that Randy Johnson has faded into legend. He is joined by a solid, if not overpowering, support team: returnees Chris Archer (Grade 11) and Jerrad Eickhoff (Grade 10 C+31 HR-16) and trade acquisitions Jason Hammel (Grade 11 HR-16) and the ever young Bartolo Colon (Grade 9 C+41). There are a few Scott Feldman starts to fill it out, but this fivesome covers just about the entire season.



Thor: The new photogenic

With a solid, deep bullpen this would be a fine rotation, but unfortunately that will be a problem. These guys have to give the team a majority of decent starts to get through the season.



BULLPEN. The Calusa bullpen is led by a new closer guy: Raisel Iglesias (Grade 22* HR+23), who has 50 strong innings. He'll be turning 8s and 9s into outs all season. He has some solid help in trade acquisition George Kontos (Grade 15* HR+41) and rookie Tony Barnette (Grade 15* C+21 HR+56). They have 113 innings of homer-stealing goodness between them.



Iglesias: Closer guy

hits, 4 walks, 1-5-5-6) as does the guy at the other corner of the infield, Evan Longoria (9 hits, 1-5-5-6). To get an idea of how powerful this group is, note that we're just getting to slugger Nelson Cruz (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-5-6) – the epitome of a cleanup hitter.

There's more. Carlos Santana will get on base with annoying frequency (9 hits, 5 walks, 1-0-0-0), as will speedy Ender Inciarte (11 hits, 3 walks, 0-6, 27 SSN with 23 SBA.) Asdrubal Cabrera, the Calusa SNT, is very solid (10 hits, 2 walks+22, 1-0-0-0) as well.

The rest of the bullpen, though, will only steal 8s with a good shift. Luke Hochevar (Grade 12* C+21 HR-16) and Jacob Barnes (Grade 12* C+36 HR+46) combine for 64 innings; lefties Daniel Coulombe (Grade 11* C-16) and Xavier Cedenio (Grade 11* HR+45) and righties Ryan Madson (Grade 10* C+16 HR+21), Rob Scahill (Grade 10* C+22 HR+41), and Juan Nicasio (Grade 10* C-13) provide about 250 more, and there are some scattered mopup innings as well.

The rest of the lineup is a bit mix-and-match. Chris Owings (10 hits, 6-0-0, 35 SSN for 23 SBA) will see some infield time, and Melvin Upton (9 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0, 30 SSN for 35 SBA) and Brett Gardner (9 hits, 4 walks, 31 SSN for 20 SBA) will get reps in the outfield. Only cstrcher is a real problem, split between Carlos Perez (8 hits, 3 0s), Austin Romine (9 hits, 0-6-6) and noted Dancer With the Stars David Ross, providing an 8-hit, 1-5-5 swan song.

If the problem was not enough offense last year, the club has certainly compensated this year. Other than catcher, there will be a lot of extended innings and a lot of tough outs.

Defense: 3.0 Some DHs need to use a glove.

The recent spirited appeal to "old-time baseball" has produced some teams willing to go without a DH. This club is not one of them; indeed, if it were possible, they'd like to have more than one in the lineup. While solid at first base (Freeman is a 1B5) and adequate on the left side of the infield (Owings and Cabrera are SS8s; Longoria is a 3B4) there is a large problem at second, where Daniel Murphy turned in an eye-popping 2B6. There is a 2B8 on the bench, but it's hard to imagine a situation in which Calusa



Calusa Chief Gordon Rodell is entering his 2nd full season as a TBL manager and would like to improve on last year's 92-70 record. His rotation is very good and deep, but is supported by only 50 innings of Raisel Iglesias (Grade 22) and a cast of thousands in the Grade 12* to 10* range. Bullpen help at the trading period would be useful.*

It's a solid pitching staff, without question; the doubt is whether it's deep enough – especially in relief – to do more than dominate the teams in the Clemente that are mostly set on restructuring. (Without a lot in the 2018 draft (a third-rounder and two #5s) there might not be much flexibility to go get help down the stretch.

Offense: 12.5 Go big instead of going home.

It is hard to avoid harping on the theme. Calusa management was dissatisfied with the offense on the 2016 team; as a result, the 2017 club has gone big. *Very big.* The top card in the lineup is a real eye-popping one: Daniel Murphy (12 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0-0). That is a formidable card for anyone's everyday lineup. He has help: Freddie Freeman has another nice card (10



Murphy: Eye-popping

would want to take that bat out of the lineup. With Carlos Santana as the everyday DH, it means that Nelson Cruz (OF1, 31 arm) will have to be a DH with a glove in LF.

Fortunately, Brett Gardner (31 arm) Ender Inciarte (33) and Melvin Upton (35) are all OF3s and can go get the ball. Cruz is more likely to come out than Murphy, but neither will leave a close game. It's unclear whether that will cost the team over the course of a long season.



Inciarte: Goes and gets it

Bench: **3.0**
Useful, if used.

The club's defensive issues and – at least to some extent – station-to-station offense can be addressed by guys on the bench. Upton, Gardner and Owings are the most useful here, as they can play defense (Owings is an OF2, in fact) and can all run. There's even a pinch-hitting toy: a few at-bats of Steve Selsky (12 hits, 1-0-0, L+8 R-8). Shift or not, he may be used to cover the offensive deficiency at catcher.

There are also a passel of light-hitting middle infielders. The best are Kiki Hernandez (10 hits, 4 walks) and Eugenio Suarez (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0). Carlos Sanchez (2B8 3B4) is a good extra glove.

1st This is not a hard call to make. Given the competition in the Clemente this year – which is, essentially, dependent on Whitman's dice – the Calusa club should have very little trouble replicating or improving on the 2016 result. The offense will carry them and the pitching staff will keep them in most games.

A lot depends on how much Gordon Rodell is Earl Weaver (as opposed to Tony LaRussa). In TBL terms, whether he's more Rich Meyer or more Pat Martin – squeeze every small advantage out of every player, or send the best guys out and let them do their thing. There is such a thing as overmanagement; but we

think there will have to be some careful use to get the team past just the Clemente finish line.



calusa:
Realignment

Since 1993, the club now playing down in Florida has been resident in either the Mays or the Clemente Division, spending – as it happens – 12 years in each. This year's realignment brings them back to the Clemente, where for many years the Chia Pet incarnation sparred with perennial contender Whitman for the chance at post-season glory.

Notwithstanding Whitman's continued residence (along with Blue Hill), the Indians have arrived back at a fairly propitious time. Blue Hill continues to be a few players short of contention; Whitman, after coming up short in the World Series, is positioned for a restructuring year, and the Franchise Formerly Known as Taylorville is already making Spring Training arrangements for 2018. This leaves them a clear path to a pennant. As sure as the *Annual* is about anything (except how Clay Beard will defy our expectations *again*) we're pretty sure the Fierce Ballclub will have little trouble capturing the Clemente pennant.

As noted, however, that's a fair distance from the Greater Enchilada. Some of the outcome depends on whether the starters perform and whether the bullpen is good enough. But it may be even more important how Mr. Rodell directs his team. How often will Nelson Cruz come out? Will pinch-running be a common or rare tactic? In the last analysis, the success of the club may be in his hands. That's a good thing.

TQ: 26.5



calusa INDIANS



Still fierce



2016 whitman RIVER RATS in review



The team did everything it needed to do ... right up to the end.

2016 in Review

Final Record: 106-56 (1st, Clemente)

There is no question that the best outcome for the 2016 Whitman River Rats would have been their first TBL championship. No one disputes that, not even Munich – which has reached the Series and fallen to others. Still, there are 22 other teams that would be content to have gotten as far as Whitman did and called it a successful year.

And it truly was. Whitman won 106 games and ran straight through Brobdingnag and Gotham City en route to the finals. The team had everything: power, speed, contact, and, of course, pitching. With an experienced and talented manager to make it all run, the team did everything it needed to do ... right up to the end.

What went right?

The offense was led by some big sticks, particularly Paul Goldschmidt (.308-40-146, 108 walks, 16 SB), who did everything. Carlos Gonzalez (.285-47-136) was a dangerous hitter; Ben Revere (.283) stole 30 bases; A. J. Pierzynski led all hitters with a .330 average.

On the mound, of course, Clayton Kershaw was dominant (24-3, 1.53, 331 Ks in 271 innings; 16 CG, 10 shutouts). David Price (18-7, 2.58) notched 236 strikeouts of his own. J. J. Hoover recorded 36 saves with a 1.79 ERA, and the pen won 20 games in relief.

What went wrong?

The offense turned out to be thin below the top performers. Troy Tulowitzki was the poster boy for this (.222-14-67); Kolten Wong hit .236. There were a lot of empty at-bats, and while the team only struck out 1068 times, it also hit only 157 homers, 13th in the league.

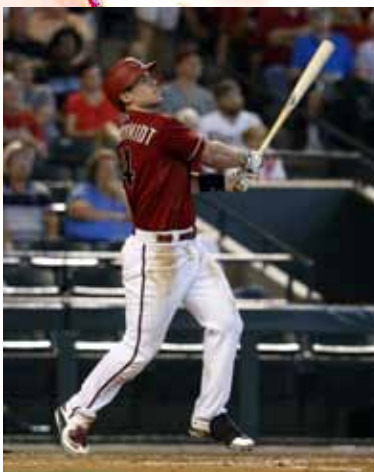
The same was true of the pitching staff. Kershaw, Price and part-timer Jesse Hahn aside, the starters were pedestrian, and the bullpen was a very typical Whitman one: it walked a lot of people. Hoover gave out 32 free passes in 55 innings.

3 Things

1. *Hedging against aging.* Teams that see the cliff coming get the first hint when they look at the ages of their players. The roster isn't geriatric yet, but the key players are now 29-33 years old. Prudence suggests getting ready for the next iteration.

2. *Price and Kershaw.* Kershaw's injury last summer and Price's this spring are cause for concern at Whitman HQ. The near future depends very heavily on those two left arms.

3. *Drafts – 2017 and 2018.* This year was very productive considering how far down the team picked; with a more middling position next year, the new additions will be critical to the team's needed restructuring.



Goldschmidt: Everything

whitman RIVER RATS



Brian Hanley (22nd year)

If the recovery isn't very quick, it may have to be long and painful.

There is a model for a team that makes a run for the championship and falls short. Sometimes, to make it happen, the team makes a heavy investment in assets that will soon have no value. By late in our TBL season we can all see what's coming – who's having an off year, whose arm has fallen off – and that affects such decisions and the price for such goods.

The upcoming season for the Whitman River Rats is not any of that. The team has mostly the same names as it had last year. Indeed, the turnover rate is very low; a few new members of the pitching staff, a couple of fringe players with future upside. Injuries and off years make this a less effective team than the one that went 6 against Munich. They'll struggle, but they have not completely come apart.

Pitching: Not solid enough.

5.5

ROTATION. Opening up the Whitman envelope, the first pitcher that falls out is Clayton Kershaw (Grade 19 C+54 HR+36, 21 starts), who is without doubt The Man, when he's there. It's hard to be completely critical of a rotation with him at its head. The problem is that things go downhill after that. Ervin Santana (Grade 11 HR+21) and Blake Snell (Grade 11 C-62 HR+44) help fill out the top half of the starts.



Kershaw: The Man, when there



SNT: Blake Snell.

He fits the mold of a Whitman pitcher: left-handed, hard-throwing, and wild. The upside is great, once he learns control.

David Price (Grade 9 C+26) has 35 solid starts – the only card in the set with that many – and the remaining trips will be spread among Yovani Gallardo (Grade 6 C-46), Matt Garza (Grade 5 HR+16) and others. The same names, but not the same levels of performance.

BULLPEN. There are some arms in the bullpen, but nowhere near enough innings to rescue the starters. On days when Kershaw isn't on the mound (what the Whitman instructions refer to as "otherworldly"), these guys will be doing their best to rescue the game.

The closer role likely belongs to lefty Boone Logan (Grade 17* HR+23, 46 IP), with help from Jake Diekman (Grade 16* C-46 HR+34, 53 IP). Rookie Michael Ynoa (Grade 17* C-46 HR+62) adds 30 more innings that are at least high grade. This group, if used aggressively, could all be out on the golf links by Memorial Day.

Turnover Rate: 20%

Arrived: A.J. Achter; Clayton Richard; Joey Rickard; Blake Snell; Nick Vincent; Tony Wolters; Michael Ynoa.

Departed: Joey Butler; Prince Fielder; Dan Haren; Chris Johnson; Justin Miller; Eric Sogard; Carlos Villanueva.



whitman RIVER RATS

The middle crew is led by two unreliable veterans: Tyler Clippard (Grade 13* C-24 HR-21) and Fernando Rodriguez (Grade 13* C-36 HR+33).

New additions Nick Vincent (Grade 11* C+34 HR-24), A. J. Achter (Grade 9* HR-24) and former top grade lefty Tony Sipp (Grade 5*) give Whitman about 250 more innings. They all have flaws of one sort or another, and may well perform better at home where Mr. Hanley can mix and match more efficiently.

This area of the club used to be a strength, but aging and injury have reduced its effectiveness. It's going to be a long season in Whitman when Clayton Kershaw doesn't start, particularly when the starter gets sent to the showers early.

Offense: 7.5
The big three, then others.

There are three impact cards in the lineup every day. Carlos Gonzalez turned in another fine card (1-5-6-6, 11 hits, 2 walks, L-6 R+1); Jose Ramirez will get on base (4 0s, 11 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 29 SBA); and Goldschmidt (1-6-6, 10 hits, 5 walks, 33 SSN for 37 SBA). Drew Butera has a surprisingly good card for a third of a season (1-4-6-6, 11 hits) and since it didn't get traded, it'll get played.



Gonzalez: Impact

Behind this trio are some players whose names are familiar, but whose cards are disappointing. Troy Tulowitzki (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks) is the best of the lot; Billy Butler (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks) will be in many lineups; Nick Markakis (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks) and Jacoby Ellsbury (3 0s, 10 hits,

3 walks) are very similar, though at least Ellsbury can run. Rookie Joey Rickard (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks, L+6 R-5) provides an alternative against lefties.

The rest of the lineup will provide many empty at-bats. Kolten Wong (2 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, 35 SSN) will be spelled by Kelly Johnson (1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks) and Miguel Rojas (6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks); behind the plate, A. J. Pierzynski (3 0s, 8 hits) won't be hitting .330 again, and will sit when Butera or rookie Tony Wolters (0-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks) are a better choice.

The big three hitters in the lineup are fine, and getting them up to bat means a good chance for some offense; but there may be some completely empty innings.

Defense: 7.0
Team strength.

This is very much a team strength. The infield is Fielding One all around: Paul Goldschmidt is a 1B5; Kolten Wong and Miguel Rojas are both 2B8s; Tulowitzki is an SS9; and Jose Ramirez turned in a top glove rating of 3B5.



Ramirez: Top glove

In the outfield, Jacoby Ellsbury (30 arm), Carlos Gonzalez (33 arm) and Nick Markakis (34 arm) are all OF3s. Only at catcher is Whitman somewhat deficient; A. J. Pierzynski (C7, Th-1) is his usual ineffective self; Drew Butera is a C8, but has a Th-2; Tony Wolters is a C6 with a Th-1. They won't do much with the opposing running game.



Tulo: Disappointing

Bench: Not much help.

2.0

It should come as no surprise that the remaining players on the roster don't do a lot to help the regular starters. The best bench player is the versatile Brock Holt (3 Os, 9 hits, 3 walks; OF2 3B4 2B7 SS7; L-15) who will be useful some days but whose platoon shift is a real problem.



Holt: Plays everywhere

Chris Stewart is a spare catcher (C8, Th-1) who can't hit a lick. Jefry Marte (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42) will be a useful pinch-hitter. Ben Revere (8 hits, 2 walks, 29 SSN) has been reduced to no more than a pinch-runner.

Overall, the bench players are there to fill out the roster.

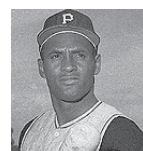
2nd

And yet, despite all of the disparagement meted out by the *Annual*, the club has a decent chance to finish second in the Clemente Division.

This speaks more to the weakness of the division – the dismembered club down in Riverwoolf, the continuing rebuild over in Blue Hill – than to the intrinsic ongoing strength of the River Rats.

Except for a brief blip a couple of years ago, the Whitman club has been one of the top clubs in TBL for at least ten years. An optimistic view of the current roster is that this year, too, is a blip – that some of the injured and underperforming players will have a better 2017 and the club

will be back in the hunt after a year of retooling; but a few more years have passed, and there are only a few truly young prospects on hand (Wolters, Snell, Rickard, Ynoa) and, as noted in the review article, the critical guys are in the 29-33 range. That means that if the recovery isn't very quick, it may have to be long and painful.



whitman RIVER RATS



whitman:
Realignment

Unlike almost any team in TBL, the Whitman River Rats have played in no other division than the Clemente since we went to the six-division format. They have won 100 or more games seven times and won the division eight times. They've been in the playoffs on thirteen occasions. This year was their second visit to the World Series.

The arrival of the Calusa Indians has provided an opportunity for the club to take a seat further back on the bus this year, but even that isn't much different from the past – Warrenton, Las Vegas, Greater Ohio, and other teams have come and gone during some shuffle or other. Whitman has remained in place, and has been the odds-on favorite in most years.

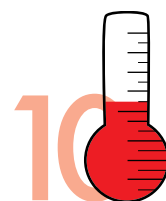
For the Whitman club, remaining in its home is clearly an advantage. In a year or two, they may well be back on top of it.

Vegas



Clayton Kershaw is the leader of a staff with 105 starts above Grade 9. The bullpen doesn't have a closer grade available, but lots of opportunities for mixing and matching. The offense is reduced from 2016, but we all know how much Brian can squeeze from lesser talent. Whitman should give Calusa a run for the Clemente crown.

TQ: 22.0



2016 taylorville RED RAIDERS in review



The problem is there's always context.

2016 in Review

Final Record: 94-68 (2nd, Williams)

94 wins is a pretty good total for a TBL season, taken out of context. A team that hit 179 homers and featured lights-out performances by Nolan Arenado, Jake Arrieta and Aroldis Chapman should have been one we talk about in terms that suggest success.

The problem is that there's *always* context. The Las Vegas Gamblers were five wins better in the Williams, Maracaibo won 101 to take the Aaron away from Kansas at 95-67, and Munich went 113-49 to finish eighteen games ahead of the 95-67 Melrose club. Once the dust had settled, there were two teams with just one win more than Taylorville, edging them out of post-season play by the narrowest possible margin.

The swan song for the Taylor brothers did not end in a playoff run, and the club has now changed hands – well, actually, hands, feet, upper and lower limbs, and just about every other part you can imagine.

What went right?

Nolan Arenado put up some eye-popping numbers – 42 homers, 52 doubles, 122 RBI. Albert Pujols chipped in 36 homers of his own, and Gerardo Parra led regulars with a .282 average and 36 doubles.

The real stars, though, were on the mound. Jake Arrieta was dominant: he pitched 14 complete games with 8 shutouts, and went 18-6, 2.20 with 308 Ks, allowing only 149 hits in 262 innings. Gio Gonzalez had 16 wins, 7 CG and six shu-

outs. Aroldis Chapman was lights out (6 wins, 22 saves, 1.41 ERA, 77 Ks in 51 innings), and his supporting crew was pretty good as well.

What went wrong?

Just as with the team's final record, the good performances mask the lackluster one of the team overall. They scored just 688 runs, walked only 383 times, and recorded a .248 / .299 / .404 slash line as a team. Pujols' 36 dingers came with a .219 BA. Robinson Cano hit .226. Brett Gardner struck out 155 times somehow, and five regulars had 100 or more (Pujols just missed at 97). The pitching was excellent (3.14 ERA) but it's clear that the offense just did not deliver.

3 Things

1. *Team chemistry is a myth.* Or maybe not. No one was safe during the off season fire sale that produced the new club. Jake Arrieta, Nolan Arenado, Aroldis Chapman, Albert Pujols, Erick Aybar, Gio Gonzalez, J. A. Happ, Robinson Cano, Jeurys Familia . . . and lots of others are gone. Their replacements are, for the moment, what's on the club, but there's no sense of continuity with the old club.

2. *The "old club".* Well, to be fair, it was getting to be an old club. If this team as constructed was short of a playoff contender, a new manager would logically think to rebuild. The draft in 2018 will help them get younger.

3. *A new broom sweeps away.* The question will be if too much – notably Arenado and Arrieta – was swept away. Time will tell.



Arrieta: Dominant

riverwoolf SHARKS

Daniel Dumont (1st year)

Sometimes it leads to an outcome which is (dare we say it) Brobdingnagian.



We have seen this before. We have even seen it to this extreme before.

New managers come to TBL and, more often than not, are presented with a team that has some flaws and some talent. (There are a few exceptions to this rule; ask Mark Bloom what he inherited the first time he came into the league.)

In an effort to either (1) put his own stamp on the team, (2) correct the flaws by stepping back and getting younger, or – occasionally – (3) looking for an opportunity to show these guys how smart he is, the manager will engage in some sort of rebuild. Sometimes it's moderate. Most often, it either starts with a big teardown or is drawn inexorably into one. By the time the smoke clears, lots of talent has moved elsewhere and the team on the field is either very young, or very inferior, or both. In the best circumstances, there's a lot of the next year's draft with this team's name on it.

We welcome Daniel Dumont from Rivière-du-Loup in Québec to our merry band of brothers. It would be disingenuous for the *Annual* to ascribe any motive to our new manager regarding motives for the rebuild that has turned over more than 70% of the roster (so far); it's fair to say that he was not satisfied with what he had, and was willing to trade almost all of it away. What's left is younger, yes; there is a great deal of draft in 2018 to anticipate; but the question remains – was all of this a good idea? Trade Albert Pujols: sure. Get a good price for Aroldis Chapman? Justifiable. But . . . Nolan Arenado? He couldn't carry the 2016 Raiders to the playoffs . . . what would make him a liability on a rebuild? He's the sort of guy you want to rebuild *around*.

Turnover Rate: **71%**

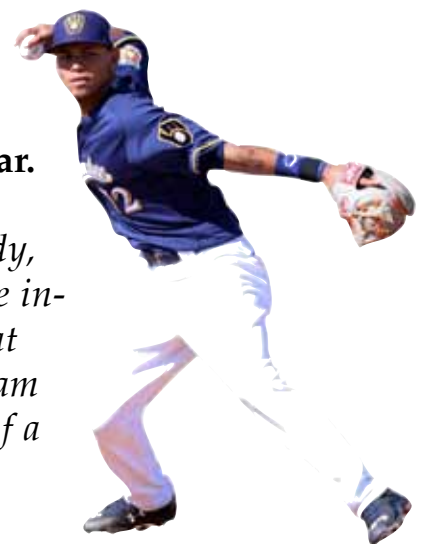
Arrived: Matt Adams; Tim Anderson; Joe Biagini; Blaine Boyer; Santiago Casilla; Doug Fister; David Freese; Avisail Garcia; Jaime Garcia; Phil Gosselin; Hisashi Iwakuma; Max Kepler; Ian Krol; Brett Lawrie; Logan Morrison; Joe Musgrove; Hernan Perez; Kyle Ryan; Jarrod Saltalamacchia; Scott Schebler; Andrew Triggs; Jonathan Villar; Stephen Vogt; Adam Warren; Matt Wisler; Chris R. Young.

Departed: Cody Anderson; Nolan Arenado; Jake Arrieta; Erick Aybar; Robinson Cano; Aroldis Chapman; Steve Clevenger; Matt Den Dekker; Odrisamer Despaigne; Jeurys Familia; Brett Gardner; Gonzalez Germen; Johnny Giavotella; Gio Gonzalez; Jedd Gyorko; Ryan Hanigan; J.A. Happ; Cesar Jimenez; Taylor Jungmann; Charlie Morton; Shane Peterson; Albert Pujols; Brendan Ryan; Tyler Thornburg; Matt Thornton; Shawn Tolleson.

So, as we say, we've seen this before. Sometimes it works out, usually after a little struggle and a lot of retrenching. Sometimes it leads to an outcome which is (dare we say it) Brobdingnagian. But sometimes the result is less than what was there in the first place. It will be up to Daniel Dumont, the 2018 draft, and the vagaries of the gods of baseball to show us which.

SNT: Jonathan Villar.

A young, speedy, talented middle infielder is a great pickup for a team in the middle of a rebuild.





Pitching: The fall of Babylon.

4.5

A team strength a year ago, this part of the Sharks has become one with Nineveh and Tyre: while there are some interesting prospects among what remains, the rotation will not be getting a lot of people out, and the bullpen will be helping them not do it. With our long view, we have seen much worse, but this is ugly.

ROTATION. The ace of the staff is lefty Hector Santiago (Grade 10 C-34 HR-22), who has 33 starts. Rookie Joe Musgrove has 10 slightly better ones (Grade 10 C+16). Other than six trips for Andrew Triggs (Grade 15 C+16 HR+26), the rest of the

rotation consists of Grade 7s (Doug Fister, Jaime Garcia HR-15, Hisashi Iwakuma C+25) and a Grade 6 (Matt Wisler, C+14 HR-22). Other than Garcia they are all right handed, so on good days they'll be stealing 9s. Again, this isn't the worst we've ever seen, but there will be some long days out in the field.

BULLPEN. Here's where the fun begins. The designated closer is Santiago Casilla (Grade 12* HR-14), with help from lefty Travis Wood (Grade 16* C-16) and short-innings righties Brian Ellington (Grade 15* C-32 HR+36) and Jeff Manship (Grade 14* C-42 HR-14). Kyle Ryan is the most reliable guy (Grade 12* C+33 HR+52) and might fit the ninth-inning role even better, but he'd really look better if he was a setup guy in a better bullpen. With long man Hansel Robles (Grade 12* C-31 HR+23), this crew has 329 innings, which will get used, as all of them are better than all of the starters (other than Triggs during his six starts).

There are actually a few more useful innings. Joe Biagini from the right side (Grade 10* C+21 HR+51) and Ian Krol from the left (Grade 9* C+33 HR+31) will see some middle inning use, as will Adam Warren (Grade 9* C-15 HR-22). Again, far from the worst we've seen, but they will have trouble with strong offensive teams.

Offense: 7.0 Some speed; not enough power.

Probably the most interesting player in the Riverwoolf lineup is Jonathan Villar, who will be at second base this year. Villar had a break-

out season in 2016 and has a very good card (10 hits, 4 walks, 1-6-6, 30 SSN for 80(!) SBA). He is a shortstop by trade, but will yield that position at least half the year to rookie Tim Anderson (11 hits, 4 0s, 32 SSN for 18 SBA). Gerardo Parra, one of the few key players from last year's team to remain, has some power (10 hits, 4 0s), as does part-time first baseman Matt Adams (9 hits, 1-0-0-0 power and no batting handicap).

Hernan Perez (10 hits, 1-4-6, 32 SSN for 42 SBA) provides some more speed and modest power.

That, however, is where most of the good news ends. David Freese (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 3 0s, L+9 R-4) and Logan Morrison (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-5-6) will see playing time; so will Kevin Pillar (10 hits, 1 walk, 3 0s, 27 SSN for 20 SBA), Howie Kendrick (9 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, 32 SSN for 12 SBA); Avisail Garcia (9 hits, 3 0s), rookie Max Kepler (9 hits, 1-5-6), and Brett Lawrie (9 hits, 1-6-6). Brian McCann (9 hits, 1-5) and Steven Vogt (9 hits, 6-0-0, L-10 on the boards) share the catching duties.

It's a fast team, which sometimes doesn't play well on the computer; it certainly lacks power, as



Santiago: "Ace"



Villar: Interesting

Adams and Parra are the only four-power cards on the roster.

Defense:
Average, or worse.

3.5



riverwoolf:
Realignment



riverwoolf SHARKS

Defense is not a strong suit for the Sharks.

They do have Fielding One in the outfield (Kevin Pillar can certainly make catches) and Gerardo Parra; both are OF3s with 34



Pillar: He can do this

arms. At first base, Morrison and Adams are both 1B4s, as is Parra, for what it's worth. But second base and short are manned by 2B7s and SS8s; the roster is full of 3B3s (Kendrick is a 3B4 and may see time there); and the rest of the outfielders are OF2s. Only Garcia (36) has a superior arm. Behind the plate McCann and Vogt are both C7s with a Th-2; so is waiver pickup Jarrod Saltalamacchia, who is here for no good reason.

Bench:
Mix and match.

2.5

During the many trades, Monsieur Dumont did pick up some useful cards that can be swapped in and out. In addition to the worthies described above, Scott Schebler (10 hits, 1-4-6, L-8) will be a nice situational pinch-hitter. For a rebuild, there are more options than expected.

3rd Despite the pitching staff and the lack of power, the Riverwoolf team simply isn't bad enough as presently constituted to fall all the way to the basement of the Clemente. The team speed will win some games if properly used, and there are enough choices among the roster that they will steal some wins. That being said, this team (again, as presently constituted) isn't very good – which should surprise no one, particularly its manager. The next draft will bring a lot more changes to a team that is already different.

The relocation of this franchise to the Clemente is good news, much as it is for Calusa, but for slightly different reasons. Overall, there are more teams in the International Conference in the process of rebuilding/restructuring/ getting younger, while the NC has some powerhouses on the rise, peaking or waiting for the Bounce.

That being said, the *Annual* thinks that there is more reason for caution than optimism (such as is expressed by the Vegas Line below). Sure, a lot can happen in two years; and yes, a big draft and the obvious move toward youth will benefit Riverwoolf more than staying the course with what Taylorville left him. But it is hard to avoid asking Mr. Dumont the question: *are you better off without some of the best pitchers and a few of the best position players in the game?* If you're going to rebuild, doesn't it make sense to provide some anchor? Thirty years ago, when Joe Auletta blew into town and blew up the team he'd been handed, he kept Eric Davis as his anchor. Soon Davis was joined by Ken Griffey, Jr., Alex Rodriguez, and numerous others. Friction catches up with you. We'll check back in a year to see how it affects the master plan.



New TBL member Daniel Dumont has taken a Taylorville franchise that won 94 games in 2016 and missed the playoff by a single win and stripped it down to remake in his own image. Their win total will, probably, drop about 25-30, but they could be trouble by 2019.

TQ: **17.5**



2016 blue hill MUDSLIDES in review

It's not out of reach.

by Mark Ludwig



2016 in Review

Final Record: 66-96 (3rd, Clemente)

The Blue Hill Mudslides suffered another difficult campaign in the Clemente, only staying out of the basement due to the equally-difficult year experienced by the Columbus Jets (now moved on to the Mantle Division). The *Annual* had been optimistic and encouraging, but their confidence did not yield the expected results.

What went right?

Still, there were some high points. The Blue Hill outfield was very good, led by Bryce Harper, who set a franchise record with 51 home runs while also scoring 120 runs and driving in 130. Christian Yelich hit 35 doubles and stole 12 bases, and Jayson Werth slugged .468, which was good for second best on the team.

On the pitching side Yordano Ventura led the staff with 11 wins and 186 strikeouts; rookie Lance McCullers had 10 wins in limited starts and recorded a team-best 3.28 ERA.

What went wrong?

The offense only hit .236 as a team and managed only 157 HR and 37 SB overall. The team scored 690 runs, but gave up 783, recording a subpar team ERA of 4.45. I was disappointed that Harper (.280) and Yelich (.253) both hit well

below .300; despite their performance highlights listed above, they simply did not live up to their projections. Seven regulars struck out more than 100 times, meaning that the offense often was unable to sustain a consistent attack.

The bullpen blew too many leads and once again lost over 20 games.

3 Things

1. *Three good young players.* Bryce Harper, Trevor Story and Christian Yelich should be in the



Harper: Franchise record

middle of the Mudslides' lineup for years to come. Since the oldest is 24, I think they will be around for a while as long as they don't go cruising around the Dominican Republic!

2. *New young pitching.* Last year I listed youth in the pitching staff but unfortunately that took a big hit with the death of Yordano Ventura and injuries to Lance McCullers and Alex Wood. But Zach Eflin, Cody Reed and Luis Perdomo are all 24 or younger so hopefully one of them can emerge. Overall the staff is still young.

3. *It's not out of reach.* Getting back into contention doesn't look that far away. This year we will still be rebuilding but there is enough core now to look to add some veteran leadership in the near future.

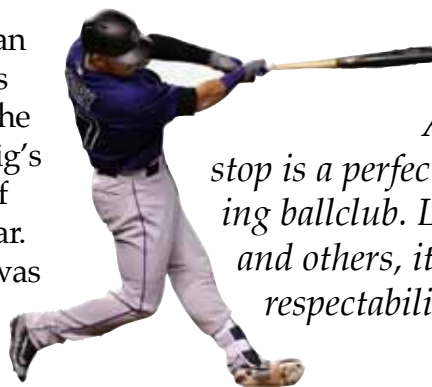
blue hill MUDSLIDES

Mark Ludwig (22nd year)

This year might be the critical one.



We've been at this task for more than twenty years. So has Mark Ludwig. And for more than twenty years, we've been writing more or less the same article, which consists of praise for the young talent, polite observation of Mr. Ludwig's patience in bringing it along, and some sort of encomium suggesting that the breakout is near. It was near when he added Bryce Harper; it was near when he drafted Christian Yelich; it was near when the Mudslides selected the late Yordano Ventura. It's *still* close.



SNT: Trevor Story.

A power-hitting short-stop is a perfect addition to a rebuilding ballclub. Like Harper and Yelich and others, it's another step toward respectability.

Turnover Rate: 34%

New logo; new divisional alignment; new first rounder – Trevor Story is the big splash in 2017. And where do we expect them to finish? Fourth in the Clemente. But sooner or later . . .

Youth is important, its pursuit is praiseworthy. The young cornerstones of this club are Guys We Like. But while those young stars mature into everyday, consistent players, they're growing older as well. There is a point where the Blue Hill club will have to place a bet on what they have and make a move toward respectability and contention. It's long past time.

Pitching: 2.5
This will be a long, long season.



Graveman: Full season

was restricted to only 14 starts (Grade 12 C-62 HR+42); the full season lead starter – it would be generous to call him an ace – is Kendall

ROTATION. At this time last year, rookie Lance McCullers was to be the new staff ace for years to come. It was a good plan, but injury cut it short. Instead, he

Arrived: Cristhian Adames; Darwin Barney; Matt Bowman; Wei-Yin Chen, Zach Eflin; Phil Hughes; Omar Narvaez; Manuel Pina; Luis Perdomo; A.J. Reed; Cody Reed; Trevor Story.

Departed: Nick Ahmed; Gregor Blanco; Chris Capuano; Neal Cotts; Stephen Drew; Elian Herrera; Adam LaRoche; Kyle Lobstein; John Ryan Murphy; Scott Oberg; Jerry Sands; Yordano Ventura.

Graveman (Grade 8 C+23 HR+14, 31 starts). These two are all of the good news the starters can provide.

The majority of remaining starts will be provided by lefty Wei-Yin Chen (Grade 5 C+33 HR-25) and righties Zach Eflin (Grade 4 C+25 HR-26), Jarred Cosart (Grade 4 C-62 HR+35) and Luis Perdomo (Grade 4 C+23 HR-15). After that crew there are still fifty starts for lefties Adam Morgan (Grade 1 C+26 HR-31) and Cody Reed (Grade 1 HR-41). This is going to be a long, long season in Blue Hill, providing batting practice for 23 other offenses.

BULLPEN. The relievers available to rescue the starters have a particular characteristic as a group: they simply don't have enough innings. The closer – almost as inappropriate a title as ace – is Chris Rusin (15* lefty, C+22 HR+36, 45 innings.) His



setup man is excellent: Matt Belisle (Grade 14* C+52 HR+44, 46 innings). And that is the end of the pitchers who can take 8s.

There are five middle relievers: Matt Bowman (Grade 11* C+16 HR+36); John Axford (Grade 10* C-34 HR+31); Brad Boxberger (Grade 9* C-62 HR-16); Seth Maness (Grade 8* C+33 HR+35); and lefty Oliver Perez (Grade 8* C-25 HR+22). There are 250 innings among them. They all help all the starters, but they might run out of innings by Memorial Day. Edwin Jackson (Grade 4) and waiver pickup Phil Hughes (Grade 1) will provide about 140 mop innings between them and even *that* might not be enough.

The argument here, as elsewhere, is that the key members of the pitching staff are young and one or more of them could be future stars. This is a fond hope and we at the *Annual* are

loth to dissuade it, but the future isn't now, and they're going to get pounded this season.

Offense:
Some high points.

7.0

Last year's sublime Bryce Harper card has been replaced by a more pedestrian one (8 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-6, 26 SSN for 31 SBA). Early 2017 suggests that there's lots better to come. The good news is that Christian Yelich has definitively arrived (10 hits, 4 walks, 1-6-6, 27 SSN for 13 SBA). And, of course, for two thirds of the season Trevor Story will be a big league threat (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-0-0-0).



Yelich: Arrived



Davis: Speed indeed

One of the real positive aspects of the Blue Hill offense is its speed. The top runner is Rajai Davis (9 hits, 3 0s, 34 SSN for 49 SBA). When he gets on base he will be a threat. The same is true of Coco Crisp (8 hits, 3 walks, 4 0s, 26 SSN for 15 SBA). Along with Harper and Yelich, the club can manufacture runs.

The rest of the lineup is a bit of mix and match. Darwin Barney has turned up to play second base most days (10 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, L+3); Yonder Alonso, a young prospect not that long ago (he's 30 now!) will be the primary first baseman (9 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s) and Chase Headley will be the main man across the diamond at third (9 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s). Behind the plate Kurt Suzuki (10 hits, 2 walks+22, 6-6-0) will be the primary, with help from two rookies we'll talk about in the bench section. Eduardo Escobar (9 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s) and Jayson Werth (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-5-6, L+10 R-5) will appear in some lineups.

This is an adequate offense, particularly when Story is in it. They'll perform adequately against inferior pitching; it's too bad they can't face their own.

Defense:
Won't extend innings.

4.0

This is primarily a Fielding Two team, with no outstanding liabilities with some stellar defenders. Yonder Alonso is Fielding One (1B4); so is Kurt Suzuki (C8, though with a Th-4); Coco Crisp and Christian Yelich are both OF3s with 31 arms, while Jayson Worth (35 arm) and Bryce Harper (36 arm) are OF2s. Darwin Barney is a



This franchise can't seem to catch a break! They haven't seen above .500 since 2008. This year's version has 45 starts at Grade 8 and higher. The rest are innocuous. Only Matt Bowman (Grade 11) and John Axford (Grade 10*) have more than 50 innings available from the bullpen. Another 100+ losses seem more than likely.*

2B8, but his shortstop partners are SS8s (Story, Escobar, Adames) and Chase Headley is a 3B4.

This defense won't extend innings, and it is certainly adequate to take the field.

Bench: 2.0 **A rebuilders' bench.**

There are enough games and at-bats for the club to have some flexibility during games. The bench doesn't help too much: it consists largely of players taken because of a hope for future improvement. A. J. Reed (6 hits, 4 walks, 2 0s) does nothing well; Christhian Adames (8 hits, 3 walks, 2 0s, SS8 2B7 3B4) is an extra glove when Story is unavailable; Omar Narvaez (9 hits, 4 walks, 2 0s, C7 Th-4) and Manny Pina (9 hits, 5 walks, 3 0s, C6 Th+1) will fill in games when Suzuki can't play. This is a rebuilders' bench.

4th

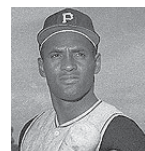
This is not a surprising result, due to all the reasons we've mentioned. Even the completely reshuffled club up in Riverwoolf will perform better than Blue Hill, primarily due to the very large number of awful starts that they will throw out. In a way, Riverwoolf has done what Blue Hill might have to do: tear everything apart and put it back together. Does that mean that they should trade away Yelich, Harper, Story, and the others? Who knows? It might take that shakeup to get them started. The laudable patience of Mr. Ludwig has not provided much reward.



Harper: He'll return



blue hill: Realignment



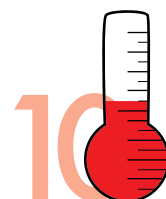
The Blue Hill club, like Whitman, has been in the Clemente for many years. They have watched the other two slots be swapped out over the course of that time, yet they have remained. They were competitive for a time (four playoff appearances between 2002 and 2008), but it's been all famine and no feast since then, the high point being a 79-83 season in 2015. That would try the patience of an Old Testament prophet.

When you've had a run of injury and bad luck and poor performance, it seems a moot point to even discuss the situation of your team in this or that division. But it does sort of beg the question whether a change of venue might help the club shake off what they have experienced for the last ten years in particular: running in place, watching the team (including the young prospects) grow older. Right now, 19 of the 35 players are 30 or younger, and 11 of those were born after 1990. This year might be the critical one.

Players born after 1990 (11): Adames, Bowman, Eflin, Harper, McCullers, Narvaez, Perdomo, A. Reed, C. Reed, Story, Yelich.

Players born from 1987 to 1990 (8): Alonso, Boxberger, Cosart, Escobar, Graveman, Maness, Morgan, Pina.

TQ: 15.0



blue hill MUDSLIDES

It All Comes Together

This was a good year to escape the Ruth Division, due to a resurgence by the *Brob-*

dingnag Barbarians –who look like they’ll be showing no mercy to opponents during the upcoming season. Instead, *Jim Jeatt’s New Westminster Whiskey-jacks* have relocated to

the Mays Division, where they’ll be showing off their top-flight rotation and their reworked lineup in a much more friendly setting.

This should be the first of a number of good years for a team that has put up far more 66-96 than 96-66 seasons. Being able to see a path to the playoffs in that first year is evidence of having it all come together for our friend from the northwest.

The massive realignment shuffle has returned the *Maracaibo Rumrunners* to the Mays Division after a long hiatus in the Aaron. *Walter Hunt’s* club is coming off a surprisingly successful 101-win campaign, in which they defeated the Las Vegas club in a tough seven-game series and then went completely cold against the eventual TBL champion



2016 Mays Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Gotham City*	94	68	.580	—
Calusa†	92	70	.568	2
Grand Cayman	74	88	.457	20
Rye	71	91	.438	58

* Lost to Whitman in the IC Conference finals.

† Lost to Gotham City in the IC playoffs.

Munich Marauders. This year might have been a rebuild, but is instead a scramble for a playoff spot with the existing crew.

Meanwhile, the *Gotham City Batman*



remain in place in the Mays, and *Anton Greenwald’s* club, like the rivals down in Maracaibo, will be looking to get to the post-season with a very similar roster to the one

that won the division last year. It may be a much tougher slog in 2017, but they’ve got a good chance for the wild card.

Meanwhile, *Craig Musselman’s Rye Herons* continue to embrace the cliff that has been rushing toward them for some time. Last year was only the beginning of the very necessary retooling. Some in-season and off-season deals have made the club younger – but there’s still lots of work to do, and 2017 will be a long season.



- 
- | | |
|--------------------|------|
| 1. New Westminster | 36.0 |
| 2. Maracaibo | 27.5 |
| 3. Gotham City | 24.5 |
| 4. Rye | 17.5 |

Kyle Hendricks,
New Westminster

Mays Division

2016 new westminster WHISKEYJACKS in review



by Jim Jeatt

It would appear that the future is now.

2016 in Review Final Record: 66-96 (3rd, Ruth)

In addition to the shifting of talent the Whiskeyjacks find themselves a part of a new landscape for this season. Competing with Rumrunners, Batmen and Herons should prove to be a great test for manager Jeatt. The other three managers have 6 titles between them and lots of playoff success compared to two playoff appearances that were one and done, including one against the Batmen that may prove to be motivation for a big season.

2017 represents the 20th Season for the New West Whiskeyjacks / Douglass Trojans / Gumsville Buffaloons franchise. The 1997 Douglass team will be making a special promotional visit for Trojan Day sometime in May.

What went right?

2016 marked a repeat record of 66 wins and six seasons without making the playoffs. Those six seasons have averaged just 63 wins per year. For the 19 years of the franchise they have a total 1,252 wins which is an average of 65.9 wins per year. So, we can assume it is likely that New West will win 66 games this season.

The pitching staff was the highlight of the season. Pitching for New West ranked 7th in the league. Estrada led all pitchers as a swing man (12-8, 2.94, 3 saves in 196 IP.) Cueto ate up innings throwing 230, and an ERA of 2.63. Four of the six starters topped 180 IP including Hendricks and Locke.



Cueto: Ate innings

Odubel Herrera was the lone bright spot on offense leading the team in batting average, and tied with Addison Russell for the RBI lead with 61.

What went wrong?

The offense just did not show up in 2016. New West was ranked 23rd in average, last in the league in runs scored (560), OBP, homers, doubles and slugging. Injuries and disjointed line ups did not help. Just four players played over 100 games and most played between 60 and 90 games.

3 Things

- 1. Starting pitching.** The emergence of Hendricks as a legitimate top end starter and the continued good work of Cueto and Estrada created a win now mentality for the club. Offseason additions of Guerra and Straily give the club 5 plus starters. The bullpen got a few additions but the big four of Colome, Treinen, Baez and Ross must carry the load.
- 2. Pump up the anemic offense.** The 2017 off season saw the Whiskeyjacks management address an anemic offense by adding three players: Ryan Braun, Jose Abreu and Yadier Molina. This came with a heavy price for the 2017 and 2018 drafts. The core of Russell, Schoop, Herrera, Miller and Fowler should benefit from veteran hitters who can bring some stability to the middle of the order. Power and homers have returned.
- 3. Build from within.** Just seven players have arrived by trade. Drafting is and will be the foundation of this team. There are two hitters and three pitchers over 30. It would appear that the future is now.

new westminster WHISKEYJACKS

Jim Jeatt (13th year)

The starting pitching is phenomenal. The bullpen is deep. And the lineup will get its hits. Scariest of all, most of this team is young.



2010 was the last season that the Whiskeyjacks won more games than they lost. That was also the last time they made the playoffs, the last time they won the division, and the last time they won more than 100 games. We at the *Annual* bring this up because we expect all of these things to happen in 2017.

This year's edition of the team is stacked. Whatever Mr. Jeatt couldn't acquire through the draft — and he acquired quite a bit — he traded for. As a result, the Whiskeyjacks got better in a hurry. Finally out from under Brobdingnag's shadow, this team should do better in the regular season and go farther in the postseason than the 2010 team did. And they'll do it with Canadian efficiency.

Pitching: 16.0
Deep and talented.

"McGee & Ray" sounds like a vaudeville act, and because they won't be pitching, these two pitchers just may be doing stand-up all year. They're the only pitchers who won't contribute in 2017 — they're not really needed. The team employs six starters to cover the season, and they don't even need all of those starts. The bullpen is seven deep of Grade 13* and above. They're deep and talented.

If there's any weakness on the pitching staff, it's a lack of exceptional lefties. Ray is the only lefty starter, and he doesn't pitch. The two lefties in the pen are decent set-up guys, but neither is particularly dominant enough for more than a late-inning LOOGY role. Maybe that's picking nits. This is, after all, the highest rated pitching staff in TBL. The starting staff will carry this team straight into the playoffs.

ROTATION. It helps to start your rotation with the best full-season right-handed starter in the

Turnover Rate: 31%

Arrived: Jose Abreu; Jake Barrett; Jerry Blevins; Ryan Braun; Adam Frazier; Junior Guerra; Seth Lugo; Jake McGee; Yadier Molina; Jarrett Parker; Dan Straily.

Departed: Manny Banuelos; Clint Barmes; Tucker Barnhart; Caleb Joseph; Desmond Jennings; Jeff Locke; Nick Martinez; Paulo Orlando; Alex Rios; Keyvius Sampson; Ryan Webb.



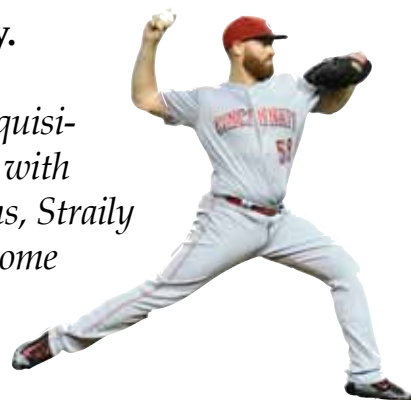
Estrada: Second man

set: Kyle Hendricks (Grade 17 C+25 HR+25). He's followed by Marco Estrada (Grade 15 C-22) and Junior Guerra (Grade 15 HR+25). Then it falls all the way to SNT Straily (Grade 13 HR-22). That was sarcasm, by the way. This team throws 110 starts of Grade 13 and above at their opponents. Take *that!*

But even the "bottom" of the rotation is ace-worthy. Johnny Cueto (Grade 12 C+31 HR+33) is better than some teams' best starters, and yet here, he's fifth on the depth chart! Finally, there's the once-proud Clay Buchholz (Grade 9 C-24), who gets to use only 20 of his 21 starts. As good as this rotation is, it'll be even better in a seven-game playoff series. You have been warned.

SNT: Dan Straily.

The top pitching acquisition in a draft filled with pitching acquisitions, Straily bounced back to become relevant again.





BULLPEN. It all comes down to closer Alex Colome (Grade 18*). He has mildly positive peripherals, but nothing worth writing about. He's set up by a fearsome foursome of right-handers: Blake Treinen (Grade 17* C-26 HR+26), Pedro Baez (Grade 16* HR-21), Seth Lugo (Grade 15*, who loses his +5 bonus after 17 innings), and Jake Barrett (Grade 14* C-26). That's 321 innings alone.

The two lefties (both of whom are active most of the year) are Robbie Ross (Grade 13* C-31 HR+53) and Jerry Blevins (Grade 13* HR+22). They add 97 more quality innings. The two mops aren't pushovers either: Matt Barnes (Grade 11* C-41 HR+26) and Erik Goeddel (Grade 9*). They add another 102 innings. This is a deep, loaded bullpen who only real weakness is a lack of overpowering peripherals.

Offense: 11.5
Plenty of scoring chances.

This attack features a lot of hits. The lineup always seems to boast four hitters with 11 hits, but all told there are six of them: Ryan Braun (11 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, E29 for 21 attempts, L+4 R-3), Jose Abreu (11 hits, 2 walks+42, 1-5-6, no shift), Lonnie Chisenhall (11 hits, 2 walks, 4 0s, L-6), Adam Frazier (11 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s), Yadier Molina (11 hits, 2 walks+22, 3 0s), and Tyler Saladino (11 hits, 3 0s, D27 for 16 attempts, L+4 R-3). Half of these hitters came via trades.

In addition to Braun and Chisenhall, the team has more power in the lineup with Brad Miller (9 hits,

3 walks, 1-4-5-5, L-5), Jonathan Schoop (10 hits, 1-0-0-0, L-4), and Addison Russell (8 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-5-6). While these developing players have some holes in their swings, they play every day, usually batting low in the lineup.



Fowler: Table-setter

The table-setters are Dexter Fowler (9 hits, 5 walks+22, 3 0s, E30 for 17 attempts) and Odubel Herrera (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 3 0s, E30 for 32 attempts, L-9). Their job is to get on base and into scoring position. Frazier and Saladino have the most limited usage, but they form a platoon, with help from the bench.

Although the lineup is mostly plug and play, Mr. Jeatt will have to manage around some of the shifts and use the bench effectively. The instructions are a little light and even prohibit straight steals, which takes away one of his weapons, especially high up in the order. Still, there should plenty of scoring chances, especially against weaker pitching.

Defense: 6.0
Anchored by Russell.

Let's start with that outfield: Braun, Fowler, and Herrera are all OF3s. None of them have above average arms, but they'll catch everything they can reach. The infield is anchored by Russell (SS9) and Molina (C9, but Th-2), although he's backed up by Christian Vazquez (C8 Th+3). Schoop (2B7) and Abreu (1B3) are just average on the right side, and the platoon at third features the average Saladino (3B4) and the ugly Frazier (3B3). The instructions call for Saladino (2B8) to take over at second and Chisenhall (OF2) to take over for Fowler for some bizarre reason.



Braun: Arrived



After years of picking near the top of every draft, the Whiskeyjacks seem poised to finally reach the combustion stage of ignition. Over 100 starts of Grade 13 and higher is backed by a good, if not great bullpen. The lineup has a good blend of young talent and solid veterans. Should win the Mays and make a deep playoff run.

Bench: 2.5 Power and on-base, just waiting.

There's more on this bench than on most teams. There's the power of Chisenhall, Justin Morneau (10 hits, 2 walks, 4 0s), Tim Beckham (9 hits, 2 walks, 4 0s, L+2 R-4), and Jorge Soler (8 hits, 4 walks+22, 1-5-5). Then there's the on-base prowess of Jace Peterson (9 hits, 5 walks, L-7, 6-0). Even Vazquez (9 hits 2 walks+22, 6-0, L+8 R-4) has his uses besides defense. Power and on-base, just waiting. The only thing missing is a pinch-runner. But most teams don't have a Chisenhall on the bench.

This is something that might be improved by a tweak during the trading period. But honestly, if this is all the team has to worry about, they should stop worrying.

1st

Despite some pretty good divisional competition, this team should lock up the division crown before the All-Star break. The starting pitching is phenomenal. The bullpen is deep. And the lineup will get its hits.

Scariest of all, most of this team is young and eager. Only 10 players (including Morneau) are older than 30. This isn't a flash-in-the-pan team. Watch out, Mays Division!

Players born after 1990 (8): Jake Barrett, Adam Frazier, Odubel Herrera, Tyrell Jenkins, Robbie Ray, Addison Russell, Jonathan Schoop, Jorge Soler.

Players born from 1987 to 1990 (18): Jose Abreu, Pedro Baez, Matt Barnes, Tim Beckham, Lonnie Chisenhall, Alex Colome, Erik Goeddel, Kyle Hendricks, Seth Lugo, Brad Miller, Jarrett Parker, Jace Peterson, Robbie Ross, Tyler Saladino, Dan Straily, Blake Treinen, Preston Tucker, Christian Vazquez.



new westminster: Realignment



After many years, New Westminster has moved out of the Ruth Division, and thus away from the considerable shadow of Brobdingnag. This is a major challenge for any team (just ask Dr. Steve Powell, who's still there in shadow-land).

Now in the Mays, they'll face some challenging competition from all three other teams: Maracaibo still has some gas in the tank, Gotham City has power and pitching, and Rye cannot be completely discounted. However, any reasonable analysis (and, you know, that's our job here), it's clear that the boys from up north are superior and should have no trouble leading the Mays. None of the other three are under any illusions on that score.

Still, the road to the World Series in 2017 may have to go through Brobdingnag, a team with plenty of post season experience and the ability to get better in September (which isn't really true here, though this team does pick in rounds 3-7 in 2018.) This doesn't even consider the Clemente Division, where there's some talent on tap.

But overall the Mays is a much better venue for New Westminster; realignment is certainly a win for them.

TQ: 36.0



new westminster WHISKEY JACKS

2016 maracaibo RUMRUNNERS in review



One more try as a contender.

by Walter Hunt

2016 in Review

Final Record: 101-61 (1st, Aaron)

A funny thing happened on the way to restructuring: an Aaron Division championship. It was supposed to be a dogfight between Northboro and Kansas, since there was a sense that the Rumrunners were better than the previous year but not quite good enough.

The offers for key players were unappealing, though. Instead of building down, Maracaibo management kept them, and added some short term talent – Curt Casali, Matt Albers, Chris Young(s) – and let the boys play. And they did: a very hot start, consistent performance through the summer, 101 wins and a defeat of the very competitive Las Vegas club in the divisional playoffs. Reality only set in when the bats went silent against the eventual champion, Munich.

What went right?

Bullpen performance is a hallmark of the Rumrunners, and this year was no exception. Mark Melancon scooped 10 wins in the setup role, and Albers was awesome in very limited usage, surrendering only one run and 9 hits in 37 innings, saving 30 games with a microscopic 0.24 ERA. Six relievers, including trade acquisition Sergio Romo, recorded ERAs under 3.00, with 31 relief wins. The 3.51 team ERA was good for sixth in the league.

On the offensive side, Lorenzo Cain was an all-around leader, with 21 HR, 84 RBI, 25 steals in 28 attempts, and a .286 BA. Mitch Moreland delivered 17 HR with a .318 average which led the team. The club's 104 steals was second in the league.



Cain: All around

What went wrong?

During the regular season, lineup consistency and no easy outs is an advantage. Maracaibo had eleven players with double digit homers. Unfortunately, Cain's 21 led the team; there was no single huge bat, someone to scare the opponent's closer. The offense was relentless, but if it couldn't get going, it could be shut out. Five regulars struck out 100 or more times, and the team walked only 344 times – a .313 team OBA bears that out. Sometimes they just didn't score.

The team depended heavily on its bullpen, for good reason: the starters were unimpressive.

Cole Hamels put up a 17-9 record, but surrendered 26 homers and had a 4.37 ERA – not quite Cy Young material.

3 Things

1. *One more try.* As with last year, the team management toyed with the idea of a rebuild, but once again the offers were not very exciting. The move to the Mays offers a chance for one more try as a contender. The rebuild is going to have to happen – but not this year, at least not at the outset.

2. *Peeking at the next iteration.* Maikel Franco and Orlando Arcia are not here for their current performance, but for what's to come. 2017 MLB stats may well point at a rebuild next year – so if the team doesn't perform, it might start even sooner.

3. *Some moves are best not made.* Even if the attempt to get J. D. Martinez (or another bat) had succeeded, they might not have caught New Westminster. The team will go with what it has.

maracaibo RUMRUNNERS



Walter Hunt (31st year); Hall of Famer

They're well behind the new New Westminster juggernaut, but this team could — and possibly should — make the playoffs.

Once again, the *Annual* is predicting the Rumrunners to win more games than they lose. It seems like an old refrain, but Mr. Hunt never seems to tire of it. Sometimes, they're bashers; sometimes, they win with speed. Yet, every year, there's never been a three-digit number in the loss column. Never.

This year's team relies heavily on veterans. That's not to say there isn't any youth on this team; it's just for the most part they're still waiting in the wings. Mr. Hunt has (obviously) displayed a fine eye for young talent over the years, almost always picking in the second half of the draft rounds. He's built a good team that's likely bound for the playoffs, but they may not get as far as the Conference Finals again.

Pitching: They'll win some games.

12.0

What set Maracaibo pitching staffs apart in the past has been their positive peripherals. Mr. Hunt knew how to build a pitching staff that could dominate by stealing hits, walks, and homers. Mariano Rivera will always remain the poster child of Maracaibo pitching. This year, the bullpen is holding up its end, for the most part, but the starters ... not so much.

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Erick Aybar; Caleb Joseph; Jabari Blash; Wilmer Difo; Hunter Cervenka; Tom Koehler; Matt Strahm; Orlando Arcia; Jim Johnson; Pat Neshek; J.A. Happ

Departed: Christian Bethancourt; Steve Cishek; Luis Sardinas; Santiago Casilla; David Freese; Logan Morrison; Chris R. Young; Matt Albers; Marlon Byrd; Josh Rutledge

The grades are solid, up and down the staff, and despite 17 subpar starts, this is a team strength. A deep bullpen matches the rotation well, with left and righty options. And since the bullpen has the better peripherals, the team will feel like the

Rumrunners of old when the game's on the line in the late innings.



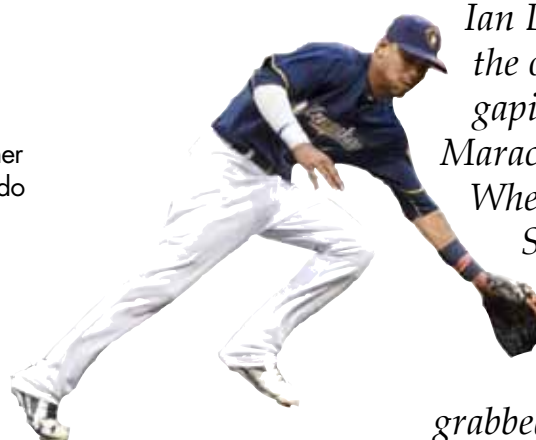
Lackey: Lifetime

ROTATION. It may be difficult to believe, but John Lackey (Grade 14) has been a Rumrunner his whole career, 13 years so far. He returns as the ace. Newly acquired J.A. Happ (Grade 13) joins him, followed by another solid

Cole Hamels season (Grade 12 C-23). Those three start 93 games, more than half the season.

The next level belongs to returning Colby Lewis (Grade 11 C+22 HR-21) and another trade acquisition, Tom Koehler (Grade 9 C-31). They add 52 starts. Those final 17 starts are "filled" by Ubaldo

SNT: Orlando Arcia.



Ian Desmond in the outfield left a gaping hole in the Maracaibo infield.

When 23-year-old SS Arcia fell to him in the first round, Mr. Hunt grabbed him.



maracaibo RUMRUNNERS

Jimenez (Grade 6 C-62 HR+22), the only weak link in the rotation. While 97 starts are left-handed, it doesn't feel like a weakness, although five of seven playoff games will be started by a southpaw.

BULLPEN. Mark Melancon (Grade 19* C+34 HR+44) is doing a great Rivera imitation. He returns as the closer. The set-up crew is deep and varied. Nate Jones (Grade 17* C+33 HR+21), rookie lefty Matt Strahm (Grade 22* C-51 HR+62), Pat Neshek (Grade 15* C+51), lefty Hunter Cervenka (Grade 15* C-62 HR+33), Jim Johnson (Grade 12* HR+44), Sergio Romo (Grade 14* C+26 HR-25), and lefty Justin Wilson (Grade 8* C+21 HR+23) supply 408 innings total.

Considering the strong starting rotation, that's plenty of innings with — as noted — mostly strong peripherals. At the bottom of the pen, Junichi Tazawa (Grade 10* HR-23) and Keone Kela (Grade 8* C-46) provide 84 mop-like innings, but they'll come in handy sometimes.

Handled properly, as Mr. Hunt always manages, this bullpen will win some

games for the team and save many others.

Offense: 8.0
Hits well, runs well, but . . .

This version of the Rumrunners offense has a lot of variety, but there's one thing conspicuously absent. Let's start with powerful Jake Lamb (1-4-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks, L-10) and still just 27-year-old Salvador Perez (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, a walk+22). Perez starts the trend, as you'll see.

Starling Marte (11 hits, 1 walk+42, 4 0s, C31 for 59 attempts, L-5) does almost everything well. Ian



Lamb: Powerful



Walter's warriors won the Aaron in 2016, held down a good Las Vegas team and fell to a ridiculously good Munich team. The Rumrunners are back in 2017 and are a wild card favorite and will contest their new division with New West all season.

Desmond (1-6-6, 11 hits, 2 walks, E30 for 27 attempts, L+3 R-3) is solid. Part-timer Chris Young (1-6-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L+6 R-6) had a great season.

Table-setters Ichiro Suzuki (6-0, 11 hits, 3 walks, E32 for 12 attempts, L+5 R-3), Lorenzo Cain (3 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks, E29 for 19 attempts, L+12 R-5) and Brandon Phillips (3 0s, 11 hits, a walk+22, D25 for 22 attempts, L-5) get on and can run. Marwin Gonzalez 3 0s, 10 hits, a walk+22, D26 for 18 attempts) adds to the mix.

There's more power in Mitch Moreland (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks+22) and Maikel Franco (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+4 R-3). And finally, there's SNT Orlando Arcia (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, L+9 R-5), who's counted on for many better cards to come.

This team hits for average, hits for power, and runs well, but there are too few walks. If three walks is considered average, there are eight players below average. In this respect, it's not quite like a veteran team.

Defense: 5.0
Good times, bad times.

It starts with the best defensive catcher in baseball: Perez (C9 Th+6). Moreland (1B5) is outstanding, and there are three OF3s on this team (Cain, Marte, and Young), although all three must miss some time. The other outfielders are average, and all have excellent arms.

Up the middle, Phillips (2B7) and Gonzalez and Arcia are both SS8s. That will hurt, as will the black hole at third, as Lamb and Franco are both 3B3s. Gonzalez and Erick

Aybar are 3B4s for later innings, though. Good times, bad times. Maybe they'll get lucky.

Bench: Some moves to make.

2.5

Because of the obvious shifts, there are many moves to make when playing this team. But there should always be some moves to make.

Aybar (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L-6) is more of the same, but Curt Casali (1-0-0, 7 hits, 3 walks+22, L+5 R-4) promises to be entertaining. Wilmer Difo (3 0s, 10 hits, 4 walks) may get a moment in the sun. The team also benefits from the presence of Marwin Gonzalez (1B4 2B7 3B4 SS8 OF2), who can play everywhere but behind the plate; he should find his way into most lineups, even if he doesn't start.



Gonzalez: Everywhere

2nd And a distant second behind the new New Westminster juggernaut. But, as mentioned, they could — and possibly should — make the playoffs. They have a strong pitching staff with a deep bullpen. Their offense can do almost everything well, while it mixes and matches its problematic shifts. Gotham City has more power, but more weaknesses. Another winning season!

The question about Maracaibo is not where they are, but where they're going. Management has traditionally been loyal to long-time players, such as Lackey, Hamels and Suzuki; Maracaibo is a place where veterans finish their careers (think Cal Ripken, Mariano Rivera, Orlando Hudson, Al Leiter). Soon it'll be one more tip of the hat for Ichiro. Making the transition to a younger ballclub is a challenge that may well compromise that tendency.



maracaibo: Realignment



The relocation of this franchise is an interesting case. If realignment hadn't happened, the Rumrunners would be fighting Northboro and Strong City for the division crown.

While the *Annual* says Northboro has the advantage, Mr. Hunt and his teams have overcome much greater odds. But *because* of realignment, they find themselves in a division with powerful New Westminster. They'll roll the dice and play the games, but chances are, there's no way to win this division. Overall, the tendency is to view this move as a net loss for the club.

maracaibo RUMRUNNERS



Ichiro: One more tip of the hat

TQ: **27.5**



2016 gotham city BATMEN in review



Go 66 and 11!

by Anton Greenwald

2016 in Review Final Record: 94-68 (1st, Mays)

In 2015 our prize for not quite beating Whitman was a next to last place in the draft. In 2016 we did all we could to get back into the playoffs, won our division, won our first playoff round, and then again got beat by Whitman who advanced to the World Series because Gotham City could not beat up on lefties. Before this draft, Gotham City believed that rebuilding was a considered option *but* we did not get a really good offer for the star player to be traded – Mark Trumbo, the MLB homerun leader in 2016. We never assume that we *have* to trade a player, taking less than full value because we want to rebuild and do not want to overperform due to good cardboard. When we had the very best catcher card ever to be published by APBA with full season use and we could get no offer better than the very last pick in the first round, we simply held on to him and had fun watching him crush the opposition even though we did not make the playoffs. Thus, we prepared to compete once again. This year, maybe just a wild card slot and maybe not even that. We expect to be a 500 team.

On the downside is the fact that competing in 2016 cost the team 3 draft picks (rounds 2, 3 and 4) and although we had an equal number of extra lower round picks (5, 6 and 7th) these lower picks just helped the team to fill needed roster spots with warm bodies that are not necessarily expected to be there next year. The team has holes that will show against good competition.

3 Things

1. *Risk.* We look great if the dice fall right and really bad if they don't. First up – starting pitching. There were several prognosticators who suggested that I would take Ryon Healy for my next third baseman. Correct on my need but

wrong for the player to fulfill that need. Healy is not going to be a third baseman. Instead we chose Anthony Reyes. Due to the upcoming TJ surgery, he dropped like a rock to position 17. Before his arm trouble he was throwing about 103 mph. What will he be able to do after he returns? Big risk, big potential reward. Gotham City continued with a trade for Eovaldi, a 27 year old also missing this year in MLB due to TJ surgery. I think the odds for his comeback are better as he is not the super-fireballer. This gives Gotham City two starting pitchers uncarded next year. Not exactly a good plan. However, we have six other starters, Hernandez, Verlander, E. Rodriguez, Wacha, McHugh and Karns. So we could be OK next year and fabulous the year after.



Wacha: Led the staff

2. *What about 3B?* After the obvious initial 3B was taken the only reasonably sure bet was the old Cuban. Not a rebuilding choice so I went and took the best offensive infielder available (Schimpf) with my bonus pick. This is a risk. He has strikeout problems but if he can increase contact just a bit then he will stay in MLB.

3. *Hitting the lefty.* Pham isn't huge, suffering the same strikeout problem as Schimpf, but he could turn into a good performer. He will be joined by latter pick Heisey – older and part timer but a 7th round pick that might last another year. Really solving this problem would take earlier draft picks that I did not have.

Gotham City then loaded the bullpen with bodies. Next year, GC could be good again if newcomers come alive and the rest of team does not fall apart. Of course, Trumbo could fail hugely – toss a coin. So I might get lucky. And then again – I might hold a fire sale.

Meanwhile, we will live or die by the homerun. Go 66 and 11!

gotham city BATMEN

Anton Greenwald (32nd year)

In a new, tough conference, Mr. Greenwald has his work cut out for him — for 2017 and beyond.



A year after repeating as the Mays Division champion, the Gotham City Batmen face an uncertain present ... and future. Many of the same names have returned, but despite a few career years out of the veterans, most of the team suffered injury or worse: ineffectiveness.

Gotham City entertained offers for some of his star players in the offseason, but in the end decided against a fire sale. He's hoping another year and a full draft in 2018 will bring a return to greatness. In the meantime, they'll push for a playoff spot in a new, tough conference. Mr. Greenwald has his work cut out for him — for 2017 and beyond.

Pitching: 9.5
They may need every inning.

If you look at the top performers on this pitching staff, you see legitimate highs, optimistic numbers that make you think of playoffs and championships. But then you look at the bottom and see ... well, the bottom. It's deep and ugly and uninspiring. It makes you think of mediocrity and good draft picks. So where does that leave the team?

That's the question that the prescient writers of the *Annual* get to answer. When you crunch the numbers, look at the competition, and figure out the odds, what you end up with — what we end up with — is "meh." They'll win some on pitching alone. They'll lose some on pitching alone. There's marginally more of the former than the latter, so they stand a chance to contend. A chance.

ROTATION. Justin Verlander (Grade 15 C+21) has been a Batman his whole career. He's had a winning record in seven of his

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Matt Albers; Richard Bleier; Jose Dominguez; Nathan Eovaldi; Cory Gearrin; Chris Heisey; Tommy Pham; Alex Reyes; Chaz Roe; Ryan Schimpf; Ryan Zimmerman

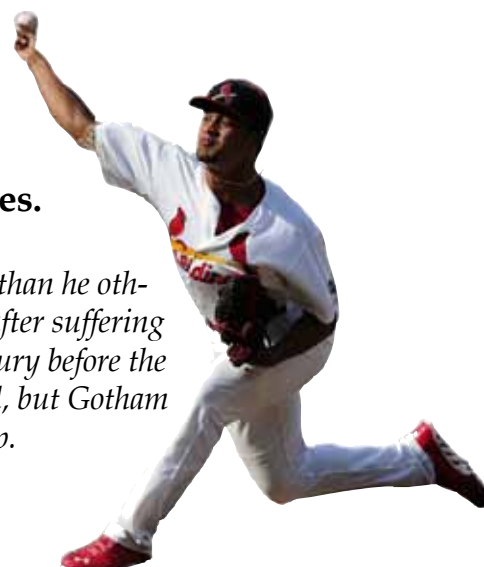
Departed: Ehire Adrianza; Al Albuquerque; Enrique Burgos; Jorge De La Rosa; Ryan Howard; Sam LeCure; Franklin Morales; Jonathan Papelbon; Colby Rasmus; Nolan Reimold; Pedro Villarreal

10 years. He will again. He's followed by former ace Felix Hernandez (Grade 12 C-33). He's had a winning record in seven of his 11 seasons, all with Gotham City. They're a formidable 1-2 punch. Eduardo Rodriguez (Grade 9) and Nathan Eovaldi (Grade 8 HR-24) bring the total to 100 games even.

Nathan Karns (Grade 7 C-41) is the best of the rest, but only for 15 starts. Most of the sub-par starts — a massive total of 33 of them — go to Collin McHugh (Grade 6). Erstwhile prospect Michael Wacha (Grade 4) gets the final 14 starts,

SNT: Alex Reyes.

He dropped farther than he otherwise might have after suffering a season-ending injury before the MLB season started, but Gotham City scooped him up.





gotham city BATMEN

showing confidence both in him and the bullpen. If they make the playoffs, Verlander gets to start three times, but McHugh is the fourth starter. Think about that.

BULLPEN. The new closer is SNT Alex Reyes (Grade 21 C-51 HR+55). Even without the +5 bonus, he's awesome, but he gets only 46.0 innings. He's set up by Dellin Betances (Grade 15* C-26 HR+35), who is no longer dominant, and lefty Richard Bleier (Grade 15* C+33 HR+62) for a moment. That's 142 innings — not enough. Beyond them, there's Chaz Roe (Grade 14* C-36 HR+35), Hunter Strickland (Grade 13* HR+34), lefty Fernando Abad (Grade 13* C-35 HR+31), and reborn Gavin Floyd (Grade 13* C+23).

That's 310 innings, which isn't bad, but it's split between seven relievers, so it'll have to be managed carefully. The early innings fall into the hands (or arms) of Cory Gearrin (Grade 10* C+22 HR+25), Jose Dominguez (Grade 8* C-35), and lefty J.P. Howell (Grade 6* C+23 HR+31). That brings the total to 445, and seven will be active every month Wacha pitches. They may need every inning.

Offense:

They'll need to get lucky.

8.0

This year, the best card on the team is versatile Matt Carpenter (9 hits, 5 walks+22, 1-4-5-6, L-4), who combines power and on-base. There's more of both in the lineup. Mark Trumbo (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-0-0, L-12 R+3), who was on the trading block all winter,



Carpenter: Versatile



Verlander: Lifetime ace

has lots of power, as do rookie Ryan Schimpf (1-1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks+42, L-11) and Chris Heisey (1-1-6, 8 hits, 3 walks+22).

Then there's Michael Saunders (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+22) and Giancarlo Stanton (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L+5 R-3). It's trick or treat, swing or miss. But wait; there's more: rookie Tommy Pham (1-5-5, 8 hits, 4 walks+22) and Robinson Chirinos (1-5-5, 8 hits, 3 walks+42). Sense the pattern? Get the picture? See the problem?

The team does have two exceptions in Jonathan Lucroy (1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L-5) and Ian Kinsler (1-5-6, 10 hits, 2 walks+42, E27 for 20 attempts, L+2 R-3). Plus, one of the table-setters — Jarrod Dyson (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, C31 for 37 attempts) — can walk a little. The other — Alcides Escobar (6-0, 10 hits, a walk, E31 for 21 attempts, L-4) — can't.

That leaves the uninspiring Ivan DeJesus (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L-3) and Ryan Zimmerman (1-0-0, 8 hits, 2 walks+22) to fill in the gaps. There are no 11-hit cards on this team. In true Gotham City fashion, they have lots of power and lots of walks and only a little speed. They'll need to get lucky with the power. But it could happen.

Defense:

May help . . . sometimes.

5.0

Jonathan Lucroy (C8 Th+4) is still a star. He's backed up ably by Robinson Chirinos (C8 Th-1). Ian Kinsler (2B9) is the star of the infield, and Ryan Zimmerman and Matt Carpenter (1B4) are above average.

Alcides Escobar (SS8) is average every day, but only Ryan Schimpf (3B4) is Fielding Two at third. Carpenter and DeJesus (3B3) don't help. Dyson is the lone OF3, but he also has a rag arm (28). All the other outfielders are average (OF2), but they all throw well (33 or better, including



The Batmen have averaged almost 98 wins these past three seasons, but that success ends in 2017. Verlander and King Felix are solid, but only for 59 starts. Phenom Alex Reyes will make use of his Grade 21 (and only 46 innings) as the closer. Offense is still OK, but weak in spots. Won't be pushing new division mate New West much in 2017.



gotham city:
Realignment



gotham city BATMEN

Stanton's 36 cannon). This defense may help ... sometimes.

Bench: **2.0**
Not much to see here.

There's really not much to see here. Heisey's available when he's up. DeJesus can pinch-run. Despite lots of players, there are not a lot of extra games. Mr. Greenwald had enough trouble filling all the slots. Next year, some of these guys will have moved on. Maybe Ben Paulsen (3 0s, 8 hits, 2 walks) will be one of them.

3rd Even in the old Mays Division, this Gotham City squad would have struggled to compete. Verlander is one of only five starting pitchers who have 34 or more games to start, and of those, you'd only want to start two others (MadBum and Scherzer) three times in a playoff series.

The offense may sputter and at times stop altogether. The bullpen isn't on the same level as last year's, which helped the team to 94 wins. 2017 will be a rollercoaster ride for Mr. Greenwald.



Trumbo: On the block, but still here

What effect did realignment have on this semi-permanent resident of the division? Surprisingly, not much. Grand Cayman was replaced by New Westminster, and Calusa was replaced by Maracaibo.

Without any realignment, the *Annual* may still have ranked the Batmen third. So, Even. The real question, moving forward, is the direction of this noble franchise. Can they regroup for another run, even in a strong division and a strong conference? Or will the best pieces be sold off and the inevitable rebuilding begin? Stay tuned.

TQ: **24.5**



2016 rye HERONS in review



A losing season and a transformation.

by Craig Musselman

2016 in Review

Final Record: 71-91 (4th, Mays)

The Rye Herons limped home to a 71-91 record in 2016, their worst record in 12 years. This is a proud franchise, with the third most total wins in TBL history, and with the fourth most wins of the 24 franchises since 2005. This year it became clear that the end of a run was near at hand – well over the cliff in TBL parlance. The club dumped aging stars in September and began a transformation and planned “soft landing”, hoping to return to competitiveness quicker than is the norm in the TBL. The question for Rye is whether this soft landing will result in a truly competitive team in a few years, or whether long term mediocrity will result. Time will tell.

What went right?

For a boring 71-91 team like this, you have to drill down a bit to find some things that went right. Jared Hughes won ten games out of the bullpen, a rarity, before becoming the team’s “closer” late in the year. Javy Lopez pitched well as the closer, with a 0.59 ERA and 24 saves before he too was shipped out in September. Going into the year, his lack of control was a concern; yet he pitched as if he had a Z, with only 9 walks in 30 innings pitched. Unlike JT Realmuto, he had the dice.

What really went right is that the team’s lackluster performance induced the Rye brain trust to finally give up on these geezers and begin the transformation.

What went wrong?

The offense was anemic. Rye scored the fewest runs, had the fewest homers, the lowest batting average and lowest slugging percentage in years – the ravages of time. The team’s fielding was atro-

cious. The team was old, slow, and *boring*. Hence the transformation. JT Realmuto, with a fine 10 hit rookie card, was below the Mendoza line, hitting .199. JT just couldn’t hit it where they weren’t. Jeff Samardzija wasn’t half bad on the mound, with an ERA of 4.11, but went 4-17.

3 Things

1. *The 2017 Draft.* Rye had many draft picks and had the luxury of selecting the best available young player at every draft pick. Rye hoped to select Benintendi, but had to “settle” for Alex Bregman in the first round. Jameson Taillon was perhaps a gem of the first round. He appears to know how to pitch. Rye had other plans going into the draft, but the best young hitters available in later rounds were all fast, young outfielders. Fifteen draftees made the Rye roster for 2017. Fifteen. That changes a roster.



Morales: Leader

2. *The Roster Transformation.* The roster changed from old and slow as molasses to young and speedy, in one fell swoop. The new players have speed to burn. The roster has changed from the oldest in the TBL, by a lot, to one that reflects a long term youth movement. There will be no more free agent signings of older players, as has been Rye’s practice, until the team is on the cusp of competitiveness again. A transformation.

3. *The Future.* Rye will not be competitive in 2017. As always, well more than half of the draftees will likely fizzle. However, some will develop into key players. Rye has all its likely fine draft picks for 2018 so the roster transformation is likely to be complete. The future is bright despite a year or two of losing on the horizon. It will all depend on how well these chosen rookies perform. Time will tell.

rye HERONS

Craig Musselman (13th year)

This is not a team devoid of talent. They may have less than the average TBL team, but it doesn't mean they'll sink to triple-digit losses.



The Herons had actually reached the proverbial cliff and were leaning over it before Mr. Musselman pulled the trigger on a number of mid-season trades last year. Thus began the slow and deliberate inching away from the edge of the abyss. Since then, he's begun to assemble the pieces he hopes will compose the next great Herons team. There's a lot of work ahead.

For the 2017 season, however, the Rye Herons will often have trouble competing against superior teams, such as those in the Mays Division.

Turnover Rate: 46%

Arrived: Tim Adleman; Alex Bregman; Trevor Brown; Keon Broxton; Joel De La Cruz; Alex Dickerson; Guillermo Heredia; Whit Merrifield; Colton Murray; Zach Neal; Edubray Ramos; Rob Refsnyder; Mallex Smith; Jameson Taillon; Michael Tonkin; Nick Wittgren

Departed: Elvis Araujo; Joe Beimel; Roenis Elias; Latroy Hawkins; Torii Hunter; Travis Ishikawa; Jim Johnson; Pat Neshek; Aramis Ramirez; Justin Ruggiano; Carlos Ruiz; J.B. Shuck; Joe Thatcher; Juan Uribe; Jason Vargas

That's all right; Mr. Musselman knows he's in for a long slog. In the meantime, he's got a few key pieces, including SNT Alex Bregman, to root for. In three years, this team will look very different.

Pitching: 5.5 Half a season of concern.

The good news is that there will be some highlights this season. But aside from their ace, those highlights may be few and far between.

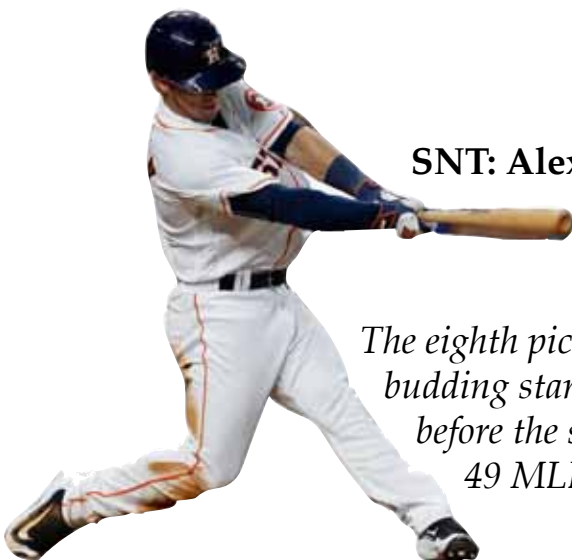
They'll likely come unexpectedly, like finding a dollar bill on the floor of a penny arcade. For all the promise of half the rotation, they'll eventually have to turn the ball over to the bullpen, and not much good will come of that.



Sale: New ace

Or maybe the good starters will suck it up and pitch complete games every time out. It's fun to project a team like this. The Herons could absolutely fall apart, sinking to 100+ losses, or they could go out and win 75 games just to make us look bad. Either way, this pitching staff will have a say in the team's success ... or lack thereof.

ROTATION. Before you write them off completely, remember that the Herons send respectable starters to the mound for



SNT: Alex Bregman.

The eighth pick in the draft netted this budding star. He turned 23 right before the season and already had 49 MLB games under his belt.



RYE HERONS

82 games. Ace Chris Sale (Grade 13 C+31), Jeff Samardzija (Grade 10 C+22), and rookie Jameson Taillon (Grade 10 C+36) are names and grades every team would like to own. It's the starters for the other half of the season that are cause for concern... or ridicule.

The fun starts with Tim Adleman (Grade 10 HR-31), who adds 13 exciting starts. Joel de la Cruz (Grade 6) chips in nine more. Jered Weaver (Grade 4 HR-31) and James Shields (Grade 4 C-31 HR-32), once studs of this rotation, have fallen hard and fast, but they only start 13 games between them. Two innocuous starters handle the rest: Tyler Wilson (Grade 3 C+24) and Zach Neal (Grade 2 C+52).

BULLPEN. When a wild Grade 14* is your closer — in this case, Will Smith (Grade 14* C-34 HR+32) — you know you're in for late-inning fun. Add in his limit of 40 innings, and you begin to glimpse the bigger problem. He's "set up" by Nick Wittgren (Grade 10* C+41), lefty Tyler Lyons (Grade 15* HR-33), Edubray Ramos (Grade 11* C+21), Jared Hughes (Grade 10* HR+21), and Neal (Grade 11* C+52) when he's not starting.

For those of you scoring at home, that's 278 total bullpen innings that can steal hits without a +5 bonus. They only pitch in games that the Herons lead or trail by three runs or less. Otherwise, it's time for Michael Tonkin (Grade 5* HR-21) and Colton Murray (Grade 3* HR-25), who add a bunch of innocuous innings. They'll likely pitch way too much.



It took longer than expected, but Craig Musselman has finally begun The Rebuild in earnest. Many established vets were sent away and were replaced by guys from the 2017 draft. Matt Kemp, Jeff Samardzija and Kendrys Morales could be gone by the midseason trading period. May contend for No. 1 pick.

Offense: Mix and match.

6.5

The best cards on this team belong to Matt Kemp (10 hits, 2 walks, 1-5-5-6, L+5 R-3) and Kendrys Morales (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-5-5, L+5 R-4). They play every day. More limited are Kennys Vargas (8 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-5-6, L+15 R-9) and SNT Alex Bregman (10 hits, 1-0-0-0, 3 walks, L-3). They smack left-handed pitching.



Kemp: Best card

More power comes from rookie Keon Broxton (8 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-6, C33 for 27 attempts, L+5 R-6) and Steven Souza (9 hits, 2 hits+22, 1-0-0, L-4). They each have limits, but they may contribute when called upon. That's six players with a first-column "1." They don't all play at the same time.



Nunez: Set him loose

Then there are two true hitters. These table-setters even run well. Eduardo Nunez (11 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, C31 for 50 attempts, no shift)

plays every day. As Mr. Musselman's instructions say: "He needs to run. Set him loose." Against righties, the team adds J.T. Realmuto (11 hits, 2 walks+22, 3 0s, E29 for 16 attempts, L-10). Who doesn't love a catcher who can run?

The rest of the lineup is nondescript: Jhonny Peralta (10 hits, 2 walks, 6-0-0, L-10 R+2), Whit Merrifield (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, E28 for 11 attempts, L+7, R-4), Kelby Tomlinson (10 hits, 3 walks+22, R-4), Chase Utley (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 3 0s, L-13), Mallex Smith (9 hits, 3 walks+22, 3-5, A26 for 24 attempts, L-19 R+5), and Trevor Brown (9 hits, 2 walks+22, 3 0s). They mix and match into the starting lineups.

Defense: Errors waiting to happen.

3.0

The only highlights on this team are Tomlinson (2B8), Realmuto (C7, but Th+2), and Kemp's arm (OF1, 35 arm). Everyone else is average or worse. Brown (C7 Th-1) isn't bad. Nunez (SS8), Utley (2B7), Peralta (3B4), and Vargas (1B3) will all make the easy plays, most of the time. All the other outfielders are average, albeit with mostly mediocre or weak (Broxton's 29) arms. Merrifield (3B3) and Morales (1B2) are errors waiting to happen when they play. Tomlinson is the only defensive replacement.

Bench: Not very helpful.

2.5

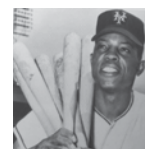
The team has a deep bench; it's just not very helpful. The best of the lot is rookie Alex Dickerson (9 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0-0, L-5). Rob Refsnyder (9 hits, 4 walks+22, 6-6, L+4 R-5) at least plays everywhere, poorly. The rest are outfielders: Guillermo Heredia (9 hits, 4 walks+42, 2 0s), Delino DeShields (8 hits, 3 walks+22, 2 0s, D28 for 11 attempts), and Aaron Altherr (7 hits, 4 walks+42, 2 0s, E30 for 9 attempts, L+5 R-3). There may be pieces for the future here, but beyond Dickerson (who starts the year in the minors), there isn't much help.

4th

With a T.Q. rating this low, conventional wisdom says that they'll compete for the first pick in the 2018 rookie draft, but before you go printing that lottery ticket, bear in mind that this team has half a season of solid starting pitching and some decent power. This is not a team devoid of talent. It may have less than the average TBL team, but it doesn't mean they'll sink to triple-digit losses. Of course, the bullpen may cost as many wins as the power can deliver. Your guess is as good as ours.



rye:
Realignment



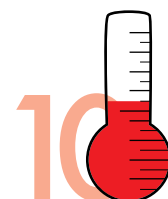
rye HERONS

Like Gotham City, Rye remained in the Mays Division. And like Gotham City, Rye – as a franchise – is identified with the division, as it has always resided here (since it moved out of Incense and Peppermints Stadium after two years as the Dunn Loring Iconoclasts. Yes, we had a team with that name – but hey, Doug Chapin gave us hey**tb**l. Another piece of TBL lore.)

What effect does realignment have on this club? Essentially nothing. Last year and this year were and are all about the end of one era for the Rye Herons and the beginning of another. A few years ago we made quite an issue of the relative age of the team; Craig Musselman is now doing something about it.

From the Mays Division, Rye lost Calusa and Grand Cayman as rivals – both of whom might win the Clemente and Williams Divisions this year – and in their place, they gained Maracaibo and New Westminster. All four of those teams are better than the current Rye team. So, in the end, it matters not who beats them up; they'll still at the bottom of the standings come November. Overall, we judge realignment as neither a win nor a loss.

TQ: 17.5



No Mercy

The last two years have brought Ruth Division championships to **Brobdingnag** but

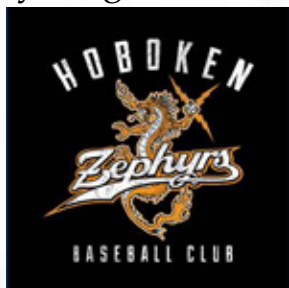


they have not been, you know, true **Barbarian** victories. *Joe Auletta*, the TBL impresario, has worked hard to set a standard for con-

tending – and 73-89 and 84-78 teams are not up to that standard. This year's team, however, is very much more a deep contender, and should show no mercy to its opponents in the Ruth Division and beyond.

The division rivals aren't going to do too much to hinder the Barbarian charge to the playoffs. The biggest challenge will come from the **Hoboken Zephyrs**. *Steve Powell's* club skirted the .500 mark in 2016; they should be better in 2017.

The pitching is somewhat deficient for a true contender, but the roster is younger and stronger and loaded with Guys We Like. The last two drafts have done wonders to sweep out the veterans, replacing them with young and exciting players. This year Brobdingnag may



have an easy ride, but in the long run they'd better watch out.

2016 Ruth Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Brobdingnag*	84	78	.519	—
Hoboken	76	86	.469	8
New Westminster	66	96	.407	18
Detroit	52	110	.321	32

* Lost to Whitman in the IC playoffs.



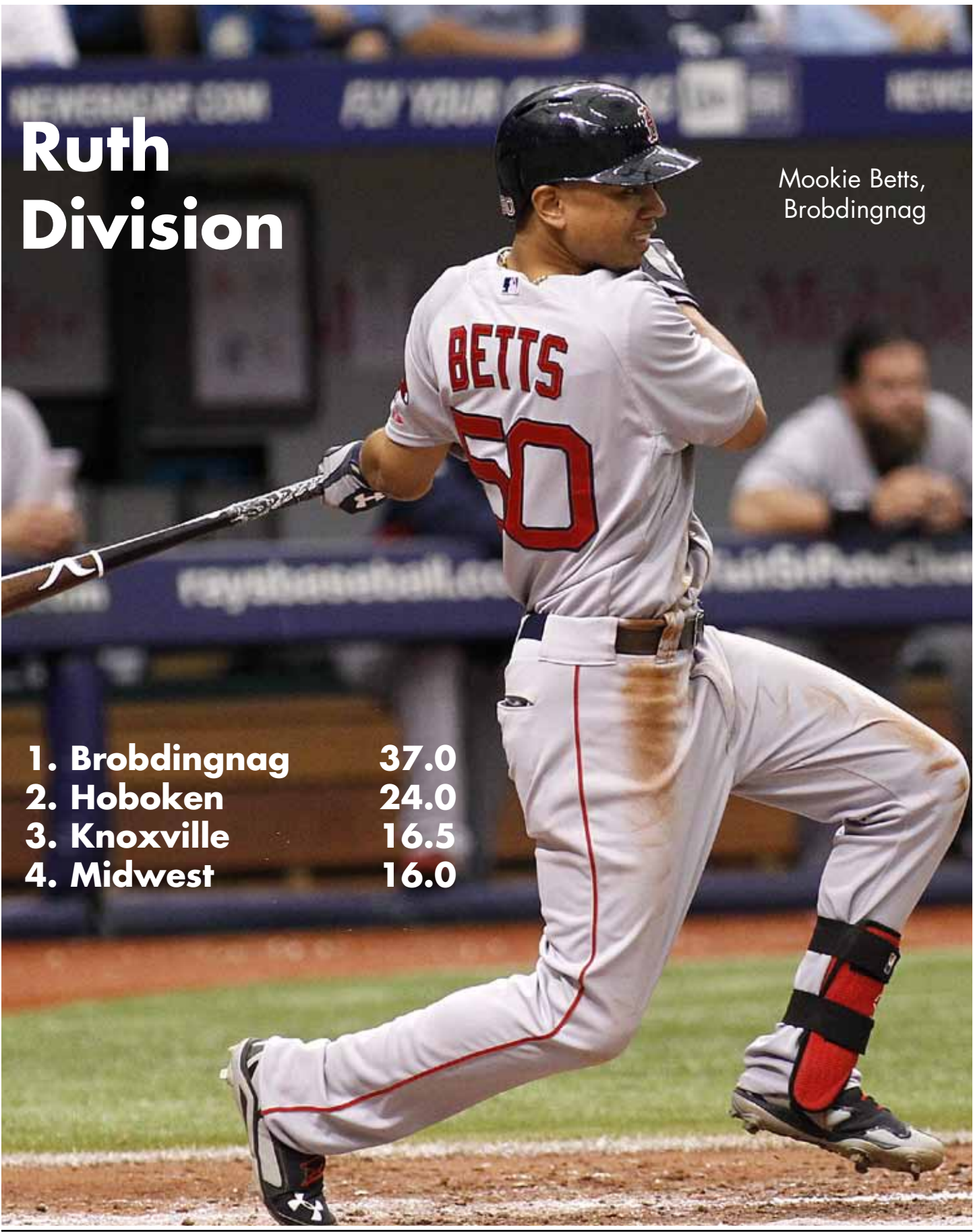
The massive act of realignment has brought the Minnesota boys over from the Williams Division. Of the two clubs, *Pat Martin's Knoxville*

Blue Thunder has the better present day talent; but having said that, it is more an indication of the other club's weakness than his own team's strength. The roster – including some nice new additions from the recent draft – is very talented, but some of the mainstays had deficient seasons. We believe that they'll not be contending this year.

It's going to be another rebuild for the Guru out in **Midwest**, where the **Mongrels** are in full Reboulet mode. Trea Turner notwithstanding, *Darrell Skogen*

will be bunting his way toward the #1 draft pick in 2018. Even if little ball was enough to win some games, the pitching is dreadful, and there's no question that this year will be a slog.





Ruth Division

Mookie Betts,
Brobdingnag

1. Brobdingnag	37.0
2. Hoboken	24.0
3. Knoxville	16.5
4. Midwest	16.0

2016 brobdingnag BARBARIANS in review



Not a year of great rejoicing.

by Joe Auletta

2016 in Review Final Record: 84-78 (1st, Ruth)

It was a year of hanging a Division pennant, but not a year of great rejoicing. Yes, the Barbarians attained their fourth consecutive Ruth banner, but the 84-78 record was better only in comparison to the 73-89 record the year before.

The season came to a definitive end when they lost in the playoffs 4 games to 1 to the Whitman River Rats. But beneath the mediocre record, the talent base for 2017 and beyond gained experience.

What went right?

Youth was served in family sized portions. Dee Gordon (28) hit .310, scored 91 runs, and stole 43 bases. Manny Machado (23) played every game, hit 29 homers and had 99 RBI. Mookie Betts (23) became the everyday left fielder. Rookie Carlos Correa (21) hit 25 HR in under 100 games. And Mike Trout (24) continued to make the case as the best player in the game with an OPS of .914.

On the mound Jose Fernandez (11-11, 2.22), Steven Strasburg (15-4, 2.47), and Aaron Sanchez (7-2, 6 saves, 2.89) became a core trio to build around.

What went wrong?

There was simply not enough depth behind the young stars. Joe Mauer saw his OPS drop to the

second worst of his career. Chris Davis showed power but little else (.224 average, .311 OBP). Almost half the games were started by the trio of Pineda, Tillman, and Urena who went 16-34 with a composite ERA of 6.22.

When faced with a deeper, more complete team in Whitman, the Barbarians had no answer.



Trout: Best in the game

3 Things

1. *Did the team veer off the rebuild too soon?* After three seasons of youth, youth, and more youth Vlad took a major reversal of direction and added “experience” in David Ortiz (42), Seung-hwan Oh (35), and Wil Harris (32) with 1st and 2nd round picks. And two of the five starting pitchers are dead. Clearly the future is now, but did they overreach, and how far will the fall be?

2. *Can they get past the competition in the IC?* The Barbarians loaded up, but so did the favorites in the other two divisions—Calusa (Clemente) and New West (Mays). All three got off to fast starts in 2017, and it looks to be a difficult race in the regular season and the playoffs.

3. *This is Brobdingnag*, so the eternal question persists: *What About Second Base?* After a stellar year of Dee Gordon, up popped a half-season drug suspension. That leaves star-rookie-turned-journeyman Steven Drew, rookie Jorge Polanco, and *good-glove-what’s-a-bat?* Ryan Goins to hopefully keep the position from being a terminal

brobdingnag BARBARIANS

Joe Auletta (29th year)

It's clobberin' time!



Last year, this fearless prognosticator looked at the brutally obvious fact that Joe's frozen minions were both young and good, and predicted they would soon morph into a juggernaut. Well... the juggernaut is in, and it's party time in Albuquerque.

The one proviso is that Joe's savvy drafting and trading has been something of a victim of outrageous fortune. His pitching features two pitchers whose next public appearances may be as extras on "The Walking Dead" – Jose Fernandez and Yordano Ventura. His hitting attack features the comfortably retired David Ortiz and catcher Sandy Leon, this year's Landrum Effect poster boy.

This club is terrific, and they will continue to contend for quite a while. But this year's team is targeted at TBL title number 6 – right here, right now. Nothing less will do. There will be some settling of contents down the road. But first, it's clobberin' time!

Pitching: **14.0**
Starts solid; bullpen deep.

ROTATION. The starting rotation features three guys who steal 8s without help. The ace for this year is Jose Fernandez (Grade 14 C+15 HR+32, 29 starts), whose tragic death this winter sent shock waves through all of baseball. Twenty-four-year-olds with a heroic backstory and an unlimited future are not supposed to die in accidents like this.

Fernandez' last season is augmented by Aaron Sanchez (Grade 14 C-13 HR+33, 30 starts) and Stephen Strasburg (Grade 13 HR+15, 24 starts) – two guys that would look good in any starting rotation. The



Sanchez: Looks good

top 3 have 83 starts of Grade 13 and above. Joe's patience with Chris Tillman (Grade 12 C-24, 30 starts) finally paid off, as he checks in with a nice full season of starts.

The last 49 starts are less impressive. Yordano Ventura (Grade 8 C-26, 32 starts), who died in a Jeep crash over the winter, has one more full season here to build memories. The enigmatic Michael Pineda (Grade 7, 32 starts) takes the rest. The top of this rotation has a championship look. Opponents that think that the back part of the rotation leaves Brobdingnag a little vulnerable should keep reading...

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Nick Ahmed, Christian Bethancourt, Ryan Buchter, Alex Claudio, Stephen Drew, Ryan Goins, Will Harris, Sandy Leon, Seung-Hwan Oh, David Ortiz, Jorge Polanco, Yordano Ventura.

Departed: Dustin Ackley, J. P. Arencibia, Byron Buxton, Arquimedes Caminero, Wei-Yin Chen, Derek Holland, Aaron Loup, Joe Mauer, Dione Navarro, Ruben Tejada, Pat Venditte, Brett Wallace.

SNT: Seung-Hwan Oh.



The Final Boss was sitting there for Joe in the second round of the 2017 TBL draft.

At 35 years of age, he is the oldest SNT in league history, but he fits perfectly into the Barbarians' 'win now' philosophy for this year.



brobdingnag BARBARIANS

BULLPEN. This is the part of the team that will make Brobdingnag tough to beat in the playoffs. Hammer Time starts with Cam Bedrosian (Grade 22*, HR+55, 40 IP), son of a former Cy Young award winner. Ryan Buchter (Grade 22* C-46 HR+34, 63 innings) and Craig Kimbrel (Grade 21* C-62 HR+34, 53 IP) will be regulars when the games are close and late.

The kicker is that none of those guys is the closer. Seung-Hwan Oh (Grade 18* C+32 HR+34, 80 IP) is the guy who will get most of the saves this year, although his role and the roles of the other relievers will be game dependent. No matter – the top 4 in the pen have 236 innings of soul-withering Grade 18*+ relief.

There are two nice middle relievers to bail out the weaker starters. Roberto Osuna (Grade 15* C+41, 74 IP) and Will Harris (Grade 15* C+24 HR+45, 64 IP) add another

138 innings when rolling 8s won't help you. Alex Claudio (Grade 10* C+32 HR+52, 52 IP) is an awfully nice spare part, but will barely make it off the bench all year. Daniel Norris (Grade 9, 69 IP) and John Broxton (Grade 10*, 61 IP) will mop up when the games get silly. The depth of this bullpen means that Joe is ready for a deep playoff run. With 570 innings to burn, there is no reason not to be aggressive.

Offense:

14.0

Power goes 8 deep.

Joe casually mentions that 250+ homers is expected from this group. When guys are throwing out numbers like that in their emergency instructions, you know there's a stacked lineup.



Ortiz: Find a slot

It starts with three of the best cards in TBL. David Ortiz (11 hits, 4 walks, 1-1-6-6-6) has a 2 speed number, 3 24s on his card and cannot hit and run, but Joe will find a lineup slot for him anyway. Mike Trout (10 hits, 6 walks, 1-0-0-0, 31 SSN for 36 attempts) won the American League MVP award again last year. Mookie Betts (12 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0, 33 SSN for 30 attempts) finished second to Trout in the MVP voting. Third baseman Manny Machado (11 hits, 2 walks, 1-5-5-6) finished fifth.

The second half of the order includes CF Jackie Bradley, Jr. (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, R+2), 1B



Trout: MVP

Hanley Ramirez (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0), and SS Carlos Correa (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-6-6, 31 SSN for 16 attempts). Ramirez is the first baseman over Chris Davis (8 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-5, R+1) who, hilariously, gets shuffled into the pile most afternoons because of his glove.

There are two positions where Brobdingnag employs platoons. Steven Drew (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-5-5-6, R+1) and Jorge Polanco (10 hits, 2 walks, 4-5-6) share the second base duties. Cameron Rupp (9 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0, L+10, R-4) and Sandy Leon (11 hits, 3 walks, 4 0s, L+9) will try to keep Christian Bethancourt (8 hits, 2 walks, 1-6-0) on the bench all season.

The power in this lineup goes 7 or 8 deep every day, and the core cards match up with any group in TBL. The TQ ratings have them as the best offense in the league.



The 2017 edition of the Barbarians should bring a smile to Vlad's lips (if that's even possible). 113 starts of Grade 12 and above. Over 150 relief innings of Grade 21 or more and 230 of Grade 18* and above! There is an All Star at almost every position. Should have the best record in TBL in 2017 and are the favorite to win it all.*

Defense: Lots of replacements.

6.0

There's the defense they start with, and the defense they end with. Joe makes heavy use of defensive replacements in his instructions, largely replacing weaker gloves in the starting lineup with Fielding One guys off the bench. Case in point: Carlos Correa (SS8) gets replaced by Nick Ahmed when the score is close. Cameron Rupp (C7, Th-1) sits down for Sandy Leon (C8, Th+5). Hanley Ramirez (an undeserved 1B2 – he was better than this for the Red Sox) gets the hook for Chris Davis (1B5).



Leon: Fielding One

Some guys don't need any help. Mike Trout (OF3, 33 arm), Mookie Betts (OF3, 32 arm) and Jackie Bradley, Jr. (OF3, 33 arm) are outstanding outfielders. Manny Machado (3B5) is as good as anyone at the hot corner. Both second basemen are 2B7s, but Ryan Goins (2B8) is around in case Joe gets bored with having good hitters everywhere.

Where there are problems, Joe has answers on the bench. This is a very good defensive team.

Bench: Roles for everyone.

3.0

The primary pinch hitter is Chris Davis (8 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-5, R+1) who will be used to hit for Cameron Rupp every day. The rest of the bench



Davis: Primary PH

is primarily glove men like Ahmed, Goins, and Sandy Leon, who despite his card never pinch hits. Dee Gordon can pinch run when that service is required. A good group, and they all have roles.

1st

This race will be over by Mother's Day. Brobdingnag's challenges will come from outside the division – New Westminster will give them trouble in the playoffs. But no one in the Ruth can stay with them over the course of the season.



brobdingnag:
Realignment

New Westminster moved out of the Ruth Division just as they were emerging as a threat to win the TBL World Series. Brobdingnag should coast along for a few years at the top of the Ruth with Mr. Jeatt off terrorizing the Mays Division. The team that moved in? The Midwest Mongrels – perhaps the worst team in TBL. Win.



Ventura, Fernandez: Walking Dead

TQ: **37.0**



brobdingnag BARBARIANS



2016 hoboken ZEPHYRS in review



Another step in the slow and sometimes tedious process of rebuilding.

by Steve Powell

2016 in Review Final Record: 76-86 (2nd, Ruth)

Hoboken experienced a nice upturn in its development with a 22 game improvement from the previous year. Flirting with .500 and respectability all year, we finished at 76-86 (as opposed to 54-108 in 2015). We look at it as another step in the slow and sometimes tedious process of rebuilding.

What went right?

It's a complete mystery how a Jon Niese, a gift from Munich, became our best starter winning 13 of 29 starts to lead the staff with an ERA under 4. Rookie Chris Heston justified his high draft status with 10 wins and a team leading 3.43 ERA. Overall, the pitching staff kept us in most games and held up well with a team ERA in the low 4's, all without the benefit of a true closer.

What went wrong?

Inconsistent offense. While rookies Francisco Lindor and Steven Piscotty lived up to the hype, and the resurgent Mark Teixeira homered 32 times, scoring against sometimes average pitching seemed to elude us. The age-old problem of finding offensive players able to consistently get on base and keep scoring opportunities alive really showed up as the team OBP was only 50 points higher than team batting average. Too many out-makers with names like Starlin Castro

and Freddie Galvis filled out the lineup. Absent was also the one thing that made the contending Dallas teams a force was speed on the bases. Hoboken stole only 53 bases all year with .225 hitting Jake Marisnick leading all batters with only 22.

3 Things



Teixeira: Resurgent

1. Improve the infield defense. Hoboken committed 108 errors in 2016 and if it's one thing a young pitching staff needs is solid defense behind them. Having an infield that includes Lindor, Galvis, and Javier Baez is a start. James McCann and his Th+6 can't hurt either.

2. For heaven's sake, get a closer.
Aside from tight defense, a starter's best friend is a strong, or in our case, an adequate bullpen. We go nowhere with middle graded relievers acting as closers.

3. Improve the power on offense. There's no defending the longball. While you have to respect the all-around gap hitter, the guy with 20 homers and 30+ doubles, and we sport a few of those, the true slugger can turn a game, a series, or even a season.

hoboken ZEPHYRS

Steve Powell (28th year)

It's always good dealing with one behemoth at a time.



With some rebuilding teams, you can see it coming together. This is one of them. Steve Powell has been collecting nice pieces of the puzzle since 2014, when he broke it all down and started over. That year, they won 48 games. Steve grabbed Nick Castellanos and Javier Baez in the first round of the 2015 draft and they've been clawing their way back to respectability ever since. Last year, they won 76. This year, they are looking up at Broodingnag, which may be the league's best team.

Pitching: **4.0**
Will compete when ahead late.

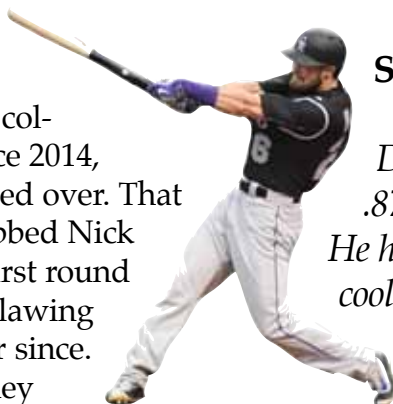
ROTATION. This part of the team is lagging the rest of the operation. And Steve knows it, which is why he drafted the promising Kenta Maeda (Grade 12 C+22, 32 starts, 22 Fatigue) in the second round of the TBL draft. Matt Moore (Grade 10 C-15, 33 starts) has a full season of starts and a reasonable fatigue, unlike Maeda. Luis Cessa (Grade 10 C+31 HR-41, 9 starts) will pitch on days when gale force winds are blowing straight



Maeda: Promising

out. Carlos Rodon (Grade 8, 28 starts) is a lefty, so he'll get clubbed. Hoboken goes into 2017 with 102 starts of Grade 8 or better.

Things get a little too interesting after that. Archie Bradley (Grade 5 C-25 HR+15, 26 starts), Josh Tomlin



SNT: David Dahl.

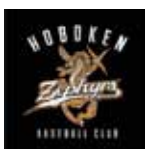
David Dahl was a .310 hitter with an .870 OPS in his minor league career. He has size, youth (23 years old) and the cool, thin air of the Colorado Rockies working in his favor. He got off to a bit of a tough start this season, spending April on the disabled list with a fractured rib. When he's right, he should deliver cards that Steve can shuffle into the middle of his lineups for years.

As an added extra, Steve will spend the season rooting for Aaron Judge, a 26 year old monster-in-training who won a job with the Yankees out of spring training. Judge has plus plus power – he has 5 homers in his first 47 at bats this year. He could be the most important hitter on the team this time next year.

Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Keith Hessler; Kyle Crockett; Ryan O'rourke; Jose A. Ramirez; Steven Moya; Luis Cessa; Aaron Judge; Brian Flynn; Andrew Toles; Kenta Maeda; Josh Bell; David Dahl; Albert Almora

Departed: Oswaldo Arcia; Christian Colon; Brandon Cunniff; Steve Geltz; Keith Hessler; Chris Heston; Bryan Morris; Jonathon Niese; Cesar Ramos; Jason Rogers; Travis Snider; Mark Teixeira; Giovanny Urshela



hoboken ZEPHYRS

(Grade 6 C+46 HR-32, 29 starts) and the enigmatic Wily Peralta (Grade 4 HR-14, 23 starts) eat up the last 60 starts. It won't be pretty.

BULLPEN. There is a closer. And someone to set him up. Brian Flynn (Grade 18* C-36 HR+25, 55 IP) gets to pitch when the pressure is on, but is lefthanded. David Phelps (Grade 17* C-23 HR+33, 87 IP) is righthanded, and has enough innings to set himself up. Jockeying for seventh inning work are Ryan O'Rourke (Grade 14* C-33 HR+13, 25 IP), Jeremy Jeffress (Grade 13* C+21 HR+52, 58 innings), and Jose Ramirez (Grade 13* C-33 HR+36, 33 IP). These guys add 116 innings. The Zephyrs have 258 innings of grade 13* and above – a nice total for a team still in rebuild.

Dennis Tepera (Grade 12* C+15 HR+45, 18 IP) is terrific until you notice how short of innings he is. Vidal Nuno (Grade 8* C+41 HR-24, 59 IP) will work all year as a middle man. Jose Alvarez (Grade 6* C+33 HR+36, 57 IP) and Kyle Crockett (Grade 6* HR+62, 16 IP) will mop up when things get gruesome.

Hoboken will compete when they are ahead late. Get them early, or you don't get them at all. But the shallow pool of relief innings coupled with the modest starter fatigues could spell trouble late in the season.

Offense: **8.0**
An emerging offense.

Nick Castellanos (11 hits, 2 walks, 1-4-5-6, 110 games) and David Dahl (11 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0, 63 games) are really terrific young hitters, and they will play regularly against right-handed starters. They are also symptomatic of a team that is not quite ready for Prime Time. Both of these guys play partial seasons, as do Andrew Toles (11 hits, 2 walks, 5 0s, 48 games) and



Castellanos: Terrific

Josh Reddick (10 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, R+4, 115 games). All these guys start in the regular line-ups except Toles, who is up early and late, and gets the summer off.

Some guys play all year. Stephen Piscotty (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-6-6) bats fifth, and the outstand-

ing Francisco Lindor (11 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, 31 SSN for 24 attempts) bats second. Matt Joyce (8 hits, 6 walks, 1-5-6) is the leadoff man with all those 14s. Javier Baez (10 hits, 1 walk+42, 1-0-0, 31 SSN for 15 attempts) has emerged as a decent hitter and plays third all season. Starlin Castro (10 hits, 1-0-0-0), who was supposed to be a superstar by now, will play second and bat eighth. James McCann (8 hits, 2 walks, 1-6) is the everyday catcher, but not because of his bat.

This is an emerging offense that is waiting for the big cards to show up. Dahl was a nice addition for a club that could use some pop. And Aaron Judge (7 hits) could be really special. They're coming ...

Defense: **6.5**
Very solid.

We have contended that if you really want to win, your infield needs to be anchored by an SS9. Steve Powell apparently took that advice and ran with it – he has three. Francisco Lindor (SS9) is the guy that actually gets to play, but if he overindulges on dollar beer night, Hoboken can run out Freddy Galvis (SS9) or their regular third baseman Javier Baez (2B8, SS9, 3B5, OF2, 1B4) – who could be the best defensive player in TBL history. James McCann (C8, Th+6) is outstanding behind the plate, and Josh Reddick (OF3, 36 arm) is one of the best outfielders in the entire league.

There are a few other regulars who are solid glove men. David Dahl (OF2, 33 arm) and Matt Joyce (OF2, 33 arm)



Lindor: Gets to play

are competent, and they are backed up by Jake Marisnick (OF3, 35 arm), who is outstanding and can play all three OF positions.

Steven Piscotty (1B3) and Starlin Castro (2B7) and very average defenders, but are the only real weak spots. This is a very solid defensive team.

Bench:

3.5

Gathering the forces.

The bench is smaller than it may appear because some of the starters have limited usage. Andrew Toles (OF2, 31 arm) and Josh Bell (9 hits, 5 walks, 3 0s, 45 games) are very nice hitting options off the bench. Stephen Moya (10 hits, 2 walks, 1-4-5-5) will be brought on to scare the daylights out of some reliever late. If McCann gets pinch-hit for in a close game, Travis d'Arnaud (C8, Th-3) is a competent backup catcher.

This is a very good bench for a team gathering the forces.

2nd

They will finish well behind Brobdingnag, but that should still be good enough for second place in this division. The real question is whether they can improve on last year's total of 76 wins. We think so; but with so much young talent, they are probably a year away from a deep playoff run.



hoboken: Realignment



It's always good dealing with one behemoth at a time. In this case it'll be Brobdingnag, as New Westminster, a real serious contender this year, has moved to the Mays Division. The Detroit Stars have also left the building, relocated to the Mantle.

In their place are Knoxville and Midwest, departed from the Williams. That old-style Minnesota rebuilding will be the order of the day. Knoxville has a few assets, but Midwest will need all the flea and tick spray they can get, as they may be the worst team in TBL.

All of this makes Hoboken – the behemoth notwithstanding – positioned better than it had been before the shuffle. There's no question who wins the division; but if the club can win enough to make the playoffs, it'll be interesting to see how far they go. As for 2018 and beyond – there is every reason to believe their young core players will take them very far.



Dr. Steve, then owner of the Dallas Eagles, finished the 2014 season at 48-114, one of the worst records in Eagles history. That off-season the franchise relocated to Hoboken, and every year since their record has improved. 54 wins in 2015 and 76 last year. 2017 is the year they break .500! Yeah!

TQ: 24.0



hoboken ZEPHYRS

2016 Knoxville OUTLAWS in review



It just didn't happen.

by Robert Jordan

2016 in Review

Final Record: 78-84 (3rd, Williams)

After 105 wins in the 2015 season, Knoxville showed up with a nice lineup and solid pitching for 2016, and were chosen by the *Annual* to win the Williams by a nose over Taylorville and Las Vegas. After sweeping division rival Vegas 4-0 at the beginning of June, they were 26-19, and poised for a great year.

It just didn't happen. By the last week in August, they were 51-50 and starting up at two division rivals that were engaging in a heated pennant race without them. Pat switched gears, making several September trades that bolstered his 2017 draft, then dealt away Brian Dozier to Grand Cayman for two #1s and other goodies on draft day. They coasted home with 78 wins, and a trainload of 2018 draft picks.

What went right?

Justin Turner had a terrific year, with a .312/.387/.490 slash line in 119 games. Andrew McCutcheon established his superstar credentials as well (.291/.383/.475 with 68 extra base hits and 107 walks). Michael Brantley had 47 doubles, went 18 for 19 stealing, and scored 86 runs.

On the pitching side, the Knoxville bullpen was spectacular. Zach Britton and Hector Rondon combined for 29 saves, allowing only 57 hits in 97 innings. Jason Hammell threw 5 shutouts in 31 starts.

Another thing that did go well was Pat's mid-season trading binge. Knoxville has a gigantic 2018 draft coming, and is already on its way to putting a very young team on the field.

What went wrong?

Knoxville did not overall have a good year with the bats. They scored 708 runs and hit only 147 homers. They finished 11th in the league in runs, 11th in hits, and 13th in slugging – a picture of mediocrity. On the pitching side, this was the Year of the Pitcher in TBL, so Knoxville's numbers were only relatively weak. They finished 14th in team ERA at 3.98, and ninth in team WHIP (1.23).



Turner: Terrific

But the biggest frustration of the season had to have been the team defense. Knoxville committed 152 errors last year, more than any other team in TBL except Grand Cayman. When you're struggling with a good but not great team, errors at key moments can lead to some long nights at the game table.

3 Things

1. *Pulling the Plug.* Pat watched the team bump along the .500 mark for five months before deciding to cash out in September. By dealing good cards to contenders, he did far better than he might have had he waited for the offseason.

2. *Drafting Jose Peraza.* He's a good young second baseman for Cincinnati who will replace the suddenly departed Brian. Dozier. Pat took Peraza with the 9th pick in the 2017 draft.

3. *Acquiring Byron Buxton.* Pat paid a bundle for him, shipping his 2018 #1 to Brobdingnag for the young speedster. The development of Buxton will be watched closely this year from Pat's seat at Target Field.

knoxville BLUE THUNDER

Pat Martin (31st year)

This could be a shorter than average bounce.



Fortunes rise and fall with blinding speed in TBL. Two years ago, Pat Martin rode a juggernaut to 105 wins and a Williams Division title. Last year, they showed up at the draft loaded once again and were picked by the *Annual* to win the Williams for the second straight year. They got out of the gate well, but were floundering for most of the summer, and Manager Pat Martin decided to accelerate the inevitable rebuild by selling off some shiny objects in the September trading period.

In 2017, they are rebuilding again, but the 2018 draft is stacked and the late season arrivals are young and have talent. The switch to the Ruth Division brings some challenges – Joe Auletta is currently managing one of the best and youngest teams in TBL. The path to the top of the Ruth goes through the frozen wastes of Brobdingnag, but Pat Martin has seen many such challenges in his three decades with us. We will watch as he gathers the forces.

Pitching:
Meh to flammable.

3.0



Cole: Young, steaming Meh.

ROTATION. One dead giveaway that no play-off tickets are being printed is that there is not a single double-digit grade among the starting pitchers. The 'Ace' of the staff is Tyler Skaggs (Grade 9 C-41 HR+24, 10 starts) who only pitches two months. Mike Foltyniewicz (Grade 8 C+21, 22 starts) hangs around a little longer, and may be the better pitcher. These two guys give the

Blue Thunder 32 starts of guys who steal hits without help.

Then comes 101 starts of steaming Meh. Gerrit Cole (Grade 6 C+14 HR+41, 21 starts) is a good young starter who will deliver better grades in future years. Tyler Duffy (Grade 7 C+31 HR-22, 26 starts) will be steady and unspectacular. Michael Fiers (Grade 6 C+22, 30 starts) came over in one of those September trades. Patrick Corbin (Grade 5, 24 starts, nice hitting card) would make a good pinch hitter, but rules prevent it.

Turnover Rate: 60%

Arrived: Jett Bandy; Justin Bour; Peter Bourjos; Byron Buxton; Andrew Chafin; J.T. Chargois; Gerrit Cole; Kyle Gibson; Chris Gimenez; Justin Grimm; Robbie Grossman; Tommy Joseph; Jeff Mathis; Shelby Miller; Jose Peraza; Dalton Pompey; Ryan Pressly; Sean Rodriguez; Tyler Skaggs; Neil Walker; Blake Wood.

Departed: Brandon Barnes; Michael Brantley; Andrew Cashner; Michael Cuddyer; Brian Dozier; Danny Duffy; Jason Hammel; Luke Hochevar; Adam Lind; Jordan Lyles; Yadier Molina; Jose Reyes; David Ross; C. C. Sabathia; Bryan Shaw; Denard Span; Alex Torres; Jonathan Villar; Tsuyoshi Wada.

SNT: Jose Peraza.



Jose Peraza had one of the best cards in the draft pool this year, and he just turned 23. His lack of power hides how useful a piece of the offense he can be, and he can run.



knoxville BLUE THUNDER

The last 29 starts will be learning opportunities for Kyle Gibson (Grade 4, 25 starts) and last year's ace Shelby Miller (Grade 1, 20 starts). This unit is the weather vane. When Pat is ready to contend, the grades here will be much higher.

BULLPEN. Shawn Kelley (Grade 16* C+35 HR-23, 58 IP) will serve as the closer this year. He has a decent grade and good control, but the wind is blowing out on this guy. This fireman is flammable.

Kelley has a bunch of 11s to set him up. Justin Grimm (Grade 11* C-22 HR+24, 53 IP), Blake Wood (Grade 11* C-41, 77 IP) and Zach McCallister (Grade 11* C-24 HR+21, 52 IP) will be up and throwing in the bullpen for most of the year. Michael Dunn (Grade 10* C+21, 42 IP) and Ryan Pressley (Grade 9* C+15 HR+22, 75 IP) are usable guys with large amounts innings. Add it all up, and Knoxville has 357 innings of grade 9 and above.

After that crew, the overworked mops are J.T. Chargois (Grade 5* C-55 C+62, 23 IP), Andrew Chafin (3* HR+45, 23 IP) and Jeanmar Gomez (Grade 4* C+15 HR+25, 69 IP). They will pitch more than one would hope.

Offense:

7.5

Good days and bad days.



Bour: Middle of order

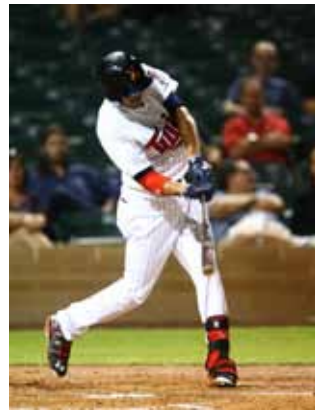
There are still elements of the Knoxville hitting attack of 2015 here, although the lights are a little dimmer with this version of the team.

Conspicuous by his absence in the instructions is rookie prize Jose Peraza (12 hits, 1 walk +

42, 3 11s, 2 0s, B25 for 31 attempts). Apparently, the kid will be playing his 72 games at home.

Justin Bour (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-5-5) and Justin Turner (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0) bat in the middle of the lineup against righties. The middle

infielder for the road managers is Neil Walker (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-7-7) at second and Jordy Mercer (9 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, L+5) at shortstop. The leadoff hitter and DH is Luis Valbuena (9 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-6, 90 games). Sean Rodriguez (10 hits, 3 walks, 2 31s, 1-0-0-0) and Andrew McCutchen (9



Buxton: Double down

hits, 3 walks, 1-5-6) are stars and play the outfield every day. Peter Bourjos (9 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s) plays centerfield and scares no one with the stick. Double down on that when Byron Buxton (8 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, 20 speed number, 32 SSN for 11 attempts) gets the call.

The catching was a bit of a hole, so Pat drafted Jett Bandy (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks + 42, no shift, 70 games) so he would not have to look at the likes of Derek Norris (1-6, 7 hits, 3 walks) or Jeff Mathis (2 0s, 9 hits, 41 games) every day.

Against lefties, Knoxville can run out a few scary hitters. Tommy Joseph (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, L+4) will make some southpaws pay for their lack of vision. Steve Pearce (1-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks, 2 31s, 85 games, L+5) might have the best card on the team other than Peraza. He bats second and DHs against lefties. Robbie Grossman (1-6-6, 10 hits, 5 walks, R-5, L+5, 99 games) also appears only when a lefty is starting, although he may sneak into some games against righties with this nice card.

They will have their good days and their bad days. All but the best lefthanders will struggle when Pat loads up, but the right-handed lineup is pretty tame.

Defense: Relentlessly average.

3.5

Knoxville is relentlessly average defensively, except in the outfield. Byron Buxton (OF3 35 arm) and Peter Bourjos (OF3, 33 arm) roam out there, and catch everything in sight. Andrew McCutchen (OF2, 33 arm) is solid out there too.

In the infield, Jordy Mercer (SS8) and Neil Walker (2B7) will make the plays. Jose Peraza (SS8, 2B7) can replace either one of them without a down-grade. Justin Turner (3B4) plays all year at third, leaving both Sean Rodriguez (1B4, OF2 with 32 arm, 2B7, 3B4) and Luis Valbuena (3B4) to fight for playing time elsewhere. Tommy Joseph (1B3) and Justin Bour (1B3) are at first to get their bats in the lineup. Behind the plate, Jeff Mathis (C8 Th+1) and Jeff Bandy (C7 Th+4) are pretty darn good. Chris Gimenez (C7 Th-3) and Derek Norris (C7, Th-4) will play if they have to.

There's nothing much here to admire, but they aren't awful anywhere either. They'll make the plays most days and finish in the middle of the pack.

Bench: Nice for a rebuild.

2.5

There is an entire lefthanded lineup ready to pounce on a southpaw in the late innings, so this is not a team to try and play matchups against. Byron Buxton will make an outstanding pinch runner on days that he's not starting. Bour and Joseph provide be a power-hitting pinch hit option. Sean Rodriguez plays 7 positions, so anyone can be replaced as long as Sean is around to slide over defensively. This is a nice bench for a rebuild.

3rd

The TQs have them falling short of Hoboken, but clearly better than Midwest. The 'race' between Midwest and Knoxville may come down to who sheds what pieces in September. Shawn Kelley – a 33 year old Grade 16* – is obviously on roller skates and could leave town

quickly. Pat executed the build-down very efficiently last year. This could be a shorter than average bounce, but they really need the kids – like Buxton and Peraza - to develop into everyday stars.



knoxville: Realignment

Like Midwest, Knoxville is moving to the Ruth this year, which means that he has to avert his eyes when playing 19 games a year with the Prince of Darkness.

The Williams, which the Minnesota clubs have departed, is no walk in the park, though, with Rich Meyer and Grand Cayman and Trader Jack counting hit numbers on their pitching cards.

Assuming we don't go through another major shakeup in teams and divisions next year, Knoxville will again be in the Ruth; if the rebuild goes well, they may well be jostling with the Brobdingnag juggernaut and the other rising young team – Hoboken – for chances at post-season play. For the moment, we'd call Knoxville's relocation here a draw.



Pat Martin is another in a long line of veteran TBL managers beginning an arduous rebuild. Many long time vets were shipped out and young talent took their places. Score cards will sell well in the Thunder Dome in 2017! A top five draft choice is all but assured.

TQ: 16.5



knoxville BLUE THUNDER

2016 midwest MONGRELS in review



The Dawgs sunk into the abyss.

by Darrell Skogen

2016 in Review

Final Record: 48-114 (4th, Williams)

Part one of the plan went into effect in 2016. The Dawgs sunk into the abyss after gutting the team, and only won 48 games, their worst showing under the Guru. It's hard to win when you hit .230, have an ERA of 5.46, and give up a staggering 996 runs while only scoring 576. The reward, however, was Trea Turner, the cornerstone in the rebuild of the team.

What went right?

Ryan Madson sparkled with a 1.27 ERA, recording 35 K in 28 innings, turning into Matt Andriese at the trade deadline. Felipe Rivero kicked in a 2.87 ERA with 41 whiffs in 37 innings. Eric Hosmer hit .297 with 33 doubles and 14 homers. Rougned Odor only hit .246, but that included 20 doubles, 10 triples, and 18 homers. Eddie Rosario's .253 featured 27 doubles, 20 triples, and 22 homers.

What went wrong?

Everything. Aaron Harang (6-17, 6.89), Jeremy Hellickson (3-20, 6.51), Phil Hughes (6-14, 5.10) and Alfredo Simon (9-18, 6.10) underwhelmed as starters. Mike Aviles, Trevor Plouffe, Alexei Ramirez, Rene Rivera, and Danny Santana all hit under .200 with at least 175 at bats each. Think about that as you redefine ineptitude.

3 Things

1. *Victor Martinez* will have to return from injury and hit well in the cleanup spot. There is better offense possible on this squad, and he will be counted on to plate the men who get on base in front of him. The load will be shared with Hosmer, who has bulked up and promised to hit more four-baggers this season.

2. *The emphasis is still on getting younger.* This is the second year of the plan. At the draft, we picked up a diamond in Trea Turner, but we also picked up a future closer in Edwin Diaz, two young pitching hopefuls in Braden Shipley and Jose Berrios, and a resurgent Ricky Nolasco to anchor the starting rotation. The boys should do better, although it will still not be pretty.

3. *Team leader David Wright* has been cut free as a player and becomes the manager this season. It will be his duty to find combinations that work to maximize team record. Martinez steps into an assistant GM position while remaining the every day DH, and his goal is to help the Guru continue to scout the big leagues this season to find serviceable players in next spring's draft. The original plan was two years of fixing to get competitive, and now it looks like it will be three instead.

Nevertheless, the bleeding has been stopped and the healing begins this season. The Dawgs are ready to surprise TBL as they begin play in the newly created Ruth Division this season.



Hosmer: What went right

midwest MONGRELS



Darrell Skogen (16th year)

Last with a downward-facing bullet.

Does anyone else find it hard to believe that Mr. Skogen has been with us for 15 years? The years roll by and his easy sense of humor and youthful love of the game make it seem like he just signed on. But the Guru has had a nice long run in this excellent league, including his 2009 TBL title and a second World Series appearance in 2014 that almost racked up a second trophy.

He has been here long enough to have endured the patience-testing indignity of a deep rebuild. In Darrell's first two years in the league, he won 101 games. So last year's 48 win ice bath was not in any way pleasant, but it was territory that Darrell has trod before. This is a guy that knows what he wants – and what he wanted this winter was a five tool, can't miss superstar shortstop names Trea Turner. Turner is now here, and futures are now pointing up in Midwest.

Pitching: 4.0
Dismal.

ROTATION. Mr. Skogen is a great believer in asphyxiating pitching during his championship runs. A casual glance at this staff of misfits will tell you that no parades are planned for Midwest

Turnover Rate: 54%

Arrived: Scott Alexander; Dario Alvarez; Jose Berrios; Ramon Cabrera; Juan Centeno; Jhoulys Chacin; Mike Clevinger; Cheslor Cuthbert; Edwin Diaz; Carlos Estevez; Ryan Garton; Yulieski Gurriel; Tommy Hunter; Tony Kemp; Chad Kuhl; Ricky Nolasco; Braden Shipley; Trea Turner; Kirby Yates.

Departed: Mike Aviles; Brian Duensing; Yimi Garcia; Brandon Gomes; J.R. Graham; Alex Guerrero; Aaron Harang; Jeremy Hellickson; Phil Hughes; Kyle Lohse; Henry Owens; Jimmy Paredes; Glen Perkins; Wandy Rodriguez; Alfredo Simon; Chris Stewart; David Wright.

SNT: Trea Turner.

The Turner selection at #1 in the 2017 TBL draft was announced before Christmas, and no one could possibly question this one. Turner plays a scarcity position (SS) is very young (23) and has an exceptional minor league track record. This one was a no brainer.



The stunner in the Midwest draft was Darrell's second pick – Seattle reliever Edwin Diaz. Diaz is a gifted pitcher – 88 strikeouts in 52 innings tells you what you need to know about his stuff. But taking relievers this early in a rebuild is unconventional. The Guru has surprised us before and has two World Series appearances to his credit. We all get to watch this come together.

this season. Well, the 14 season ticket holders may parade to the bar for some of the hard stuff after watching this bunch. Let's call the roll, and let you, dear reader, pick out the ace of this rotation.

Zack Davies (Grade 8 C+24, 28 starts) kicks it off with most of a season of starts where he steals 9s without help. He does not have the highest grade on the staff, however. That honor belongs to the totally wild Mike Clevinger (Grade 9 C-62, 10 starts). We have one full-season starter - Ricky Nolasco (Grade 7 C+24, 32 starts). Nolasco pitched his first 21 starts for Darrell's beloved Twins. One wonders if the Guru had a special spring in his step when Ricky got traded to the Angels last year.



Davies: Ace, sort of



midwest MONGRELS

There's more Grade 7 starts where that came from. Matt Andriese (Grade 7 C+32, 19 starts) and Chad Kuhl (Grade 7 C+15 HR+21, 14 starts) eat up a full season between them, bringing the total to 103 before the wheels fall off.

Jhoulys Chacin (Grade 5 HR+25, 22 starts) and Braden Shipley (Grade 4 C-21 HR-32, 11 starts) will pay the price for 33 starts before Justin Nicolino (Grade 3 C+25 HR+21, 13 starts) goes out to get pounded. Nicolino is innocuous for 25 starts, which means either Jordan Lyles or Jose Berrios will have to toe the rubber as a Grade 1 for one start. Dismal.

BULLPEN. There are some really nice arms here in the bullpen. The veteran Fernando Rodney (Grade 14* C-54 HR+32, 65 IP) is the closer. He has the exciting Edwin Diaz (Grade



Rodney: Closer

13*, C+21 HR+24, 52 IP) to set him up. Diaz throws smoke despite being as skinny as a super model. Felipe Rivero (Grade 11* C-23 HR+23, 77 IP) pitched a lot and effectively for Pittsburgh. Mike Morin (Grade 9* C+21 HR+16, 56 IP) is also a solid young arm. There's a lot of guys

we like here and they will be respectable for about 250 innings.

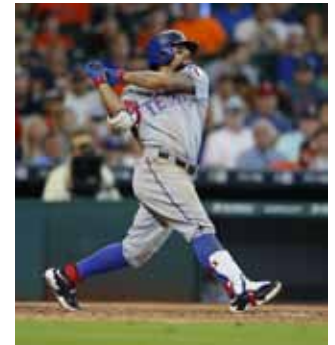
The rest are filler, and Midwest is hoping that one or more of them will morph into a top-shelf grade in future years. Tommy Hunter (Grade 9* C+26 HR+54, 34 IP) and Carlos Estevez (Grade 8* C-32 HR+15, 55 IP) are the best of what's left. Scott Alexander (Grade 6* C-15 HR+45, 19 IP) and Jordan Lyles (Grade 7* C-25 HR+36, 59 IP) will keep it in the park on most nights.

Dario Alvarez (Grade 6* C+33 HR-41, 27 IP, 41K) is an intriguing grab and stash who may have serious upside. Jose Berrios (Grade 1, 58 innings), Ryan Garton (Grade 6* C+25, 39 IP) and Kirby Yates (Grade 7* C-33 HR+15, 41 IP) round out the pen. This group will pitch a lot, and they are one unit whose best cards are definitely in front of them.

Offense: **Starting to come together.**

5.5

The middle infield is beautiful. Trea Turner (12 hits, 2 walks, 1-4-5-6, 3 11s, 32 SSN for 33 attempts) and Rougned Odor (10 hits, 1 walk, 1-5-5-6) are very young and really good. Turner has 73 games to show off, all of them at home where Darrell can keep an eye on him.



Odor: Young and good

Odor plays second base all year. Eric Hosmer (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0) is off his highs of recent years, but is coming into his age 27 season. He plays first every day. Victor Martinez (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-5-6-7-7) is the everyday DH, and can still swing the stick.

Cheslor Cuthbert (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s) plays third and bats fifth in many lineups. Aaron Hicks (8 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, 17 speed number) will use his speed to lead off this year. Eddie Rosario (10 hits, 1-4-6) bats sixth and plays left much of the year. Alexei Ramirez (9 hits, 1 walk, 3 0s) has certainly had better cards, but still suits up every day. Andrew Romine (9 hits, 2 walks + 42, 2 0s) is the 'road shortstop'. The catchers are Juan Centeno (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, 55 games) and Ramon Cabrera (9 hits, 1 walk, 3 0s) against righties and Rene Rivera (8 hits, 2 walks, 1-0) against lefties.

With Turner eating only home cooked meals this year, the lineup thins out quickly. But this is one area where the rebuild is starting to look successful.

Defense:

3.0

Oh, do we need some?

Defense is always an afterthought when you are in a deep rebuild. There are a few outstanding defensive players here, however. Since Trea Turner (OF2 33 arm, OF2, 2B8) can do everything else, it follows that he will be solid with the glove at second for his 73 games. Sadly, he'll probably be playing shortstop most of the time with Rougned Odor (2B7) playing second all year. Eric Hosmer (1B5) is one of the best at his position right now, and Aaron Hicks (OF3, 37 arm) is terrific in the outfield.



Hosmer: One of the best

The rest of the defenders are about average, except behind the plate. Ramon Cabrera and Juan Centeno (C6, Th-4) and Rene Rivera (C7, Th-0) are the catchers – and that's a bit unsightly. Cheslor Cuthbert (3B3) is the nominal starter at third, but Trevor Plouffe (3B4) is a solid backup. Andrew Romine (SS8, 3B4, 2B7, OF2, 1B3) plays shortstop on the road. Eddie Rosario (OF2, 34 arm) is a good solid gloveman, but Alexei Ramirez (SS7, 2B6, OF1 35 arm) is hoping no one hits the ball his way.

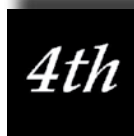
Bench:

2.0

In this town, it's made of wood.

There are few bench options. Tony Kemp (8 hits, 4 walks, 3 0s, 17 speed) and Trevor Plouffe (10 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0) are usable pieces, and Plouffe is defensive upgrade over Cuthbert. There's not much else. Danny Santana (9 hits, 2 walks, 0-6) is notable only for having a 9 on 44 – you don't see that a lot.

This is the bench you would expect from a



team at this point on the rebuilding spectrum.

Last with a downward-facing bullet. Midwest

is just getting started on

a trip back up the ladder that should take several years. Darrell joined the league in 2003, and it took him six years to win his first title. This time, he's in the same division as the ever-imposing Brobdingnag Barbarians, so he will be staring at Joe's machinations



midwest:
TBL Draft

with intensity. Let's see how this progresses.

Darrell's Dawgs are being bred with extra fur after their move to the Ruth. The Division Title journey goes through the frozen wastes of Brobdingnag for the next few years, and that is a serious challenge for anyone as long as Joe Auletta is active in this league.

But the division Darrell left – the Williams – now boasts one of the League's best teams (Grand Cayman), an 8 time TBL Champion in Rich Meyer, and the extremely savvy Trader Jack Chapman – a TBL title holder himself.

Vegas



The Guru is about to enter the first year of the Trea Turner Era in Midwest. There's less than half a season there, but what a half season! With only 38 starts at Grade 8 and above and nobody in the 'pen above Grade 14, another top five draft pick seems likely.*

Midwest broke about even here.

TQ: 16.0



midwest MONGRELS



2016 TBL world series

by Walter Hunt
(based on accounts
by Paul Montague)



Munich vs. Whitman

The Munich Marauders escaped a very tough playoff with Melrose to reach the World Series. In the regular season, as in the earlier rounds of the post-season, Munich showed its dominance: but in the final round, it would be a whole new ballgame. As for Whitman, the road was somewhat easier: two playoff series ended in five game victories. But Whitman was ready for the final challenge as well.

Game 1 at Munich Kershaw vs. Greinke

The two aces faced off in the first game. Clayton Kershaw had his moments, striking out 12 over his 7.2 innings of work. However, he also made a couple of mistakes, as Ben Zobrist drilled a hanging slider for a solo home run in the second inning to give Munich the lead, and Jose Bautista hit a two-run shot in the sixth. In between, the Marauders added a run on a walk and stolen base by Bautista in the fourth, which Carlos Gomez converted into a run with a double high off the wall. Meanwhile, Zach Greinke struck out only six Riverrats, but scattered three hits and a walk for a complete game shutout.



Greinke

Munich 4, Whitman 0

WP: Greinke

LP: Kershaw

Game 2 at Munich Price vs. Liriano

A battle of southpaws. Whitman ended its scoreless streak right away, as Ben Revere led off with a single in the first, stole second, and scored on a single by Paul Goldschmidt (although Goldschmidt was thrown out to end the inning trying to move up on the throw home). The visitors added a run in the fifth on Carlos Gonzalez's solo homer. Whitman got a couple of insurance runs in the seventh inning. Goldschmidt hit a one-out single to end Francisco

Liriano's outing, and promptly stole second after Darren O'Day entered the game. Gonzalez was walked intentionally, and Joey Butler was removed in favor of Prince Fielder. Andrew Miller came on to pitch to Fielder, and Fielder won the lefty-lefty duel by singling to the right field gap. The runners were moving, and Goldschmidt scored ahead of the throw as Gonzalez eased into third. Jacoby Ellsbury pinch-ran for Fielder and Nick Markakis hit what should have been an inning-ending grounder – but Jose Altuve booted it to allow the second run of the inning to cross the plate. Kolten Wong did hit into a double play, but the damage was done – 4-0 Whitman at the seventh-inning stretch.



Price

But all the managerial wheeling and dealing was actually moot - David Price's motto is "one good shutout deserves another", as he baffled Munich hitters for 6.2 innings of 3-hit ball. Whitman's bullpen worked the last 2.1 innings to complete the shutout (although closer J.J. Hoover did allow a hit and a walk in the ninth to make things interesting).

Whitman 4, Munich 0

WP: Price

LP: Liriano

S: Hoover

Game 3 at Whitman DeGrom vs. Haren

The series moved to Whitman tied at one. Both teams had runners in scoring position in the first inning, but Jacob deGrom and Dan Haren both buckled down to escape the jams.

Munich broke through in the top of the second when Andres Blanco singled and one out later, Stephen Vogt made his first at-bat of the series a good one by socking a ball over the right field fence to make it 2-0 Marauders. Munich added a run in the fourth when Blanco singled again, stole second on a busted hit and run play, moved to third on a ground out, and scored when Haren threw

a pitch to the backstop. Meanwhile, deGrom had been cruising through four innings, striking out 8 hitters.

Whitman staged a comeback in the bottom of the fifth, though. Number nine hitter Wong coaxed a walk to lead it off, and Ben Revere followed with a perfect hit-and-run single through the vacated short-stop position. Wong scored and Revere moved to second on a slow chopper to short. Fielder followed with a hit down the line in right and Revere scored easily to make it a one-run game. deGrom exited, and Javier Lopez got the final two outs, sandwiched around a nerve-inducing walk to Goldschmidt.



Revere

With the game now in the hands of both bullpens, it stayed 3-2 until the ninth inning. In the top half, Jason Heyward drew his third walk of the ballgame, moved to second on a groundout, and scored on a double by Miguel Cabrera. Hector Rondon worked a perfect bottom half of the inning to preserve the lead and give Munich a two games to one lead in the series.

Munich 4, Whitman 2

WP: Lopez LP: Haren S: Rondon

Game 4 at Whitman Garcia vs. Hahn

The pivotal fourth game turned out to be the most exciting so far. It was in the hands of the bullpen early, and by the bottom half of the fifth Munich led by a 3-1 score. But Whitman had other plans, and a series of hits and errors brought home six runs, making the score 7-3.



Altuve

That was only the appetizer: the main course was yet to come. Munich plated a run in the seventh to make the score 7-4; and then in the eighth, Miguel Cabrera and Anthony Rizzo hit back-to-back homers and Jose Bautista followed with a double – but he did not come in to score, leaving Whitman still in the lead 7-6. In the ninth inning Jose Altuve hit a home run of his own, tying the game. It remained tied until the twelfth inning, when the Munich offense caught up with the Whitman bullpen, plating four runs for the victory.

Munich 11, Whitman 7

WP: A. Miller LP: Villanueva

Game 5 at Whitman Greinke vs. Kershaw

The aces matched up with the Series tied. Whitman and Munich both scored early runs, and in the bottom of the fourth inning, Carlos Gonzalez and Goldschmidt started by striking out. But Pierzynski doubled, and this time Munich decided to walk Tulo with first base open. Wong made the strategy backfire, lacing an RBI single through the hole to give Whitman the lead again. Holt followed with a “pea” past Rizzo for a two-run double. Ben Revere flew out to end the inning.

With a 4-1 lead Kershaw cruised through the next few innings, and Greinke remained into the seventh after a Ben Revere double. Kershaw lasted into the eighth inning, but the Whitman bullpen shut Munich down.



Tulowitzki

In the ninth, that pen sought to hold the lead: but two walks and a hit was followed by a bases loaded single by Cabrera; then J. J. Hoover walked in a run, putting Jose Bautista at the plate with one out – but he hit a grounder to Kolten Wong who turned a 2-4-3 double play to end the game and keep Whitman alive.

Whitman 4, Munich 3

WP: Kershaw LP: Greinke S: Hoover

Game 6 at Munich Price vs. Liriano

The two lefties met back in Munich with everything on the line. Things started slowly, but in the third inning Munich opened up a 3-1 lead; in the fourth inning, even though he was still throwing a no-hitter, Francisco Liriano walked Paul Goldschmidt and gave way to the deep Munich bullpen. In the fifth inning Munich’s



Blanco

powerful offense, combined with fielding miscues, opened the game up. The key hit was an Andres Blanco double; that hit probably justified his entire year’s salary.

Whitman wasn’t done yet. In the seventh inning a Pierzynski homer made it 7-2, and the River Rats mounted a rally in the ninth, scoring two runs against the high-grade Munich bullpen – that clearly didn’t impress Goldschmidt and Carlos Gonzalez, who each delivered a double. But it wasn’t enough: Pierzynski’s soft grounder ended the game and the Series, giving Munich the championship.

Munich 7, Whitman 4

WP: Rondon LP: Price

Rolling the Dice

As noted in the lead article, we've had our divisions for so long that the stories pretty much wrote themselves. Each division had its particular character, and while teams went up and down, the races remained very much the same. Now that realignment has taken place, we have to get back to work.



The Aaron is all new, and the likely top contender is a newly arrived club: the highly itinerant **Las Vegas Gamblers**. *Paul Harrington's* team gets around, and this is their first tour in the

Aaron. They've put everything into building this team, and are the class of the division this year. Is it enough to get them past conference rivals? Hard to tell.

The **Strong City Statesmen** have a new home and a new outlook. Most of the old stars from Portland are gone – we really aren't going to talk about that anymore after this year: the roster isn't quite ready for prime time, but *Eric Sheffler* has added lots of young, exciting talent.

This isn't quite a contender – not quite – but should be a challenge to play in 2017.



2016 Aaron Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Maracaibo*	101	61	.623	—
Kansast†	95	67	.586	7
Northboro	82	80	.506	9
Statesmen	63	99	.389	17

* Lost to Munich in NC Conference final.

† Lost to Melrose in the Wild Card playoff.



This wasn't exactly where *Bill Schwartz* expected his **Kansas Koyotes** to be at this time last year. But pitching is fickle, and sometimes it all falls apart at the

same time. There's a reason why most contending teams add pitching last; *Darrell Skogen* won a few years ago by going against this wisdom, but there are always exceptions. Mr. Schwartz seems to have a good eye for talent, though, so maybe this will be a temporary lull.

The final piece to the Aaron puzzle is the **Melrose Avengers**, a perennial contender that turned in a 95-win campaign last year. That won't happen this year, as Mark Freedman has sent a number of his superhero stalwarts packing for other teams. We are always wary at the *Annual* when we see Melrose do a rebuild, since they are masters of the Bounce. Check this space in a year.





Aaron Division

1. Las Vegas	30.0
2. Strong City	24.0
3. Kansas	19.5
4. Melrose	18.0

Josh Donaldson,
Las Vegas

2016 las vegas GAMBLERS in review

A lot of things need to go right.



by Paul Harrington

2016 in Review

Final Record: 99-63 (1st, Williams)

It was clear to me as the MLB 2015 season unfolded that the 2016 edition of the Gamblers would be a good, if not great team. Just enough of the players were having solid campaigns that a playoff spot looked like a sure bet for Las Vegas and this was, indeed, the case. We spent last summer in a great battle with Taylorville (now Riverwoolf) that resulted in the Gamblers finally winning their first (and, maybe, their last) Williams Division crown. A semifinal round matchup with Maracaibo was a great series. We were able to push that talented squad to a game seven where Las Vegas had a late inning lead slip away when our vaunted bullpen gave up the lead. And the 2017 edition may even be better! And realignment adds a new flavor to the mix. Las Vegas should dominate the Aaron Division, at least in 2017.



Donaldson: A beast

What went right?

When your team goes 99-63, a lot of things need to go right. Team MVP Josh Donaldson was a beast, with a slash line of .284 / .354 / .581 with 43 HR and 53 doubles. He drove in 118 runs and scored 113. He also anchored third base all season with only four errors in 158 games. Rookie of the Year candidate Kris Bryant also enjoyed a great 2016 season with 57 XBH that included 25 HR and 29 doubles in 145 games. With Donaldson dominating at 3B, Bryant's versatility is invaluable. He heads into the 2017 season as the Gamblers' new centerfielder! On the pitching side there were several standouts. Former Gambler (now with Knoxville) Kyle Gibson went 15-9, the most wins on the team. Real team Ace Jose Quintana went 14-9, with a

respectable (for a L8) ERA of 4.01. Starter Tommy Milone was surprisingly effective in his 14 starts, going 7-2 with a nifty ERA of 2.73! Reliever Fransisco (K Rod) Rodriguez finally had a dominant season in the closer's role, notching 45 saves, his most ever in a 14 year (and counting) TBL career. He is now in 9th place all time in TBL saves with 175. The bullpen, as a whole, posted the following totals: a 36-18 record with an ERA of 2.45 in over 444 innings.

What went wrong?

Xander Bogaerts, despite having a fine offensive year, managed to make 31 errors as a SS8 in 156 games. Asdrubal Cabrera, mostly starting at 2B as a 2B7, only booted 12 balls in a 143 games! Seven regulars had 110 or more strikeouts, led by Bryant's 188.

3 Things

1. *Let It Ride.* The Gamblers' winning ways should continue in 2017 as there are many good players in their primes, or just entering their primes. And going to a new division with three foes either suffering setbacks or engaging in rebuilds doesn't hurt either.
2. *Enjoy the wealth, but pray for health.* There was no real draft in 2017, except for getting Adam Duvall, to bring in new blood for Las Vegas. And there is even less there for 2018. The Gamblers need their regulars to have healthy 2017 MLB seasons, because there is precious little in the cupboard to replace them for 2018.
3. *Take advantage of divisional weakness.* Melrose, Kansas and Strong City – Las Vegas' new competition in the Aaron Division, are all looking at long 2017 seasons. The Gamblers need to dominate these worthies while they are down. Not sporting I know, but that's how you win, right?

Las Vegas GAMBLERS

Paul Harrington (21st year)

Will they go any further into the playoffs? They'll have to hit homeruns with men on base, and the left-handed pitching will have to live up to expectations.



What more does Mr. Harrington have to do? He outlasted a powerful Taylorville team to take the Williams Division with 99 wins. Yet, it was the lowest total of any division champ in the strong National Conference, and he couldn't get past the Conference semifinals. This success hasn't whetted his appetite. He's hungry for a league championship.

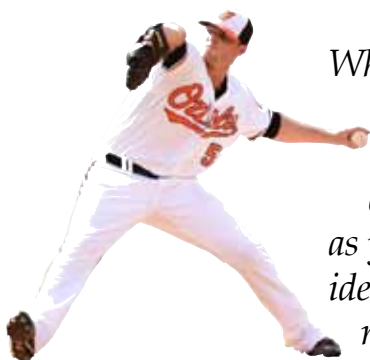
So, this year, he's moved to the Aaron Division and bulked up for another run at the title. This edition of the Gamblers has a pitching staff that leans decidedly to the left and a powerful offense that features those two favorite TBL strategies:

Turnover Rate: 43%

Arrived: Zach Britton; Robinson Cano; Adam Conley; Corey Dickerson; Adam Duvall; Blaine Hardy; Marco Hernandez; Caleb Joseph; Jeurys Familia; Shawn O'Malley; Carlos Ruiz; C. C. Sabathia; Josh Smith; Ross Stripling; Mark Teixeira.

Departed: Anthony Bass; Asdrubal Cabrera; Rusney Castillo; Daniel Castro; Andrew Chafin; Avisail Garcia; Kyle Gibson; Cole Gillespie; Sean Gilmartin; Hisashi Iwakuma; Tom Koehler; Manny Parra; Eury Perez; Hernan Perez; Bo Schultz.

SNT: Zach Britton.



What do you do when you make the playoffs, but don't go as deep as you expect? One idea: trade for the best reliever in the game.

on-base and power. The team will be carried by several key players, including this year's SNT Zach Britton and last year's SNT Kris Bryant.

Pitching: 11.0 This could work out.

Back in 2006, the Greater Ohio Chia Pets made the TBL World Series with a rotation led by three left-handers: Cliff Lee, Barry Zito, and Bruce Chen. The 2017 Gamblers are hoping to repeat that formula. Even their new closer, SNT Britton, is a lefty. It's a bold strategy that bucks TBL tradition, but Mr. Harrington has tried many different approaches without earning a trip to the World Series.

They've got the arms and pitching grades to get them there this year. The team runs the risk of running into an opponent loaded with lefty-killers, but as the Chia Pets discovered, every team has at least one important bat with a significant lefty shift, and those lefty-killing bats are often limited in playing time. This could work out.

ROTATION. The ace of the staff is Jose Quintana (Grade 12 C+22), who enjoyed a career year. He's followed by fellow lefties Adam Conley (Grade 11 C-25 HR+22), and ageless C.C. Sabathia (Grade 10). Lower down in the rotation is lefty Martin Perez (Grade 8 C-22 HR+26). That's an amazing 118 left-handed starts.



Quintana: Ace

The remaining 44 starts belong to R.A. Dickey (Grade 9 C-21), rookie Ross Stripling (Grade 9),



Las Vegas GAMBLERS

and a single start (of his two available) for Tyler Cravy (Grade 16 C-25). The bottom end of the rotation still steals hits, which means there are no real weaknesses. The pitching grade at the top end of the rotation may be smaller than desired, but that's where the bullpen comes in.

BULLPEN. The new closer is, of course, SNT Zach Britton (Grade 28* C+22 HR+62), the best in the set. The deep set-up crew includes another lefty, Brad Hand (Grade 16* C-21 HR+22), along with righties Cravy (Grade 16* C-25), Francisco Rodriguez (Grade 15* HR+21), Koji Uehara (Grade 15* C+24 HR-23), Jeurys Familia (Grade 14* HR+62), and Sam Dyson (Grade 14* HR+34).

That's 432 innings of 8-stealing goodness. In essence, these are the guys opponents will be facing from the sixth inning on when the game's still undecided. Also available are Blaine Hardy (Grade 11* C-33 HR+34), another lefty, and waiver wire acquisition Joshua Smith (Grade 9* C-26 HR-25). They add 77 more innings, which should be plenty, considering no weaknesses in the rotation.

Offense:

11.5

The formula is simple.



Bryant: Monster

The Gamblers' lineup features not one, but two monster cards: last year's SNT Kris Bryant (1-5-5-6, 10 hits, 4 walks+42, L+4 R-3) and Josh Donaldson (1-4-5-5, 10 hits, 5 walks+22, no shift). There is exactly one 24 on both cards. Awesome. The top two table-setters also

have some pop: Robinson Cano (1-0-0-0, 11 hits, 2 walks+22, L-6) and speedster Xander Bogaerts

(1-6-6, 11 hits, 3 walks, 30 SSN for 17 attempts). They all play every day.

The next tier brings more power to the lineup: 2017 first-round pick Adam Duvall (1-4-5-5, 9



Duvall: First Rounder

hits, 2 walks+22, no shift), Travis Shaw (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, L-9), and Corey Dickerson (1-6-6-0, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-9). If the hitters in front of them get on base, they'll bash their

share of homers into the cheap seats. These three also play every day.

That leaves eccentric lead-off man Francisco Cervelli (2 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks+22, 29 SSN for 8 attempts, L+8, R-3). It's an interesting idea, but Cervelli, who's not slow, may be the best choice to lead off, given the rest of the lineup. That leaves part-timers James Loney (3 0s, 10 hits, a walk+22, L-12) and Shawn O'Malley (6-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22, 29 SSN for 8 attempts, no shift).

Two-thirds of this lineup should perform well, especially with all the power, but after the HR threat of Duvall, it may be hit or miss — or should we say swing and miss. This is a team without much speed at all, same as last year, when they accrued twice as many double plays as stolen bases. But the formula is simple: walk, hit, homer.

Defense:

6.0

Solid infield and Adam Duvall.

Donaldson (3B5) anchors a solid infield with 2B8 Cano and 1B5s Loney and Teixeira. Bogaerts (SS8) is just average, as is Shaw (1B3) when he plays first. The outfield has OF3 Duvall along with OF2s Bryant and Dickerson. Only Bryant has an average arm, although Austin Jackson (OF3, 34 arm) can carry Dickerson's glove.



Cano: Solid

Behind the plate, Cervelli (C8, but Th-3), Carlos Ruiz (C7, but Th+6), and Josh Phlegley (C7, Th-4) all get to play. That's alternately good news and bad news. These Gamblers will gamble that the right catcher is in at the right time.

Bench: **1.5**
Not much to see; move along.

Marco Hernandez (5, 11 hits, 3 walks, L-2 R-4) at least offers something different as a PH. Jackson (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, L-11 R+3), as mentioned, can play defense. Ruiz (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks+42, L+2 R-3) and Josh Phegley (5-6-6, 9 hits, 2 walks+42, but 4 24s) will get their at-bats.

Caleb Joseph (C8 Th+2) has a purpose, and the less said about Teixeira's card (1-0-0, 7 hits, 4 walks, L+2 R-3), the better. Not much to see here; move along.

1st While the Statesmen may push them for a little while, the Gamblers may wrap up the pennant race by August. Two monster cards, four more good power cards, and all that pitching is too much for a weakened Aaron Division.

The bigger question is: Will the Gamblers go any further into the playoffs? They'll have to hit homeruns with men on base, and the left-handed pitching will have to live up to expectations. The defense will help; the bench will not.



las vegas:
Realignment



las vegas **GAMBLERS**

Last season, the Gamblers won the Williams Division. This year, the *Annual* is picking them to win the reconfigured Aaron. It's a good landing spot for the team, as this year's Aaron is weaker than last year's Aaron, as well as this year's Williams. So that's a win.

In this issue of our magazine, we're trying to tease out the idea of what realignment means to each of our 24 teams. In some ways the path that has brought Las Vegas to the Aaron is very illustrative of the team's boom and bust mentality and the number of times it has taken a shot at a TBL championship. Their first season was in the Ruth, but they moved to the new Clemente Division in 1998 and remained there five years (two bad years, two good ones including a loss in the IC championship series); they moved to the Mays and stayed there eight years (four good with four playoff appearances, four bad); they returned to the Clemente (one division win, one decent year, one bad year); they moved to the Williams (two bad years and last year's 99 win season that took them deep into the playoffs). And now the Aaron. This is the most recent stop in a long and complex pilgrimage. Is this the right formula? It's hard to say.



In true Vegas fashion, the Gamblers pushed everything into the pot for 2017. It's a good, solid team that should dominate the Aaron. But we have no margin for error. Win now is the Gamblers motto for this year. We'll worry about tomorrow...tomorrow!

TQ: 30.0



2016 STATESMEN in review



Who knows what direction the fickle finger of fate will point.

by Eric Sheffler

2015 in Review

Final Record: 63-99 (4th, Aaron)

Statesmen move west for a new beginning in 2017. The Statesmen packed their caps, bats, and bags and relocated to Strong City, KS, during the off-season. While they found fool's gold during the 2016 campaign in the city of The, the club is looking to pan for a new gold fan base while strip-mining a roster of older stars to help build a solid and young competitive team for the future. A less-than-accustomed 63-99 record proved that the club traded too much talent away which kept the fans away towards the end of the frustrating season. The front office begged for fan patience while the youngsters developed in the minors. Unfortunately, the writing on the wall was clear for everyone who had even a slight interest in the team that owner Sheffler, GM Fisk, and their team had more plans of disassembling the current squad. They had no idea that the club was going to tear apart the city by moving to Kansas.

The 2016 season produced many less-than-desired results. First, a pitching staff who hurled at a 4.90 ERA and 1.478 WHIP made many who watched them throughout the season want to do the same. The staff gave up a slash line of .281 / .342 / .435 to opponent's hitters.

The boys-with-bats only posted a slash line of .242 / .310 / .386. Khrist Davis whacked 20 doubles and 20 home runs but slashed only .202 / .279 / .386. He was far from the only under-achiever in the lot.

There were a few victories. Fire ball throwing reliever, and 2016 2nd round pick, Arodys Vizcaino picked up 30 saves (48% of the club's total wins) while registering a microscopic 0.59 ERA.



Vizcaino: Microscopic

2016 Bonus pick Baby Brandon Finnegan showed promise by tossing 46 innings to an ERA of 2.93. His move to the rotation is a guarantee for 2017. Add to that, Mike Montgomery (now of the Northboro Phoenix) threw the first no-hitter in Statesmen history on the road at the Midwest Mongrels' home park. Thanks Mike, see you later. Infielder Brandon Drury, a 2016 5th round pick, saw very limited action but popped 2 home runs in 20 AB's showing his talent for the future. Billy Hamilton swiped 53 of 59 bases to lead a club that was very proficient in the art of the steal.

After looking at the past season what are those special 'things' moving forward that will help the team create a loyal fan base in Strong City? The team selected Willson Contreras with the 4th pick of the TBL draft. With Turner, Sanchez, and Story all off the board Contreras was the only logical pick for the club.

Add an All-Star 3rd baseman while giving up the All-Star 2B you just acquired in a previous trade? Why not! The Statesmen got Jonathan Villar from the Knoxville club with ideas of creating more runs through speed. Little did owner Sheffler know that Nolan Arenado was on new Riverwolf owner Daniel Dumont's trade-away list. With the trade of multiple draft picks the Statesmen now have Nolan to bat cleanup for them this next campaign.

Patience will be the key again through the 2017 season. With the move to Strong City, it appears the ownership and team have some time to prove that the trades of high-profile, but aging, players to acquire and develop youth is one the new fans can live with for now. Who knows direction the fickle finger of fate will point - gold in them thar' hills of a future TBL Championship or fool's gold in the gift shop at Stuckey's along the highway.

strong city STATESMEN

Eric Sheffler (14th year)

"It's an interesting team, composed of promise and placeholders. Injuries have hit this team especially hard. All told, it's a team in transition."



2016 was a tough season for The Statesmen, but they knew it was coming. And as soon as the season ended, the team got to work. The first step was moving to Strong City with a message: start winning. With the recent draft and a flurry of trades that included the seven-player blockbuster for SNT Arenado, Mr. Sheffler is reshuffling the deck.

Young players are laying the foundation for the next contender. Veterans were brought in to add leadership and a clubhouse presence. So, while Nolan Arenado will speed the rebuilding along, the next wave also includes a handful of young talent — and all added by Mr. Sheffler. They're not there yet, but they shouldn't lose 99 games again. They may even push for a playoff spot.

Pitching: It could get ugly.

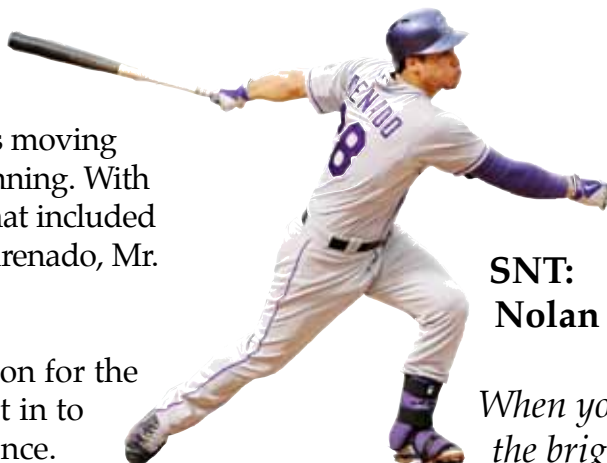
7.5

This is definitely a pitching staff in transition. While it has improved since last year, it still has a way to go to become the team strength it once was. But several of the key pieces are in place. Traditional TBL wisdom says to build the rotation first, and that's the approach Strong City is taking.

There's no dominant ace, but there is the makings of a solid rotation. There's a two-headed closer and some solid set-up help, but the bullpen is far too thin to be used aggressively. That means when the good starters pitch, the team will be competitive, but when the bottom of the rotation pitches, it could get ugly.



Carrasco: Holdover



SNT: Nolan Arenado.

When you can add one of the bright young stars of baseball by trade, you do it. Arenado becomes a cornerstone player for the Statesmen for the next decade.

ROTATION. The Statesmen need only six arms in the rotation all year, and three of them are really good. For half the season, the Statesmen will be able to play against anyone. Holdover Carlos Carrasco (Grade 12 C+25), newcomer Danny Salazar (Grade 12 C-36), and young Brandon Finnegan (Grade 12 C-44 HR-22), who's still in grade school, deliver a 1-2-3 punch for 81 starts.

That's all the good news. Gio Gonzalez (Grade 7) joined the team in the offseason. Aging vet Adam Wainwright (Grade 5) will spend a lot of time —

Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Nolan Arenado; Brett Cecil; Willson Contreras; Zack Cozart; Carl Edwards; Gio Gonzalez; Adam Lind; Joe Mauer; Danny Salazar; Kyle Schwarber; Anthony Swarzak; Luke Weaver; Rickie Weeks.

Departed: Luis Avilan; Hank Conger; Felix Doubront; Nathan Eovaldi; Ryan Goins; Mike Montgomery; Daniel Murphy; Darin Ruf; Ryan Vogelsong; Joey Votto; Matt Wisler; Mike Wright.



strong city STATESMEN

all of his 33 starts — asking himself whether he should have retired after the injury that caused him to miss the 2016 season. And the youngest of them all, Luke Weaver (Grade 1 HR-24), gets to learn on the job. But not necessarily in a good way.

BULLPEN. The two-headed closer has the grades, but not the peripherals. Rookie Carl Edwards (Grade 23* C-25) and Bruce Rondon (Grade 18*) have 72 innings between them, certainly enough for a closer. The problem will be getting to them.

Zach Putnam (Grade 14* C-22 HR+34), Tom Layne (Grade 13* C-32 HR+36), Danny Farquhar (Grade 13* C-23 HR-33), Joe Smith (Grade 12*), and Arodys Vizcaino (Grade 10* C-62 HR+33) offer up only 198 innings, not near enough, given the bottom three starters.

Adding Brett Cecil (Grade 8* C+26), Brandon Maurer (Grade 8* C+22 HR+21), and waiver wire acquisition Anthony Swarzak (Grade 8* C+23 HR-62) don't particularly help much, even with the extra 137 innings they bring to the mound. And letting Luke Weaver loose in the bullpen may destroy team morale.

Offense: **8.0**
It doesn't add up.

All talk about the offense on this team has to start with Nolan Arenado (1-1-4-6, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-3). He has that combination of power, hits and walks that no one else on the team possesses. He was worth whatever the Statesmen paid to bring him onboard. Of course, comparing any hitter to Arenado is unfair.

Khris Davis (1-1-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks+22) has awesome power, but is missing that extra hit, as is

Justin Upton (1-0-0-0, 9 hits, 3 walks). Rookie Willson Contreras (1-5-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22) is missing the extra power number. Brandon Drury (1-0-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks) and David Peralta (4 0s, 10 hits, a walk+22, L-5) have power and hits, but don't walk.



Davis: Missing

There is power up and down this lineup. In addition to the bashers listed above, there's Zack Cozart (1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks), Adam Lind (1-5-6, 9 hits, 2 walks, L-3), Matt Wieters (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+22, L-3), and Rickie Weeks (1-5-6, 8 hits, 3 walks+42, L+8 R-7). That's nine hitters with a first-column "1." It's safe to say they'll hit a few out in the course of the season, but without effective table-setters, it often doesn't add up.

Three other players stand out on the team for their exceptional — and on this team, unusual — skills. Josh Harrison (3 0s, 11 hits, a walk+22, 32 SSN for 23 attempts, L+3) has the only 11-hit card on the team; Joe Mauer (3 0s, 9 hits, 5 walks, with 3 31s, L-9) is an on-base machine; and Billy Hamilton (2 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 34 SSN for 66 attempts, L-7) is the club's real speedster.

Defense: **7.0**
Best in the league?

Yes, it's that good. Average on this team is a weakness. Both catchers have plus arms: Wieters (C8 Th+2) and Contreras (C7 Th+3). The infield has Arenado (3B5),

Cozart and Hechavarria (both SS9s), Harrison (2B9), and Mauer (1B4). Lind is a 1B3 when he has to play the field, which isn't often. The outfield has two OF3s in Upton (with a 35 arm) and Hamilton (with a 34 arm). Davis is the weak



Harrison: That good

spot: just an average fielder and thrower. Still, this defense could be the best in the league.

Bench:
Less than needed.

1.5

Adam Lind and Joe Mauer form an uneasy platoon at first; Rickie Weeks and Brandon Drury share the DH spot. Whoever doesn't start could pinch-hit, pinch-run or come in for defense. Speaking of which, there's the defensive skills of Adeniny Hechavarria (2 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks), who has to start about 40 games.

The best bats usually start the game, which is our code words for, "hey, no bench." Trading for Arenado – a move we wholeheartedly endorse – made it harder to create a broader base of talent. No question that will place the lineup in situations where a pinch-hitter or extra bench player will be helpful; they'll take their lumps this year. But that probably comes as no surprise to the veteran Mr. Sheffler.

2nd

The Statesmen are certainly an interesting team, composed of promise and placeholders. Injuries have hit this team especially hard, and the Statesmen are carrying five uncarded players all year, which certainly hampers its flexibility. All told, it's a team in transition. It's difficult to say what it will look like when it's all put together, especially since its 2018 draft is already compromised.



the statesmen:
Realignment



strong city STATESMEN

Although they played as The Statesmen a year ago, this team was one of the few that actually remained in the same division after realignment. Two years out, this is clearly Sheffler's team: they're not the "revamped Portland Possum," and we won't talk about them that way anymore – Votto is gone, Murphy (the secondbaseman, not the commissioner) is gone, and Nolan Arenado has arrived.

In any case, instead of Maracaibo and Northboro in the Aaron, they face newcomers Las Vegas and Melrose, along with Kansas (the state rivals, who get to remain in the Aaron).

Strong City wouldn't have been favored to win the division in the old alignment, and they're actually closer to the top in this alignment. The fact that they may challenge for a playoff spot is another big plus.

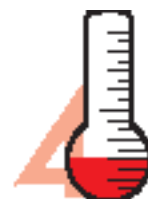
We have to score that a win.

TQ: 24.0

Vegas



A new venue for a team on the rise! Eric has done a great job revamping an aging Portland team into a promising young group. They'll still take their lumps in 2017, but don't ignore them either.



2016 kansas KOYOTES in review



Bridesmaids again.

by Bill Schwartz

2016 in Review

Final Record: 95-67 (2nd, Aaron)

Picked by the *Annual* to head the Aaron Division and described as what “could be the best Kansas team ever”, the Koyotes did indeed enjoy a stellar season. However they fell short of the Aaron crown when, after being tied with Maracaibo at 85-57 going into the final month, a 10-10 November doomed their hopes as the Rumrunners went 16-4 down the stretch to make the Koyotes bridesmaids again.

What went right?

The 95 wins was indeed the high water mark for wins for a Kansas team and the best for the franchise since the 107 win 2004 World Series team which resided then on the banks of Lake Mahopac. In the process, Kansas outcored the opposition 777-656 – the +121 margin also the best since the team’s relocation to Topeka. The team smashed 198 HR, the most in 10 years.

Mike Moustakas led the regulars in most offensive categories (35 doubles, 28 HR’s, 94 RBI’s, .478 SA) and Curtis Granderson scored 100 runs despite hitting only .231, as his 96 free passes provided many opportunities. Part-timers supplied plenty of support – Chris Colabello (101 g., .330 BA, .507 SA, 14 HR, 78 RBI) and Franklin Gutierrez (60 g., .292 BA, .638 SA, 19 HR, 70 RBI thanks to his monster 1-1-5-5-6 card).

The “Four Horsemen”, Grade 15 Dallas Keuchel and Grade 14s Sonny Gray, Max Scherzer & Matt Harvey all provided 200+ innings and each had double figure win totals, headed by Scherzer’s 17-10, 3.17 ERA, 243 IP, 9 CG, 290 K. Grade 17

setup man Ken Giles’ 65 RIP of 0.96 ERA led relievers as he sought to justify the 2017 first round draft choice that he cost. Grade 22 Joaquin Benoit, purchased for a 2016 Bonus choice, saved 32 games despite a somewhat high 3.43 ERA.

What went wrong?

For the third time in as many appearances in the playoffs as a wildcard team in the 8 ½ year Schwartz era, the Koyotes bowed out early, losing the wildcard series 4 games to 2. This time it was to Melrose after Hudson had ushered them out the previous two times. The two teams each won 95 games, with Kansas receiving the home advantage by winning the season matchup. The Koyotes came close to setting a dubious all-time TBL record when, “paced” by Justin Smoak’s 178 K, they whiffed an exorbitant 1474 times, a total that ranked #5 all-time in the TBL record book of dubious “achievements”.



Moustakas: Leader

3 Things

1. *Injuries.* After having 5 starters with 14+ grades in 2016, injuries hit Harvey, Keuchel and Gray in the ’16 MLB season. With Severino also being ineffective, the Koyotes were left with only 110 starts of grade 7+ pre-draft.
2. *Strapped draft.* Having no first round pick and needing 52 starts, 100+ innings of decent relief and a third catcher, Kansas found it impossible to add any needed quality offensive firepower.
3. *New division.* The Aaron Division of MAR, NBO, KAN & STM is no more. Instead the renamed Strong City Statesmen and Koyotes are joined by Las Vegas and Melrose. It will be interesting to see how the new rivalries will develop. We will miss the battles with Walter and Steve/Bob.

kansas KOYOTES

Bill Schwartz (10th year)

Don't just wait 'til next year; don't watch 'til next year!



Last season, starting pitching dominated for this team and kept them in games when the offense struggled to score. This season, the offense has nearly caught up, but not for the reasons you'd hope. As the rotation has mostly fallen back to earth (with a thud heard 'round the league), the offense just looks better by comparison, even though the hitters have lost ground too.

While two teams in the new Aaron Division have taken a step forward (apparently Melrose didn't get the memo), the 2017 Koyotes look like a wan shadow of the team that won 95 games last year. With a few notable exceptions, the players on this team more resemble the hunted, not the hunter; the sheep and not the koyote.

Pitching: **7.0**
Praying for recovery.

Last year, this steam rolled out 137 starts of Grade 14 or better, and the pitching staff carried them into the playoffs. This year, that number is down to 34 starts, and the pitching staff will likely carry them into the playpen. The impressive names are still here, but a combination of injury and ineffectiveness wreaked havoc on a once-great staff.

Mr. Schwartz is hoping, praying perhaps, that the arms recover. Without them, this is a very

Turnover Rate: 20%

Arrived: Gordon Beckham; Matt Bush; Christian Friedrich; A.J. Griffin; Jeremy Hazelbaker; Bryan Holaday; Chasen Shreve.

Departed: Domonic Brown; Pedro Ciriaco; Chris Colabello; Luis Garcia; Brian Matusz; Jason Motte; Branden Pinder.

mediocre team, despite the bright spots and the one remaining ace who hasn't let him down. But where once there was greatness, this year's pitching staff features a lot of placeholders to fill out games and the roster.



Scherzer: Returning ace

ROTATION. At least the Koyotes have one returning ace in Max Scherzer (Grade 15 C+22). He's got a K strikeout letter, too. He led the team last year, but he'll

bear a heavier load this year. He's followed by SNT Steven Wright (Grade 12 HR+33), Dallas Keuchel (who slipped to a solid Grade 8), and a sock puppet in A.J. Griffin (Grade 8 C-22 HR-36). That's 107 starts.

Righty Ivan Nova (Grade 7 C+35) and lefty Christian Friedrich (Grade 7 C-21 HR+22) take up all but seven of the remaining starts, although these aren't exactly arms to build around. The final few starts are spread between

SNT: Steven Wright.

This is new: a SNT he drafted a year ago! It's what happens when the first four rounds of the draft yield a reliever and Gordon Beckham.





kansas KOYOTES

the no-longer-dynamic duo of Matt Harvey (Grade 3 C+22 HR+25) and Sonny Gray (Grade 3). Still promising Luis Severino (Grade 4) is around to translate the jokes into Spanish.

BULLPEN. You can make up for a middling rotation with a great bullpen. Las Vegas proved that last year. If only the Koyotes' had one. The new closer is rookie Matt Bush (Grade 16* C+23 HR+35). The peripherals will help, but he'll need luck to get to 30 saves. At least he has an able set-up crew: former closer Joaquin Benoit (Grade 16* C-46 HR+22), Zach Duke (Grade 16* C-34 HR+53), and Neftali Feliz (Grade 15* C-23 HR-32).

After those 224 innings, the rest of the pen is mix-and-match: a pair of Grade 10*s in Ken Giles and Kevin

Quackenbush; a pair of wild Grade 9*s in Joakim Soria (C-25) and lefty Chasen Shreve (C-24 HR-41); and a lone Grade 8* in Liam Hendriks (C+35 HR+25). It's a big number of relief innings (514), and they'll help every starter except poor Mr. Scherzer. If used aggressively, they may steal some wins.

Offense:

6.0

Just like Mickey Mantle!

Last year in the *Annual* we wrote, "The lineup has lots of power, but it comes at a price: base hits." There's still some power here, but even fewer of those

base hits. In fact, the best cards on the team arguably belong to the table-setters: speedster Jean Segura (4 0s, 11 hits, 2 walks+42, 30 SSN for 43 attempts, L-6) and



Segura: Speedster

Dustin Pedroia (3 0s, 11 hits with a 7 on 55, 3 walks, no shift).

Then comes the only other player on the roster with at least 10 hits (let *that* sink in for a moment): Mark Reynolds (1-6-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, L-6). That makes Reynolds the third best hitter on this club. Others do flash some power: Franklin Gutierrez (1-5-5, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, L+4, R-17), George Springer (1-0-0, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, L+3, R-3), and Yasiel Puig (1-0-0, 9 hits, 2 walks+42), for instance.

At least those three have nine hits. Other hit-challenged power cards include: Curtis Granderson (1-4-5, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L-6), Justin Smoak (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks, L-5), and rookie Jeremy Hazelbaker (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 3 walks, L-10). Both catchers fit the mold too: Miguel Montero (1-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L-12) and Yan Gomes (1-6-6, 6 hits, a walk+22, L+10, R-6). It's a platoon!

The last few regulars are centerfielder Leonys Martin (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, 31 SSN for 30 attempts), third baseman (!) Jeff Francoeur (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks R-3), and Gordon Beckham (3 0s, 8 hits, 3 walks, 4 24s), who gets to play half the season. This offense reminds us of Mickey Mantle: he'd go up there swinging for the fences every single time at bat. Unlike Mickey, these guys won't connect as often.

Defense:

5.0

The team strength?

The 2017 Koyotes are strong up the middle with two C8s (Gomes, Th+3, and Montero, Th-4), Segura (SS9) and Pedroia (2B8) in the infield, and Martin (OF3) patrolling CF. Smoak (1B5) and Reynolds (1B4) nail down one side of the infield, while Francoeur (3B3) and Beckham (3B4) present a weakness on the other, although Mike Moustakas (3B5) offers late-inning defense.

Springer (OF3) and Puig (OF2, with a 38 cannon) are strong defensively, too. The other outfielders are all OF2s, so there aren't any weaknesses out there. Bryan Holaday (C7, Th+2) may help occasionally. All in all, this is a team strength.



Puig: Cannon

Bench: Helpful, but limited.

3.0

There are a few useful cards on the bench. Mike Moustakas (1-1-6-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, 4 24s) has limited use, but does two things very well: hit for power and play third base. Bryan Holaday (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22) actually has the most hits of any catcher on the roster, but usage limits his role. Kike Hernandez (1-6, 7 hits, 4 walks, R-5) is too much like everyone else on the team.

At least there's some platoon flexibility, particularly in the outfield, but it will require 'Pat Lineup' to stay out of the way to make it effective.

3rd There's just not a lot of bite in these Koyotes. On the one hand, you've got Scherzer, Wright, pray for rain, pray for rain, and pray for rain. On the other hand,

you've got Segura and Pedroia on first and third, followed by a lot of outs or every once in a while, a three-run homer. Don't just wait 'til next year; don't watch 'til next year!



Moustakas: Limited



kansas: Realignment

Perennial contender Maracaibo and rapidly improving Northboro left the division for the coming season. Instead, Kansas' only holdover rival is the Strong City Statesmen, who will be improved (but still not quite ready for a deep playoff run).

In place of the two departures, realignment has brought two 2016 playoff teams: Melrose and Las Vegas. These two teams are heading in opposite directions, as Las Vegas has loaded up again and Melrose has unloaded to rebuild.

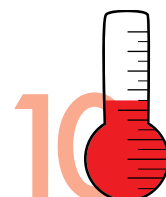
Because of Melrose, this is a win for the Koyotes; they shouldn't finish last, though it might be a close thing (as Melrose, even in its weakened condition, still brings some talent to the table).

The real question facing Kansas is whether this is a one-year phenomenon due to injuries and off years, or if there is a need for systemic rebuild. We think it's likely the former, but the early 2017 returns will be the best indicator.



The Koyotes were really hit hard by the injury bug in MLB 2016 and it shows in their rotation for this season. Harvey, Gray and Keuchel are all mere shadows of their former glory. Let's hope it's only a one year setback for Mr. Schwartz.

TQ: **19.5**



kansas
KOYOTES



2016 melrose AVENGERS in review



What went wrong: One dice roll.

by Mark Freedman

2016 in Review

Final Record: 95-67 (2nd, Mantle)

Time. One of my favorite quotes comes from billionaire banker Warren Buffett. "Someone is sitting in the shade of a tree today because somebody planted it long ago."

Well, I planted my tree and watched it grow. We went to three Championship Series, winning two, and except for one pitch to Munich's Anthony Rizzo we might have made a fourth. Since 2011 this group of players has posted 584 wins and 388 losses, including a 123-win season.

What does this all mean? Out my back window there is a great majestic oak, so old it appears on town maps from the 1780s. Every year it struggles to bloom. Every winter another huge branch falls. Some years it looks young and vibrant, with a green canopy full of jays and the occasional hawk. Other years it looks old, with twisted branches and falling bark. As I look at 2017 Melrose Avengers I see that tree. Old, venerable, clinging to life, sometime feeling young even as it enters latter stages of maturity. One day the old tree will need to be taken down, and when that happens a new sapling will be planted in its place. "We know what we are but know not what we may be."

What went right?

95-67 meant another successful season, even if we did finish 18 games behind Munich. We led the league in runs again, with 822 on a .245/.318/.443 triple slash. The team improved on last year's homerun mark, clubbing 263. Three Avengers hit 40, Todd Frazier, A-Gone, and JD Martinez (48). David Ortiz chipped in 35. Offensive production was spread fairly evenly. 4 Avengers past the 100 RBI mark, JD Martinez with 119. Mar-

tinez scored 111, and three others scored more than 90 and Ortiz was close with 86. The best season certainly went to JD Martinez who also had 48 doubles and slugged .559. The pitching staff was stellar posting a 2.95 ERA. Perennial Ace Jon Lester went 19-11, 2.93. Tyson Ross was better (21-6, 2.73). A. J. Ramos continued to rack up saves with 37 with an 0.60 ERA. Pedro Strop and Will Harris set him up nicely.

What went wrong?

One dice roll. For the second year that highlights this section. A. J. Ramos giving up a three-run homer with 2 out in the ninth in game seven at Munich ended our season. Preparation can reduce the effects of luck but not eliminate it.

The offense was hit and miss. 263 home-runs but only 822 runs. The team fell 53 runs short of expectations, and woefully underperformed on the road. Too many 5-4 wins at home were 4-3 losses on the road. The .318 team OBP is a testament to a combination of a few too hit and walk numbers.



Martinez: Leader

3 Things

1. *Retool.* Trim the tree and plant new seeds. Youth arrived: Mondesi and Mazara from the draft, Conforto and Semien by trade. This youth should help replace the aging group of Avengers that have been the foundation of the team.
2. *Rotation.* Ross and Lynn are coming back from injury. Can Cashner recover past glory? Will this be James Paxton's break out year? Can Tyler Anderson become a solid #3 pitching in Colorado?
3. *There's a good core.* A-gone is 35, Russell Martin 34, Alex Gordon 33, Todd Frazier 31. But Anthony Rendon is poised to take over 3B and Austin Hedges is waiting in the wings to replace Martin. The question is which player will surprise and how well will the older players perform? 2018 could be a bounce back year.

melrose AVENGERS



Mark Freedman (24th year)

It's a definite fall from grace. Injuries and age have taken their toll, and trades did the rest of the damage. It'll be a long season in Melrose.

The Avengers lost a seven-game World Series in 2015, but they bounced right back. In 2016, they enjoyed another run, winning 95 games, only to lose a tough seven-game Conference Finals. With the loss, they failed to become the first team to appear in back-to-back World Series since — well, since they won consecutive championships in 2011–12.

All good runs must come to an end. Eventually. With massive holes and an aging infrastructure, Mr. Freedman spent the winter both trading away present value and trading for future blue-chippers. The result is, in the short term at least, a season to come that will turn winning smiles upside down. It may take a superhero to survive the months ahead.

Pitching: Time is Kryptonite.

4.5

Remember when the Avengers had an enviable pitching staff? They always seemed to include a reliable ace (or two) and a deep, deep bullpen. In 2015, the team boasted three 20-game winners. Last year, they had one 20-game winner and a 19-game winner. Time is Kryptonite, and time finally caught up with them. The only thing that may prevent a 20-game loser this year is some limited usage.

But they haven't traded everyone. They still have a closer, and they still have the pitcher who saved 72 games over the past two seasons. While you can't argue that this staff is anywhere near the quality they're used to in Melrose, the team has picked up some young pieces. Given some time, they could develop into the next wave of Avengers' dominance.

SNT: Nomar Mazara.

Back to a youth movement for Mr. Freedman, and he got a good, 21-year-old talent in this Nomar. Rebuilding requires building blocks; enter Mazara.



Turnover Rate: 43%

Arrived: Tyler Anderson; Aaron Blair; Steven Brault; Andrew Cashner; Louis Coleman; Michael Conforto; Eric Fryer; Derek Holland; Nomar Mazara; Raul A. Mondesi; Paulo Orlando; Marcus Semien; Drew Smyly; Jake Thompson; Logan Verrett.

Departed: Peter Bourjos; Ryan Braun; A.J. Burnett; Josh Edgin; Sam Freeman; Will Harris; Kevin Jepsen; Jon Lester; Matt Marksberry; Michael McKenry; David Murphy; Alexi Ogando; David Ortiz; Jimmy Rollins; Tom Wilhelmson.

ROTATION. The bad news is that the Avengers require eight pitchers to fill out their rotation. The good news is that they don't need Aaron Blair to start. The best of the bunch is rookie Tyler Anderson (Grade 9 C+25), followed by vet Scott Kazmir (Grade 8). That's 45 starts. Then come a trio of Grade 7s: perennial prospect James Paxton (C+34 HR+34), trade acquisition Drew Smyly (HR-23), and sock puppet Jake Thompson (C-45 HR-25). That brings the total up to 105 games.

The final 57 starts belong to Derek Holland (Grade 6), Andrew Cashner (Grade 5 C-26) and young Steven Brault (Grade 2 C-26). And there's no one to rescue them in the fourth inning. Or the fifth, or the sixth. With two exceptions (Anderson and Paxton), this staff's superpower is to will



melrose AVENGERS

pitched balls over the fence. It probably doesn't help that this rotation is composed dominantly of southpaws, with 136 left-handed starts.

BULLPEN. Last year, this team boasted four relievers who could close on another team. This year, they're down to one: Pedro Strop (Grade 20* HR+23, with a K strikeout letter). But he's not the closer. That honor goes to A. J. Ramos (Grade 15* C-51 HR+61), obviously because of his past success. Ramos is set up by Strop and Jason Grilli (Grade 15* C-61 HR-21).

After those 170 innings, things fall off. Logan Verrett (Grade 11* C-32 HR-23) and Louis Coleman (Grade 9* C-35) can at least help out the bottom of the rotation. Drew Storen (Grade 5* C+25) and Aaron Blair (Grade 1 C-24 HR-26) may have to pitch way too much. All told, it's just shy of 400

innings, which isn't nearly enough, so they're looking to get seven innings out of every starter. Think about that.

Offense:

13.0

A lot of the same.

There's one superhero still in town: J. D. Martinez (1-5-6-6, 11 hits, 4 walks+22). He has to miss about a third of the season, but he'll bash when he's in the lineup. The only other



Conforto: Sorting out

player with four power numbers is young Michael Conforto (1-0-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, L-20 and 8 13s), but he obviously has some issues to sort out.

There's more power, but it comes without many hits. Todd Frazier (1-1-6, 8 hits, 2 walks+22, but 29



The Avengers may be run by superheroes, but their players have felt the ravages of advancing age. Mark Freedman has dealt veterans and had a decent 2017 draft, but he didn't strip them down completely... yet.

SSN for 20 attempts and no shift) occasionally gets hold of one. Anthony Rendon (1-6-6, 9 hits, 4 walks+22, 26 SSN for 18 attempts) and Marcus Semien (1-5-6, 9 hits, 3 walks, 32 SSN for 12 attempts) help out, too.

Paulo Orlando (3 0s, 11 hits, a walk+22, 32 SSN for 17 attempts, L+2 R-3) and Adrian Gonzalez (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-10) can at least hit for average. Logan Forsythe (1-4-6, 10 hits, 3 walks+22, no shift) is solid, while SNT Mazara (1-0-0, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L-9) still has to grow into his paws.

That leaves the isolated power of Russ Martin (1-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42, no shift), Alex Gordon (1-0-0, 8 hits, 4 walks+22, no shift), and Trayce Thompson (1-5-6, 8 hits, 4 walks, no shift). There's a lot of the same here, and it's not all that pretty. The team does feature good OBP and decent power; the question is whether they'll cooperate.

Defense:

5.0

A highlight.

This is one area where the team can shine, assuming some of these guys get to play. The infield features Rendon (3B5), Iglesias (SS9), Gonzalez (1B5), and Martin (C9, but Th-4).



Rendon: Shines

Logan Forsythe (2B7) and Marcus Semien (SS8) are just average. The outfield has two OF3s in Alex Gordon and Paulo Orlando. The rest are OF2s, and only Gordon has an above-average arm out there. Still, defense provides a highlight on a team looking for any positives.

Bench:

2.0

Not much to recommend.

Besides Iglesias (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+22) and the extra outfielders, there isn't much to recommend here. Eric Fryer (2 0s, 9 hits, 4 walks) forms an effective platoon with Martin.

Raul Mondesi can pinch-run, but probably only in November. There won't be many moves to make in Melrose this season.

4th

We predict that they will finish in last place. No way around it: it's a definite fall from grace.

Injuries and age have taken their toll, and trades did the rest of the damage. It'll be a long season in Melrose, but it was likely the right moves at the right time. They'd got the most out of their core for many years now. Still, when Ironman hits the dirt, the resounding thud is loud enough to shake the timbers.



Fryer, Mondesi: Future



melrose:
Realignment



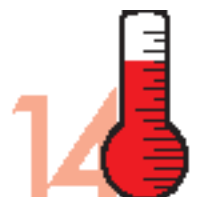
melrose AVENGERS

For many years, the Mantle Division consisted of four very successful, very experienced clubs with four talented and knowledgeable managers: Mark Freedman's Melrose Avengers, Paul Montague's Munich Marauders, Clay Beard's Hudson Generals, and Rich Meyer's Elders of Zion. They all had their time in the sun: they have all gone through rebuilds. One of the most profound effects of the great 2017 realignment is the breakup of this legendary concentration of talent and experience.

By moving from the Mantle to the Aaron, Melrose gives up some of that traditional rivalry. Still, that being said, the move didn't really affect the team's plans very much at all.

Due to time and unfortunate circumstances, the Avengers were always going to rebuild, especially given their roster limitations. The Mantle was a very strong division, whereas the new Aaron isn't as formidable, due to teams at the crossroads or in the same position as Melrose itself. It's possible that the worse division competition and the presence of J.D. Martinez and Pedro Strop could lead to more wins than the rebuild effort envisioned.

TQ: 18.0



Maybe Too Close To Call

Years of Mantle Division competition made this essay easier to write. The four senior horsemen of TBL – Clay, Richard, Monty and Mark Freedman – took turns charging toward the post-season or diving toward the rebuilding end of the draft pool. Some teams had short cycles, while others were the terror of TBL for many seasons before leaning back for a rebuild. The *Annual* just followed the script.



Realignment has given us a new script, though. Two of the old gang have moved to other – perhaps greener – pastures. Of the two that remain here, the result

may be too close to call, but we’re giving it a shot anyway: *Clay Beard’s Hudson Generals* have the numbers on their side, with an offense and a pitching staff that should nose out defending champion *Paul Montague’s Munich Marauders*.

Two things militate against this ranking. First, Hudson has consistently thwarted our best-laid prognostications; and second, Montague is as good or better than anyone in TBL in making more from not quite as much. So these two positions may wind up reversed.



2016 Mantle Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Munich*	113	49	.698	—
Melrose†	95	67	.586	18
Hudson	83	79	.512	30
Zion	62	100	.383	51

* Defeated Whitman in the World Series.

† Lost to Munich in the NC playoffs.

While there’s clearly a lot of daylight between the first two teams and the third,



newcomer *Dave Jaskot* gets to deploy a much improved *Detroit Stars* in their new home in the Mantle. Rookies Healy and Sanchez make a decent lineup much stronger, and there’s

some solid pitching to go with it. This isn’t the year, but it’ll be a more fun one.

Bringing up the rear in the reconfigured division is the *Columbus Jets*, the winner of the “best fourth place team in TBL” award for 2017. Departed from the Clemente Division, Vic Vaughn has some enviable talent on the roster, including newly-acquired first baseman and SNT Joey Votto. They are a few steps from contention, but like Detroit should be a fun team to play.



Maybe the story of the Mantle isn’t that much different after all – only a few of the names have changed.



D. J. LeMahieu,
Hudson

1. Hudson	31.0
2. Munich	29.5
3. Detroit	24.0
4. Columbus	21.5

**Mantle
Division**

2016 hudson GENERALS in review



I couldn't stop myself.

by Clay Beard

2016 in Review

Final Record: 83-79 (3rd, Mantle)

The Generals were picked for third place in the Aaron, and they finished third as predicted. The team was prepared for a step forward that was unlikely to lead to the playoffs – and it didn't. It was, in that respect, a successful campaign.

In some ways, Hudson did exactly what the *Annual* said we did: make an incremental step forward, getting ready for the season to come.

What went right?

A.J. Pollock had an MVP caliber year, leading the league in hits (209) and runs (125) with 84 extra base hits and 38 steals.

Hudson was second in the league with 209 home runs. Six players on the team hit more than 20. Randall Grichuk recorded a .913 OPS in 103 games. Migul Sano had a .885 OPS in 82 games.

Hudson pinch-hitters slugged .500 with 8 HR over the course of the season, which was a solid reinforcement of our "25 guys" philosophy.

What went wrong?

You can lose a season in the first quarter. In April and May the team play. While the end

numbers looked good, the Generals' offense didn't get things started until June, leading to a 6-14 April. and a record of 17-24 after May.

The back of the rotation just barely hung in there: Taijuan Walker had a 4.83 ERA, Kevin Gausman 4.92, Tim Lincecum 4.69 in his swan song after years of good service to the club.



Pollock: MVP

3 Things

1. *A. J. Pollock.* - Can this team contend with their best player on the shelf for the year.
2. *A contender draft.* I was sitting on the fence. The key was Naquin being available who fit the roster like a glove, even though there was some better talent available. From there I couldn't stop myself, Rich Hill, Hyun-Soo Kim, Greg Garcia all fit the bill.
3. *Get a lead!* One of, if not the best bullpens in the league. 227 innings of 18+. And the rest of it ain't bad.

hudson GENERALS

Clay Beard (33rd year); Hall of Famer

This team has a lot going for it.



There are things in this world more difficult than multivariate calculus, organic chemistry, and high-energy physics – at least for the staff of the *Annual*. The thing about which we are talking, in this instance, is the thorny matter of predicting the outcome of the Hudson Generals' TBL season.

To do so for 23 teams, however, simply would not do. Therefore, we go once more into the breach, and it is our opinion that in a high energy and hotly contested race in the Mantle Division, Mr. Beard's club is going to nose out the 2016 champion Munich Marauders and win the division. It is almost an invitation for them to go 80-82, but we consider it unlikely. This team has a lot going for it: offense, defense, pitching, and management. He uses 25 guys, and they will all get used.

Pitching: **13.0**
Very capable.

The Generals will throw out a solid rotation and a deep, capable bullpen this year. In some aspects it looks like a Munich pitching staff, which is a good way to go up against Munich.

ROTATION. Let's start with Hudson's SNT, the ageless lefty Rich Hill (Grade 18 HR+51, 22 fatigue). He came out of nowhere to make 20 superb starts last summer, striking out more batters than innings pitched. He's one of the best grades in the set. In addition, there's a full season of Carlos Martinez (Grade 13 C-15 HR+31), who has come into his own.

Other than Hill, all of the starters are right-handed, and after



Martinez: Arrived

Turnover Rate: 26%

Arrived: Michael Feliz; Greg Garcia; Donnie Hart; Aaron Hill; Rich Hill; Hyun Soo Kim; Dae-ho Lee; Tyler Naquin; Kirk Nieuwenhuis.

Departed: Gerrit Cole; Jason Garcia; Dilson Herrera; Micah Johnson; Tim Lincecum; Josh Osich; Dalton Pompey; Alex Rodriguez; Will Venable.

SNT: Rich Hill.

This guy must be a highly-placed cat, as he keeps coming back to life.

This 20-start stretch produced one of the best grades in the set.



Martinez come a full season of Kevin Gausman (Grade 10 C+21 HR-14), 44 starts of Joe Ross (Grade 9 C+23 H+25) and Taijuan Walker (Grade 9 C+21 HR-26), 27 starts of Matt Shoemaker (Grade 8 C+33 HR+16), and a handful by Marcus Stroman (Grade 7 C+16 HR+22). All in all, there are no bad starts; they should get well into middle innings in most games.

BULLPEN. And truly that's all they need to do. The top end of Hudson's bullpen is very fine: Cody Allen (Grade 21* K, C-31) is the best grade out there, but the instructions designate Brad Brach (Grade 18* HR+25) as the primary closer. He'll have a few innings' help from rookie lefty Donnie Hart (Grade 18* HR+42) and some less reliable help from lefty Kevin Siegrist (Grade 18* C-26 HR-23). That's more than 220 innings 18*+.



There's more. Luke Gregerson (Grade 16* HR+25) and Mychal Givens (Grade 15* C-44 HR+32) from the right side, and Marc Rzepczynski (Grade 13* C-34 HR+56) from the left extend the bullpen by another 180 innings. That, along with rookie Michael Feliz (Grade 11*) and Marcus Stroman's bulk innings, will get the team through most games.

This is a very capable, and very hard throwing, pitching staff. A number of "K"s and not an "R" in sight.

Offense: 11.0
Power, not much speed.

The most surprising card that falls out of the Hudson envelope has to be NL batting champion D. J. LeMahieu (12 hits, 4 walks, 3 31s, 3 0s). He has transformed himself from primarily a glove man to a potent, consistent hitter. He's featured on our division

introduction, doing what he now does best: hitting a line drive somewhere. He has some help:

C. J. Cron is a nice power source (10 hits, 2 walks+22, L-6, 1-0-0-0); he has one of the four 4-power number cards: rookie Tyler Naquin (11 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0) and veterans Carlos Beltran (11 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0-0) and Randal Grichuk (9 hits, 1-5-5-6). Other than Grichuk, they have some problems against LHP. There's also the free-swinging Miguel Sano (8 hits, 4 walks, 1-0-0-0).



Cron: Power source

The power hitters have two good supporters at catcher and shortstop: Wilson Ramos (11 hits, 2 walks, 1-5-6, L+5 R-3) and Didi Gregorius (10 hits, 1-6-6). Decent bats at these positions are not always easy to find.

The rest of the lineup consists of a patchwork, including rookie Hyun Soo Kim (10 hits, 4 walks, L-13, 3 0s); Lucas Duda (8 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-5-6, L-10 R+2); and Ezequiel Carrara (9 hits, 3 walks+22, 2 0s, L+6 R-4). Greg Garcia (9 hits, 4 walks+2 22s, 2 0s) will get some reps at third base.

This lineup delivers power and decent OBP, but it doesn't have a lot of speed. They have some problems against lefties, which will be partly resolved by the 25 men on the roster.

Defense: 4.5
Some plusses, but largely average.

The Generals flash some pretty good gloves up the middle. D. J. LeMahieu turned in another 2B9; Wilson Ramos is a defensive standout (C8 Th+3); Randal Grichuk is an OF3 with a 31 arm. Grichuk, however, is the only OF3 on the roster. When Ramos is unavailable, though, Hudson does not suffer: Welington Castillo is a C8 with a Th+3 as well.



Ramos: Defensive standout

Elsewhere, the team is largely average. Greg Garcia is a 3B4, and Miguel Sano a 3B3; Didi Gregorius is an SS8; C. J. Cron is a 1B3; Tyler Naquin and Ezequiel Carrera are OF2s. Jed Lowrie is a 2B8, but he won't get into the lineup very often. Kim and Beltran are both OF1s and may have to play the field from time to time.

There are certainly defensive standouts in the lineup, but the team in the field is largely average. This will not affect too many outcomes.



The Generals could be a potent foe in 2017. Good rotation, a deep 'pen, good hitting and power in the regular lineup. Their defense is somewhat suspect, but certainly a wild card contender.

Bench:
Doesn't help very much.

2.0



hudson:
Realignment



HUDSON GENERALS

The lineup requires a certain amount of care and manipulation, leaving very few extra players. Welington Castillo (9 hits, 3 walks+22, L+4 R-3, C8 Th+3) is an offensive stepdown from Wilson Ramos; Jed Lowrie (10 hits, 3 walks, 2 0s) has a very bland card; and Kirk Nieuwenhuis (7 hits, 5 walks, 1-6-6) is a space filler. Overall, the bench doesn't help very much.

1st

We think they'll win the division, but the margin of victory will probably be very narrow. Munich is not as overpowering as last year

but it still has plenty in the tank. Detroit has made some progress, as has Columbus, but the real contest is between the top two teams.

Hudson still has some moves it can make – it has two 2018 #1s (their own and Las Vegas', both likely to be low: but a first rounder is a first rounder. In a tight race, it must be assumed that Mr. Beard might shore up the team – a power-hitting or high-average outfielder, for example – in this struggle for the Mantle Division. There are serious rivals in the National Conference as well: Las Vegas and Grand Cayman, for example.

The Vegas Line sees a wild card berth for the Generals, which is almost certain if they don't win the Mantle outright. Where they go past that is up to them. (We really have no idea.)



Sano: Hit or miss

Along with Munich, the Hudson club has remained in the Mantle after the massive realignment. Remarkably, the team has never played in any other division – ever – since 1985. The same is true of Munich. We here at the *Annual* had no idea of that record, but now it's public knowledge.

For a lot of that time, the Mantle has been a remarkable crucible of four extremely competitive, successful and talented managers: Mr. Beard, Mr. Montague, Mr. Freedman and Mr. Meyer. Two of those men and their teams are gone, though that is a mixed bag of effect; Melrose has been a formidable opponent, but now is in the process of rebuilding, and has taken that effort off to the Aaron; Zion has been ineffectual for the past few years and is now much improved, but they have left for the Williams.

In their place, Detroit and Columbus – our Michigan constituency – have joined the Mantle. Detroit is significantly better, and Columbus isn't too bad; but this is a two-team race. In that respect, the realignment has benefitted Hudson, making their chances at a playoff berth much higher. Overall, we'd call this a win.

TQ: 31.0



2016 munich MARAUDERS in review



The Marauders exorcised some demons.

by Paul Montague

2016 in Review

Final Record: 113-49 (1st, Mantle)

The Marauders exorcised a few demons in 2016, making up for missed opportunities in 2009 and 2015 by grabbing their third TBL title. They won 113 games during the regular season, beat division rival Melrose in the National Conference Semi-finals on a dramatic come-from-behind seventh-game walk-off home run, took the NC title by sweeping Maracaibo, and won a topsy-turvy World Series from IC champs Whitman. (My compliments to all three of those teams for fine seasons and excellent managing during our playoff series!)

What went right?

Pennant! That has to be the headline for "What Went Right?", doesn't it?

Munich entered the season with one of the best pitching staffs in the league. An already-good rotation was bolstered by the mid-season acquisition of Zack Greinke (20XZG), and the bullpen added Javier Lopez (27*H) and Hector Rondon (18*XZG) to make a total of seven TBL-closer grades. The pitching depth and quality led Munich to the title. Munich's mound men rang up a 2.51 team ERA. Although nobody won 20 games, four starters won at least 16. Even number five starter Edinson Volquez was 17-8, 2.84. Greinke went 5-1, 2.51 in 8 starts after the mid-season trade.

The bullpen was truly spectacular. They pitched 398 innings with a 1.78 ERA, 26 wins and 48 saves (against only 12 bullpen losses). Brad Ziegler was the most remarkable reliever, with a

miniscule 0.55 ERA and only 22 hits and 7 walks in 65 IP, although Andrew Miller notched the most saves (29). During the playoffs, the staff had a 3.14 ERA in 17 games – stellar considering the opposition. Remarkably, Greinke went only 2-3 in the playoffs despite a 2.48 ERA.

Meanwhile, the offense was not historic, but plenty good enough – and delivered heart-stopping comeback wins especially during the playoffs. As expected, it was led by the big bats of Anthony Rizzo (.323 / .403 / .593, 30 HR, 68(!) 2B, 104 R, 101 RBI), and Miguel Cabrera (.331 / .413 / .507). The team scored 742 runs in the regular season, and 78 in the playoffs.



Rizzo: Big bat

What went wrong?

Not Much. By definition, there can't have been much "wrong" in such a season.

3 Things

1. *Not as deep.* The pitching staff returns to merely 'pretty good'. Jake Arrieta (16XG) arrived via mega-trade, but there will also be starts from a 7 and a 4, and there are only two TBL-closer-grade relievers in the bullpen. The starting offense may actually be a tad stronger than in 2016, but the bench does not feature "defensive subs" with cards as good as normal TBL starters.
2. *Not dominant, but contending.* In the restructured Mantle Division, the 2017 Marauders definitely will not dominate. But they should be in the mix for a wild-card spot, if not the division title.
3. *Hoping for positive regression.* Meanwhile, looking ahead, Munich hopes that some of the players who took a step backward in real life in 2016 will "regress" toward better performance. One of the joys of playing in a 'dynasty' league is hope for the future!

munich MARAUDERS

Paul Montague (34th year); Hall of Famer



If they can overcome Hudson they can win the pennant. The rest is speculation.

Six years ago the Melrose Avengers won back-to-back TBL championships, turning back Steve Powell's Dallas Eagles and then dispatching the Gotham City Batmen. It was the first time since 1997-1998 that any team had done so. Even in a league where (as we noted a few years ago) the middle tends to disappear as teams fall back or lurch forward, it's very hard to go all the way in consecutive years: teams can be very good for a long time (*vide* Whitman, Maracaibo, Brobdingnag, Zion and others), winning pennants or conference championships but not coming away with the big prize.

This is what's in front of the Munich club that dominated TBL in 2016 and won a tough Series against Whitman at the end of it: to get back to the playoffs, certainly, and then take this team – personnel-wise very similar to last year's, other than the obvious addition of Jake Arrieta, but nowhere near as dominant – all the way back to the World Series. In Paul Montague's hands it could happen. Unlike last year, though, there are more and stronger challengers getting in the way.

Pitching: **11.0**
Not last year's, but still solid.

It is a characteristic of powerful Munich teams that there are good starters, usually with an ace, and a very deep bullpen with multiple closer grades. This year is no exception, though the rotation past the first few is weaker than one would expect.

ROTATION. Not the surreal card from last year, Jake Arrieta is still very much an ace (Grade 16 C-24 HR+25, 31 starts). There are few teams that have such a top

flight starter. For half a season he has a very good number two: Yu Darvish (Grade 13 HR+13). The real second starter is Jake DeGrom (Grade 11 C+23 HR+15); these two have 41 starts between them, so the top end is a little short of half a season.

The rest of the starts are significantly more pedestrian. Francisco Liriano (Grade 9 lefty, C-46 HR-15) and Zack Greinke (Grade 7 righty, C+24 HR-14), especially Greinke, are significantly reduced from their 2016 editions. But that still leaves a full rotation spot (34 starts) left over, to be filled by Ryan Vogelsong (Grade 8 C-35) and, mostly, Edinson Volquez (Grade 4 C-22 HR+16). Those are hardly grades that one would expect of a contender. Fortunately, there are relievers to rescue everyone.

BULLPEN. The rescue is led by three (well, two and a half) closer grades and one and a half very helpful supporters. The top grade in the bullpen

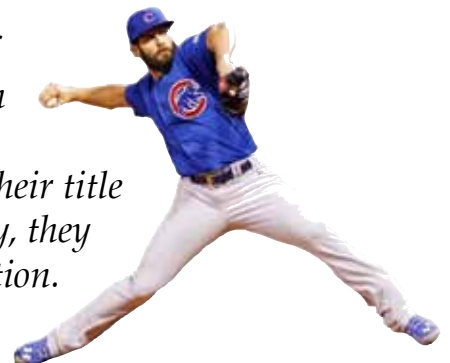
Turnover Rate: 23%

Arrived: Jake Arrieta; Luis Avilan; Andrew Bailey; Arquimedes Caminero; Zack Godley; Jon Jay; Tyler Thornburg; Ryan Vogelsong.

Departed: Brett Cecil; Jason Frasor; Jaime Garcia; Brett Lawrie; Huston Street; Drew VerHagen; Stephen Vogt; Adam Warren.

SNT: Jake Arrieta.

During the Riverwoolf disintegration, Munich had the opportunity to acquire an ace to lead their title defense. Needless to say, they jumped without hesitation.





munich MARAUDERS

belongs to lefty strikeout artist Andrew Miller (Grade 24* C+42). He has a righty sidekick: Tyler Thornburg (Grade 22* C-23 HR-22). The third closer grade is another lefty with very few innings: Javier Lopez (Grade 18* C-62 HR+15). The two helpers, both Grade 17*s, are Luis Avilan (HR+62) and Trevor Cahill (C-45 HR+15). This is not quite the 2016 group, but it's pretty solid.

There are bulk innings beyond this quintet. Darren O'Day (Grade 14* C-16 HR-16), Hector Rondon (Grade 12* C+36 HR-23), Brad Ziegler (Grade 12* C+15 HR+54), Arquimedes Caminero (Grade 9* C-46 HR+16), Zack Godley (Grade 9* C+21 HR-22) and Andrew Bailey (Grade 7* C-22 HR-16) provide more than 300 additional innings, and will be particularly useful in helping out the lower-grade starters.



Miller: Strikeout artist

Both the rotation and the bullpen have the interesting characteristic that they include names that were on the roster last year and were much better then. They're still here, but not what they were. There is no question that the pitching staff is well above average and good enough to keep the team in contention. But the roster is a result of what they had in 2016, including in-season

acquisitions. Similarly the team will largely take this roster through the season and into the playoffs. This is last year's club in this year's clothing.

Offense: 9.5
Should not be underestimated.

There are some big bats in the Munich lineup. They are led by Miguel Cabrera (11 hits,

4 walks+22, 1-0-0-0). Jose Altuve has improved power, and might have an even better card than last year (12 hits, 3 walks+22, 3 3Is, 1-0-0-0, 29 SBA for 44 SBA). Anthony Rizzo (10 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-5-5-6, L-6 R+1) has a very dangerous card. These three play every day.



Cabrera: Big bat

The infield behind them has decent bats. Martin Prado (11 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, L+14 R-5) will get lots of time at third, with utilityman Andres Blanco (9 hits, 2 walks+22+42, 4 0s, L-5) taking his place when the platoon split becomes onerous. At shortstop, Andrelton Simmons is just fine (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, 35 SSN for 13 SBA). Behind the plate Yasmani Grandal (8 hits, 5 walks, 1-1-6) has power and walks at least.

The outfield is adequate, but not as strong as during the championship year. Adam Eaton (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 3 0s, 29 SSN for 21 SBA), Jon Jay (10 hits, 2 walks+42, 3 0s) and Ben Zobrist (9 hits, 5 walks, 1-6-6) are decent everyday players, but Jose Bautista (8 hits, 6 walks, 1-5-6, L-5), while he gets on base, can't run and lacks the devastating power of previous years.

This is a good offense, with some flexibility and options for the manager, and should not be underestimated.

Defense: 6.5
Very strong.

Munich is very strong on defense, particularly in the infield. Anthony Rizzo (1B5), Jose Altuve (2B8) and Andrelton Simmons (SS9) are Fielding



2016 TBL Champion Munich is still enjoying the offseason, rubber chicken circuit, but there is still plenty left in the tank for 2017. 100+ wins, a Mantle Division crown and a deep playoff run seem all but guaranteed. No pressure, Monty!

One, as is Yasmani Grandal (C8, with a Th-1); Martin Maldonado (C8, Th+3) can replace him. Third base is adequate when manned by Martin Prado (3B4) but Andres Blanco is a 3B3; like Ben Zobrist, his best position is one he will rarely occupy (he's rated 1B4; Zobrist is a 2B8).



Altuve: Fielding One

In the outfield, Adam Eaton is the best of the regulars (OF3, 32 arm); Jose Bautista, Zobrist, and Jon Jay are all OF2s with decent arms. There are replacements on the bench: Jason Heyward (OF3, 33 arm) and Carlos Gomez (OF3, 37 arm) will trot in when the team leads.

Bench: 2.0
Not as much help as they'd like.

There are some missing games and at-bats, so the bench is lighter than desired. Martin Maldonado is the backup catcher with a good glove and arm but not much bat (7 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-6). Jason Heyward has a disappointing card representing a disappointing season (8 hits, 3 walks, 28 SSN for 17 SBA, 3 0s). The same can be said of Carlos Gomez (8 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-6-6, 30 SSN for 26 SBA). They'll both see more action as pinch-runners and defensive replacements.

2nd We are throwing small darts at a large target by complaining at Munich's shortcomings. They're better than most teams in TBL, and there is no question that they'll win 90-95 games at a minimum. Arrieta and the top of the bullpen will be used to their greatest extent; Rizzo, Cabrera, Altuve, and the other good bats will perform admirably. The 2016 team set a pretty high bar, though: this is not a 120-win or even a 110-win team. If they can overcome Hudson they can win the pennant. The rest is speculation.



munich:
Realignment

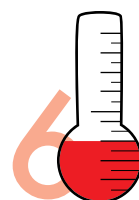


As noted in the Hudson article, Munich has been in the Mantle since the dawn of time. They have won 100 or more games 11 times; they have won 10 divisional pennants, reached the playoffs 14 times, and won three of six World Series (including 2016, of course).

There are numerous years of poor performance as well, including nine years of 100 losses. About fifteen years ago they entered a Stygian period of rebuild, with four straight 100-loss seasons and last-place finishes, including a disastrous 37-125 campaign that looked like it might break the all-time loss record (34-128). The success of recent years is in part due to those years' drafts.

Another Munich campaign in the Mantle is made easier by the absence of Melrose and Zion, gone to other divisions, and the arrival of Detroit and Columbus. If anything, Munich benefits from divisional and conference matchups, and Mr. Montague might be the best in game manager in TBL and will certainly take advantage of it. This club, not overpowering, is unquestionably going to have to make sure these matchups are successful for the Munich boys. We think the pennant race will be exciting right up until the end.

TQ: 29.5



munich MARAUDERS

2016 detroit STARS in review

No one would have questioned the fans staying home and watching reruns of Let's Make A Deal.

by Dave Jaskot



2016 in Review

Final Record: 52-110 (4th, Ruth)

Detroit was able to finish the season without their fans totally abandoning them as what often happens in several cities throughout the league. "We are not quitters" was a phrase heard throughout the clubhouse and it seemed to have resonated into the fan base although based on their 25-56 home record no one would have questioned the fans staying home and watching reruns of Let's Make A Deal.

What went right?

Very little went very well in 2016 but in a heavy rebuilding year, just being able to field a team felt like an accomplishment. The Stars finished with a weak 52-110 record, 12 games worse than the previous season. Only the Mongrels finished with a worse record in TBL. Youngster and converted reliever Anthony DeSclafani headlined the pitching staff with 12 of the team's 52 wins while eating up almost 200 innings. Reliever Blaine Boyer was second on the team with 8 wins which says a lot about Detroit's starting staff in 2016. Fernando Salas led the team in ERA with a 2.14 over 63 innings of relief with Boyer (2.54) next over his 63+ relief innings. Trevor Gott led the staff with a mere 13 saves.

The offense produced only 594 runs. Hitters did smack 161 HR led by rising star Yoenis Cespedes with 35. Six other hit home runs in the double digits. The team finished with a .220/.290/.368 line. Team MVP and batting average leader was Mr. Cespedes at .290 and rookie Ketel Marte also put up a .290 average over his 56 games. Cespedes led the team in slugging at .576 and RBI with 90.

What went wrong?

Although 2016 was a miserable season, it was foreseen, and nothing really went worse than expected in the Motor City. Age and youth contributed equally to the season of rebuilding.

Statistically Detroit's poor infield defense led to 127 errors and 103 unearned runs. The team also hit into 88 double plays. The Stars also struck out 1,494 times compared 502 bases on balls. The Detroit starters combined for a 34-91 won-loss

record for the year. Tyler Greene lost 20 himself while winning only 2. The team batting average was a poor .220 and their low OB% came in at a low .290.



Cespedes: Team MVP

FUTURE KEYS. 2017 will be a better year for Detroit with an assembly line full of newly drafted players hoping to make a positive effect for 2017 and beyond. A better than .500 season is not out of the question.

Newly acquired sluggers Gary Sanchez and Ryon Healy will contribute their bats for less than half a season each. They will join outfielders Yoenis Cespedes and Will Myers and infielder Devon Travis to build upon in future seasons.

Starting pitchers will be key in the future if any of the young acquisitions will be able to put up good numbers to be effective beyond 2017. These include Tanner Roark, Anthony DeSclafani and newly acquired Julio Urias and Ariel Miranda. Fielding better relief pitching will also be attempted.

detroit STARS

Dave Jaskot (6th year)

There are better seasons yet to come.



This is year six for the Detroit franchise. It has been an interesting ride: a year of dealing with what the Zen Master left him, two years of 90+ wins and contention, and two years of recovering from 90+ wins and contention.

There was Not Much, then there was Go Get Some, and then there was This Isn't Working, and now there's a younger and more talented club. Devon Travis, Wil Myers, Ryon Healy, Gary Sanchez, Derek Law, Anthony DeSclafani, Julio Urias (can he buy beer in Massachusetts? *I think not*) – these are what solid teams are made of.

We will wait and see where Mr. Jaskot takes this, but there's reason to be optimistic. The *Annual* sees brighter days ahead.

Pitching: **9.0**
An admirable improvement.

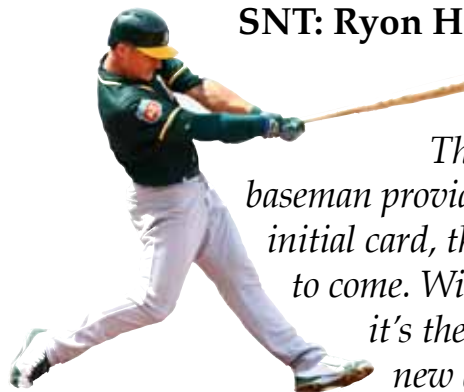
We were, shall we say, disparaging about the pitching staff in this space last year. That is no longer applicable; the Stars have brought in some talent that will keep them in games all year. It's not quite contending quality, but it is quite an admirable improvement.



Roark: Solid

ROTATION. The top starter is very solid: Tanner Roark (Grade 14 HR+25) has 33 good starts and certainly qualify him as a staff ace. He was no doubt sought after during the offseason. He's joined by ten starts of fun from rookie lefty Ariel Miranda (Grade 13 HR-34), who steals 8s but may have trouble on windy days in Detroit.

SNT: Ryon Healy.



The rookie third baseman provides a very nice initial card, the first of many to come. With Gary Sanchez, it's the beginning of a new day in Detroit.

Turnover Rate: 37%

Arrived: Dan Altavilla; Steve Cishek; Daniel Descalso; Ryan Dull; Nick Franklin; Ryon Healy; Derek Law; Mikie Mahtook; Ariel Miranda; Ross Ohlendorf; Colby Rasmus; Gary Sanchez; Julio Urias.

Departed: Austin Adams; Blaine Boyer; A.J. Ellis; Robbie Erlin; Anthony Gose; Trevor Gott; Chris Hatcher; T.J. House; Will Middlebrooks; Hector Olivera; Mike Pelfrey; Chris Taylor; Ryan Zimmerman.

The grades after that are not stellar, but, again, solid: there are 20 starts of Anthony DeSclafani (Grade 10 C+25), 23 of Miguel Gonzalez (Grade 9 C+21 HR+32), a full season of Chase Anderson (Grade 8 HR-25), and 15 starts of lefty prodigy Julio Urias (Grade 9 C-23 HR+36). The balance – a full season – must be filled by Chad Bettis (Grade 5 C+15), but better teams have had worse bottom starters.

BULLPEN. It should be noted that the *Annual* offered some criticism a while back about the lack of interest in a relief staff. That appears to have changed: Detroit has brought in a whole lot of bullpen, including a very good top end. They will get lots of work this season.



detroit STARS

The new closer in town came through an off-season trade: Steve Cishek (Grade 17*). He'll have a little help from Adam Ottavino (Grade 17* C+16). They have about 90 innings between them.

The setup crew is helpful: rookies Ryan Dull (Grade 17* C+36) and Derek Law (Grade 15* C+35 HR+41) and veteran Carlos Torres (Grade 15* HR+21) have more than 200 innings.

The rest of the bullpen is a little less reliable, but will be put to use when the team is behind. Fernando Salas (Grade 11* C+21 HR-22), the flammable Ross Ohlendorf (Grade 10* C-41 HR-34), J.

C. Ramirez (Grade 8* C+22 HR-14) and the epitome of 'mop', Shane Greene (Grade 5* C-14 HR+45) will get lots of opportunities to pitch.

This is a good bullpen, though it lacks a lefty. It will, however, keep the team in most games, and get them through the games that they get blown out.

Offense:
Powerful, sometimes.

8.5

As in previous years, the best card in the envelope belongs to Yoenis Cespedes (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-6-6, L+9 R-4). He'll be in the middle of as many lineups as he can manage (132 games). This year he has help, at least part of the time. Rookie Ryon Healy has a great half season (12 hits, no shift, 1-5-5-6); rookie Gary Sanchez has a terrific third of a season (10 hits, 4 walks+22, 1-1-0-0-0). Devon Travis is great, but misses about 60 games (11 hits, 2 walks, 4 0s, L-10 R+1) – he'll sit against board lefties. Brandon Moss has what we usually call "isolated power" (8 hits, 3 walks+22, but 1-1-0-0).



Cishek: New closer

Wil Myers is the best of the rest (9 hits, 5 walks+22, 1-5-6, 32 SSN for 34 SBA); he'll play every day. Nick Franklin (10 hits, 2 walks+22, 1-6-6, 33 SSN), Danny Valencia (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0, L+4 R-3) and Daniel Descalso (9 hits, 4 walks, 1-6-6) fit into various lineups.

Some of the better cards miss significant time, so there will be other part-timers filling in games and using up at-bats. Michael Taylor (9 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0, L+3 R-4, 32 SSN for 17 SBA) and Michael Bourn (9 hits, 3 walks, L+6 R-3, 29 SSN for 20 SBA) will occupy the outfield; Cliff Pennington (8 hits, 3 walks, 2 0s, L-8 R+1 but no shift on the computer) is the alternative when Travis does not play; Danny Espinosa (7 hits, 3 walks+22+42, 1-5, 31 SSN for 11 SBA) provides an entire season of futility at shortstop; and Jose Lobaton (8 hits, 4 walks, 3 0s) and Tyler Flowers (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 3 0s) have catching duties when Sanchez is unavailable.

There are two approaches for a roster like this. One is to make sure there's always some threat in the lineup, dispersing the part-timers over the course of the season where they'll do the most good. The other choice is to rest the part timers, or keep them

in the minors, when the opponent is poor (or very good) and putting together a powerful lineup – sometimes. It will be instructive to see which choice Mr. Jaskot employs.

Defense:
Not a key feature.

3.5

The Detroit defense has some high points. Cespedes is outstanding (OF3, 37 arm); Wil Myers is also Fielding One (1B5) though he'll be used primarily in the outfield, giving first base over to Nick Franklin and Brandon Moss (1B3). Travis is a 2B7, Pennington a 2B8; Espinosa and Descalso are both SS8s. Healy and



Cespedes: Best card

Valencia are both 3B3s, with no help on the roster. Behind the plate, Gary Sanchez has some talent (C7 Th+4); Jose Lobaton (C8 Th+1) is a Fielding One catcher, but has very little usage; Tyler Flowers (C7 Th-4) does not make up for his weak bat with capable defense, but will play a lot.



Sanchez: Talent

The outfield is capably manned, with Michael Taylor (OF3, 34 arm) and Colby Rasmus (OF3, 35 arm) providing Fielding One defense. Michael Bourn (OF2, 32 arm) and Wil Myers (OF2, 33 arm) are certainly useful.

Still, defense is not a key feature of Mr. Jaskot's team. They should be better next year, though.

Bench:
Versatile.

3.0

For a team ostensibly still rebuilding, the club has a versatile bench. There are a number of outfielders and infielders that can be mixed and matched. Everyone has something to do, with greater or lesser facility. In addition to those listed above, the bench features a few extra players: Colby Rasmus (OF3, but 7 hits, 4 walks, 1-5); Ketel Marte (SS7, 10 hits, 6-6, 27 SSN for 16 SBA); and Mikie Mahtook (8 hits, 3 0s), who's really here to drive the team bus.

3rd They are far better than last year, with pitching and power. What they lack is strong defense and more on-base percentage. Healy and Travis have 12 and 11 hits for part of a season but there are no other cards with more than 10. This is a feature of a young team, so in a way it's a good sign. What is true is that the cliff is now far away. At the *Annual* we are pleased to report this fact. Mr. Jaskot has earned it.



detroit:
Realignment



detroit STARS

Through six other identities, and for the entire time of the franchise in Detroit, this club has been in the Ruth Division. For many of those years, the team currently known as the Detroit Stars have been looking up at the intermittent juggernaut of Brobdingnag; in years they were good, they were dominant, an obstacle to contention; when they were bad, they snatched top draft positions, making it difficult for other franchises to acquire those key players. Now, at least, the first problem is ameliorated by this team leaving the Ruth after 25 years and coming to the Mantle.

This isn't all good news, however. Munich and Hudson are formidable, and Mr. Jaskot's old friend Mr. Vaughn has come along and is moving toward respectability as well. In order to compete in *this* division, they'll have to match wits with some very good managers. This isn't the year for contention, unless things break very badly for the top clubs, or Detroit makes a major move in the fall. But there are better seasons yet to come, and the realignment should be overall considered a win.



The Stars' 52-110 record from 2016 was, hopefully, the bottom of their fall and that 2017 will be the 1st step upward. Will Myers turned into a nice surprise at 1B. There is good young talent here that should only improve.

TQ: 24.0



2016 columbus JETS in review

Rolling the dice when Columbus is at bat should be more enjoyable in 2017.

by Vic Vaughn



2016 in Review

Final Record: 64-98 (4th, Clemente)

The Jets' faithful didn't have much to cheer about in 2016 as the team finished last in the Clemente Division for the second straight year. We stumbled out of the starting gate finishing April with a 7-12 record and never got any traction the rest of the way. After eleven years in the Clemente, the league realignment placed us in the Mantle Division where we'll try our luck in 2017.

What went right?

The lone bright spot was second baseman Jason Kipnis who led the International Conference with a .325 batting average. There weren't any other offensive standouts: no one reached 20 home runs (Jay Bruce had 18) or 90 RBI (the best Yangervis in the league led the team with a pedestrian 89). On the pitching side, the bullpen performed acceptably and was led by Miguel Socolovich's 19 saves and 1.57 ERA.



Kipnis: Bright spot

What went wrong?

A team that compiles a 64-98 season will have its share of disappointing performances and that was the case here. Brett Anderson compiled a 6-19 record with a 5.16 ERA. Jason Castro managed to hit a paltry .135 in 347 at bats and Mike Napoli wasn't far behind with a .169 average in 414 at bats.

In fact, the team underachieved all season. Based on our runs scored versus runs allowed we should have won 71 games instead of the 64 games we actually won. A team batting average

of .235, and sub-.700 OPS reflected the offense's ineptitude. The pitching staff didn't provide much help ending the season with a 4.29 ERA.

3 Things

1. *Drafting Starting Pitching.* We did not enter the 2017 draft intending to load up on starting pitching. However, as the draft unfolded that's the way it turned out with Michael Fulmer, Sean Manaea, and Vincent Velasquez finding their way onto the Jets' roster within the first 29 picks. They'll join Tanaka, Porcello, Leake, and Boyd as the nucleus of the Jets' rotation for the foreseeable future.

2. *Joey the Jet.* We needed to add more offense (see "what went wrong") so when Joey Votto (a personal favorite of Jets management) and a first round pick became available we jumped at the opportunity. The price was steep, as we'll miss the youth and potential of Messrs. Schwarber and Salazar, but rolling the dice when Columbus is at bat should be more enjoyable in 2017.

3. *Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire.* After ten years in the Clemente Division, we find ourselves in the Mantle Division battling it out with the defending TBL Champion Munich Marauders and formidable Hudson and Detroit squads. Overall we think our offense and starting pitching has improved, but the bullpen has regressed so the road won't be any easier this year.

columbus JETS

Vic Vaughn (11th year)

This might be the best fourth-place team in TBL.



It is a tiresome and oft-repeated remark in these pages that losing basically sucks. Sometimes a team will unbuild for a purpose: to achieve high position in the subsequent draft, to get younger, to cash in on older players' cards while they still have value . . . as a conscious effort, it makes sense. Success in TBL can be ephemeral, and in this scenario failure can be a passing thing as well.

The problem comes when losing becomes endemic, a fact of life, a part of the team psyche. There are teams that have not won in a long time, and there are teams whose success has been modest, and fleeting, and paid for in subsequent seasons: this is an accurate depiction of the Columbus Jets' experience. We are past comparing them to their predecessor and will not do so here, but they haven't won a division championship since just after they moved to Columbus and have only reached the post-season twice during all of the time in Columbus. It's time that was over. We don't think they'll contend this year, but there is a real core on board that will make this a contender in the future.

Because, you know, *losing sucks*.

Except for the Guru, no one builds their team's pitch-

Pitching: 8.5
Rotation admirable; bullpen less so.

ing staff first – unless that's what happens to come in the draft. It arrived this year, a good one to acquire hurlers, and that makes this a much more appealing part of the team than the 2016 edition.

ROTATION. The starting staff is led by a new young ace, just turned 24: Michael Fulmer (Grade 13 C+16 HR+22). He was a big prize in the first round of the 2017 draft. He joins Masahiro Tanaka (Grade 12 C+33 HR+15), who for two years (it has been feared) would have his arm fall off, and the surprise AL Cy Young winner Rick Porcello (Grade 12 C+41

HR+21). This trio makes 90 very good starts between them.

Added to this group are three young draftees, all young: Sean Manaea (Grade 10 C+21) and Matt Boyd (Grade 8 HR-21) from the left side and Vince Velasquez (Grade 9 HR-21) from the right. That's another sixty-plus starts from these three. Aaron Nola (Grade 5) only has to go to the mound a handful of times.



Fulmer: New ace

This is a good rotation, and will help carry the team deep into most games.

BULLPEN. This part of the pitching staff leaves a

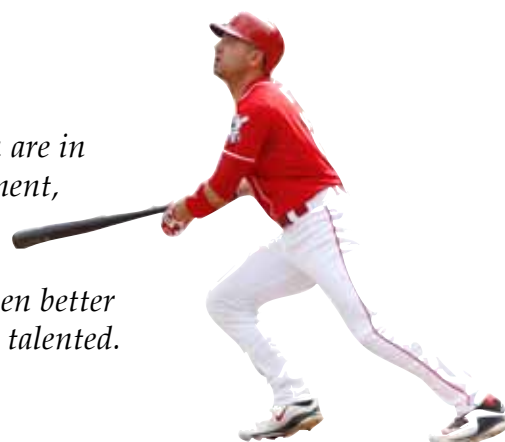
Turnover Rate: 43%

Arrived: Tucker Barnhart; Michael Brantley; Chase D'Arnaud; Michael Fulmer; Deolis Guerra; Brandon Kintzler; Aaron Loup; Sean Manaea; Dustin McGowan; Peter Moylan; Taylor Rogers; Ryan Rua; Bryan Shaw; Vince Velasquez; Joey Votto.

Departed: Burke Badenhop; Chris Coghlan; Casey Fien; Doug Fister; Carlos Frias; Charlie Furbush; Josh Hamilton; Mark Lowe; Daniel Nava; Williams Perez; Ryan Raburn; Sean Rodriguez; Danny Salazar; Kyle Schwarber; Michael Socolovich.

SNT: Joey Votto.

No matter where you are in your team's development, acquiring a favorite player is always a good feeling. It's even better when the guy is very talented.





columbus JETS

little more to be desired. Closing duties fall to Dustin McGowan (Grade 16* C-25 HR+14, 67 innings). It's not quite good enough and he'll have to be used sparingly in save situations. His two close helpers are Bryan Shaw (Grade 14* C-24) and David Robertson (Grade 13* C-42 HR+24); their 129 innings are also too few to protect leads in enough games. The solid starting staff will need to go deep into games to preserve what strong bullpen there is.

The middle relievers are a hodge-podge of grades and peripherals, mostly right handed. Peter Moylan (Grade 11* C-15 HR+26) and rookie Deolis Guerra (Grade 10* C+43 HR+15) are the best grades; there are also Brandon Kintzler (Grade 9* C+43 HR+25) and David Hernandez (Grade 9* C-14 HR-15).

The lefty relief is confined to rookie Taylor Rogers (Grade 8* C+26 HR+16) and a few innings from Aaron Loup (Grade 6* C+15). That's 300 innings altogether; Grade 4s Michael Leake and Daniel Hudson will carry the mop when necessary.

It's not a terrible bullpen, but any chance for a successful campaign probably requires a few more solid arms to support the capable starting rotation.

The new sheriff in town is the Guy He Wanted: SNT

Offense: 7.5
Some dangerous parts.

Joey Voto (11 hits, 5 walks+22, 1-0-0-0, L-6 R+1, 34 SSN for 9 SBA). He fits into a nice middle of the order, which also includes Jason Kipnis (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, 32 SSN for 18 SBA), The Best Yangervis in Baseball (Solarte; 10 hits, 2 walks+22, 1-0-0-0), Elvis Andrus (11 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, 29 SSN for 32 SBA, L+4 R-3), and a mildly recovered Jay Bruce (9 hits, 2 walks, 1-1-4-6, L-7 R+1). That is a nice set of players to run out every day (or, in Solarte's case, two days out of three).

The next tier consists of five useful players. Kevin



Solarte: Best Yangervis

Kiermaier (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-6-6, 34 SSN for 24 SBA) has two-thirds of a season; Adonis Garcia (10 hits, 3 0s) will help out at third base; Mike Napoli does what he does and doesn't do other stuff (8 hits, 4 walks, 1-5-5); and Domingo Santana (9 hits, 4 walks+22, 1-5-6, L+6 R-5) will be good against lefties on the boards. Rookie Ryan Rua (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-6, 35 SSN for 9 SBA) is a helpful spare part.

The only real blank spot is behind the plate. Jason Castro (7 hits, 4 walks, 1-4-6, L-11 R+2) and Tucker Barnhart (9 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, L-9 R+1) are not exactly a platoon, but do have enough games between them that they can be pinch-hit for.

The lineup has some very dangerous parts, but there will be some empty innings as well. Still, it's a vast improvement over last year.

The Columbus club touches Fielding One in only

Defense: 3.5
Largely average.

three places: Jason Kipnis is a 2B8; Jason Castro is a C8 (with a Th-1); and Kevin Kiermaier (OF3, 37 arm) is a serious defender, one of the best outfielders in baseball. Additionally, Jay Bruce is an OF2 with a superior arm (36), a very helpful addition.

The rest of the lineup is Fielding Two or less. In the infield, both Joey Votto and Mike Napoli are 1B3s, Elvis Andrus remains an SS8, and Yangervis Solarte a 3B4. Adonis Garcia is a 3B3, though the waivers have supplied Columbus with a defensive sub in Chase D'Arnaud (3B4). Tucker Barnhart is dead average (C7 Th-0).



Kiermaier: Serious

The remaining outfielders, Ryan Rua and Domingo Santana, are both OF2s with adequate arms. Overall, this is largely average.



The Jets' rotation is the envy of TBL! 114 starts of double grade starts. Too bad there's no back end to the bullpen and the defense is subpar. They should still improve on last year's performance.

Bench: Not enough here.

2.0

The absence of some games in some places means that most of the regulars and part-timers have already been described above. The only extra player is Chase D'Arnaud (9 hits, 3 walks, 29 SSN for 12 SBA), rated in the infield (3B4 SS8 2B7) and will be available for defense and to pinch-run.

There isn't enough here to make much of an impact on the team's success.

4th

This might be the best fourth-place team in TBL. It's hard to predict a last position for a team that puts Fulmer, Tanaka and Porcello out there for half the season; or for a team that has Joey Votto, Jason Kipnis, Jay Bruce and Kevin Kiermaier in the everyday lineup. On the face of it, there is an emotional response that suggests that they should finish much higher than we indicate.

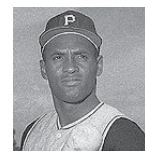
We don't completely disagree; it is obvious that over the course of a season momentum, strong starting pitching, and the individual performances of star players can make more difference than our soulless metrics can describe. This happens in real life as well: how else to account for the numerous "under-talented" teams that made their way to the playoffs and World Series? If we played the game on paper, we could all go to the bar and let Brobdingnag and Grand Cayman duke it out.

That's not how it works, of course, and we play the games – *all* the games – for the chance to supplant teams that might have better TQs than ours, better pitching staffs, better lineups, deeper benches. But it doesn't get rid of those disparities. Pragmatism must prevail; hope (and good dice) will occasionally, but not often, prevail in the face of those TQs, those staffs, those lineups, those benches.

Still, the natural variance over the season could yield a .500 record for this team in 2017. We think they'll fall short – but in any case, it will be far better than the last few seasons, with better days ahead.



columbus: Realignment



The long time residence in the Clemente Division, like Mr. Vaughn's colleague's residence in the Ruth, has been largely defined by the presence of one dominant opponent. For Columbus, that rival has been the Whitman River Rats. That club has largely owned the Clemente, and the Jets no longer need worry about them.

Being placed in the Clemente is not quite a walk in the park, though. Munich is the defending champion; Hudson is very good (and we at the *Annual* think they will win a tough pennant race) and Detroit doesn't have enough, but actually has quite a lot. There are no easy paths to the playoffs – at least this year. In the short run that probably makes realignment a draw for Columbus.

columbus JETS

Players born after 1990 (7): Barnhart, Boyd, Fulmer, Manaea, Nola, D. Santana, Velasquez.

Players born from 1987 to 1990 (16): Andrus, Bruce, J. Castro, D'Arnaud, D. Guerra, D. Hudson, Kiermaier, Kipnis, Leake, Loup, Porcello, T. Rogers, Rua, B. Shaw, Solarte, Tanaka.

TQ: **21.5**



Dogfight, Old School

We should probably just go ahead and blame Trader Jack for all this. After he went ahead and earned his nickname, he let loose the No-DH Old School Baseball Controversy, leading to the creation of a primarily NL Rules Division, leading to realignment. Thus we have the Williams Division, which has four teams none of which were here last year.



The top performer here is *Mark Bloom's Grand Cayman Havens*, possibly the best team in TBL this year. They've got the line-up and the pitching

and veteran management. The only thing left to do is to bring home the pennant.

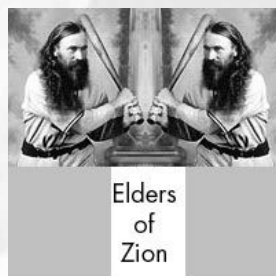
If there was a team that had cause for complaint at the whole realignment thing, it might be the *Northboro Phoenix*. The *Jordan and Stein* team has put together their best club in years; and next thing you know they're in the Williams Division looking up at Boomer and down at the Sensei. Still, there should be a playoff spot waiting for them.



2016 Williams Division Final Standings

Team	W	L	Pct	GB
Las Vegas*	99	63	.611	—
Taylorville	94	68	.580	5
Knoxville	78	84	.481	21
Midwest	48	114	.296	51

* Lost to Maracaibo in the NC playoffs.



Which brings us to *Rich Meyer's Elders of Zion*. It seems like forever since the 2014 World Series: the two years of wins in the sixties was a tough pill. But that's

over. There's lots of new talent, and it's only getting better. Could they make it to the playoffs? Maybe, but this is the good conference. They shouldn't be able to catch the Cayman boys, but there'll be lots of good baseball nonetheless.

Who doesn't like a good game of boom and bust?

Certainly *Jack Chapman*

seems fond of it. 2015 was all about the unlikely rise and exciting victory of the *Warren-*

ton Giants in the TBL World Series. The following year – last year – was a slide, and this year is full-on bust. They have an ace, a closer, and . . . well . . . it'll be a really fine #1 and #2 pick in 2018. That's where the new boom cycle might begin.





Williams Division

Brian Dozier,
Grand Cayman

1. Grand Cayman	37.0
2. Northboro	30.0
3. Zion	27.5
4. Warrenton	16.5

2016 grand cayman HAVENS in review



2016 was a purposeful step sideways.

by Mark Bloom

2016 in Review

Final Record: 74-88 (3rd, Mays)

At the end of August, the Havens were 49-51, which may sound mediocre, but the team held a 3-game lead as the second Wild Card in the woefully inept International Conference. That prompted GM Boomer Wells to trade for Michael Bolsinger, Melky Cabrera, and C.J. Wilson. Even though the price for these players was relatively low, the gambit didn't pay off, as the team went 25-37 the rest of the way, sinking to third place in the Mays Division and 12 games out of the playoff picture.

What went right?

Edwin Encarnacion once again led the team in homers (33) and walks (76), but 2016 was the coming-out party for Kyle Seager, who hit .274 with 25 dingers. Gregory Polanco stole 19 bases, and Wade Davis saved 32 games. Julio Teheran won a team-high 11 games, striking out 191 in the process.



Seager: Coming out

3 Things

1. *Waiting it out.* 2016 was a purposeful step sideways. With so many injuries and limited usage, the goal was to get younger, fill holes and wait for things to come together. Bartolo Colon was an elderly exception, but he filled many starts, allowing the team some flexibility in the draft. In the final analysis, with the right deals and picks, the team might have had enough to complete. But there were enough

holes that we probably wouldn't have gone very far in the playoffs even if we'd made it.

2. *Pulling the trigger in the offseason.* During the recent offseason, GM Boomer Wells made a series of calculated moves, trading away many of the blue-chip youth acquired recently for veterans who were ready now. As the result, the team is older — on average about 30 years old — but they're poised to win *now*. The good news is that

only the 2018 #1 has been traded, so there'll be help next year.

3. *Trading the ninth pick in the draft.* There were many possibilities for addressing the team's problems for the coming season. One idea was to get a 2B to pair with suddenly LHP-smacking Neil Walker. Another idea was to do away with the problem altogether. And so a deal was struck with Knoxville for Brian Dozier and Danny Duffy. Problem solved. And it was only possible by including pick #9 in the draft.

What went wrong?

The team hit only .240, so clutch hits were missing in action. Many players underperformed. Neither catcher (Gattis or Avila) hit his weight, and the Gattis experiment at catcher ended with 14 passed balls and 24 errors, which led the team. In fact, the Havens once again led the league in errors with 167, despite a 3B5 and an SS9.

grand cayman HAVENS

Mark Bloom (27th year)

Watch and see.



The time has come. It has been a while coming.

The franchise down in Grand Cayman won 102 games two years ago, and 109 games eight years ago; each of those outstanding seasons – which are surrounded, during years in Lewiston-Auburn and years out in the Caribbean, with a lot of bad years and mediocre years that also went nowhere or, on occasion, partway into the playoffs. Unlike the teams that have had difficulty finding their way to success, this club has had some – but not continual – success. In some ways that's more frustrating. But this year they may have built a team that has lasting talent. This year's version is built on some very fine players, and this year's team may only be the first of a series of contenders. Watch and see.

Pitching: **15.0**
Obviously a fine pitching staff.

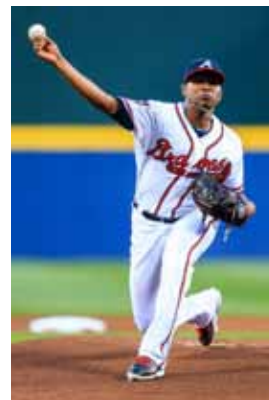
ROTATION. It begins with the ace. Jon Lester (Grade 16 C+16 HR+13) is a full season of top-rotation goodness. He joins last year's leader, Julio Teheran (Grade 13 C+26), and the hard-throwing lefty Danny Duffy (Grade 11 C+23 HR-14) and the resurgent Jeremy Hellickson (Grade 10 C+23). That takes care of three quarters of the needed starts for the season.

SNT: Jon Lester.

The long-time ace of the Melrose Avengers joins the Grand Cayman Havens to serve in the same role. Nice catch.



The remaining starts belong to two less imposing pitchers: Colin Rea (Grade 7 C-21) and Bud Norris (Grade 6 C-23). A few Vance Worley starts as a Grade 11 wraps up the rotation. These are by no means bad, but they don't quite match the #1 and #2.



Teheran: He's #2

BULLPEN. The new closer is Dan Otero (Grade 18* C+42 HR+54), who is everything you want a closer to be. He's not last year's Wade Davis; but neither is this year's Wade Davis (Grade 18* C-24 HR+62) – still, he's pretty awesome (0 HR in 43 innings). There's also the wild and wonderful Kyle Barraclough (Grade 19* C-62 HR+62). Together, the three closer grades add up to 187 innings.

The next tier consists of yet more reliever goodness. Hector Neris (Grade 16* C-13); Dan Jennings (Grade 15* C-43 HR+62); rookie Mauricio Cabrera (Grade 15* C-44 HR+62); and veteran Sean Doolittle (Grade 13* C+35 HR-16) provide almost 220 more innings; they have some wild control ratings, but they steal a lot of homers.

Turnover Rate: 34%

Arrived: Mauricio Cabrera; Brian Dozier; Danny Duffy; Jedd Gyorko; Jeremy Hellickson; Chris Hatcher; James Hoyt; Dan Jennings; Jon Lester; Cameron Maybin; Daniel Mengden; Jose Reyes.

Departed: Matt Adams; Mike Bolsinger; Bartolo Colon; Michael Conforto; Justin Grimm; Tommy Hunter; John Lamb; Marcus Semien; Tyler Skaggs; Drew Smyly; Neil Walker; C.J. Wilson.



grand cayman HAVENS

There are more relievers to come, though they are not quite as reliable. Still, we go through 400-plus innings before we reach that point, which is amazing. Jumbo Diaz (Grade 14* C-33 HR-26) returns to soak up innings, along with a few innings from rookie James Hoyt (Grade 13* C-22 HR-41); neither will pitch in high-leverage situations. The same is true of lefties Tony Cingriani (Grade 12* C-62 HR+31), Antonio Bastardo (Grade 10* C-31 HR-21), Keith Hessler (Grade 8* C-42 HR+25) and Kyle Crockett (Grade 6* HR+62); and righties Vance Worley (Grade 11* C-31), Jesse Chavez (Grade 7* C+25 HR-21) and Chris Hatcher (Grade 6* C-25 HR-31). That's about 400 more innings, less Worley's starts; it's tiring just to mention them all. This is enough bullpen for an extra team, and there are teams in TBL who could really use some of these guys.



Otero: New closer

1-1-4-6, 34 SSN for 20 SBA); along with Lester, he was a big off-season acquisition. Like everyone else, we are wondering where this came from, but in the meanwhile it's a great piece of cardboard. That's not all: there's a third card with two 1s – Evan Gattis (9 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-1-0-0), and two more regulars with four power numbers including a 1 – Kyle Seager (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0-0) and Gregory Polanco (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, 29 SSN for 23 SBA). And *that's* not even the end of the offense: Melky Cabrera (11 hits, 3 walks, 4 0s) and Cameron Maybin (11 hits, 3 walks+22, 6-0, 28 SSN for 21 SBA) get on base ahead of the big power hitters. At shortstop, Brandon Crawford (10 hits, 3 walks+22, L-4) even has a caddy: part-time lefty killer Jose Reyes (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-4-6, 31 SSN for 11 SBA).

This is a wonderful offense. It has power, speed, on-base, and no real weakness: there are bats, and bats to use in place of other bats, at every position, and some of the best regular cards in the set. They should score a lot of runs and extend a lot of innings – we expect big numbers from them.



Dozier: Where from?

Defense: 6.0
Fielding One goodness.

Let's start with the infield. Brian Dozier (2B9) was primarily brought in because of that exciting card with two 1s, but he anchors a really good infield. Brandon Crawford (SS9) will play shortstop, though Reyes (SS8) will start against some lefties; and Kyle Seager (3B5) is the everyday guy at third. Edwin Encarnacion (1B3) is only average at first base, and Evan Gattis (C7) is Fielding Two behind the plate, but he'll throw runners out (Th+5 – where did that

Obviously this is a fine pitching staff, and Mr. Bloom will have fun using it to shut down opposing lineups with regularity.

Offense: 13.5
Wonderful.

In previous years, we've begun by speaking of the Big Man, Edwin Encarnacion (9 hits, 4 walks+22, 1-1-6-6), and then drifting down from there. This year, he's not even the best power card in the envelope. That honor belongs to Brian Dozier (10 hits, 3 walks+22,



Encarnacion: Big Man

come from? Perhaps it's better not to ask.) The outfield is pedestrian, all OF2s, though the arms are good (Cabrera 32, Maybin 33, Aoki 35) to excellent (Polanco 37). There are no OF3s on the roster, but that's a quibble.

This is an excellent defensive team, and will benefit from lots of Fielding One goodness.

Bench: **2.5**
Not previously mentioned.

The mixing and matching of starting lineups will include some other folks not previously mentioned. Veteran mainstay Matt Holliday (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-5-6) is still here; Jedd Gyorko (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-1-5) is available to pinch-hit or DH; Nori Aoki (10 hits, 3 walks+42, 3 0s, L-9) will get into some games in the outfield, Travis Jankowski (9 hits, 4 walks, 2 0s, 28 SSN for 42 SBA) is an excellent pinch-hitter, and bearded lady Alex Avila (7 hits, 7 walks, 1-6) is here because you have to carry two catchers.

There's no super-duper hitting toy, but it's hardly needed.

1st There's certainly some competition in the Williams, but this team may be the best in the league and should win a lot of games. We would be shocked if they did not win this pennant and go deep into the playoffs. The pitching staff, the lineup, the stellar infield, and the solid management all point toward a successful season.

The team reminds us here at the *Annual* of those dominant Zion and Munich teams of the distant and recent past – lots of versatility, a player for every situation, deep bullpens and solid defense. Those things are no guarantee, of course, particularly in the post-season; but you make your plans and try to plan for everything and then roll the dice and hope for the best.



grand cayman:
Realignment



grand cayman HAVENS

A long time ago, in and shortly after the Don Mahley Era, this team was in the newly-formed Williams Division, where it met with some regular-season success (but not much past that). It then transferred to the Mays, and has been there during all of the Boomer Era.

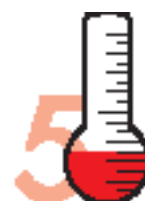
The Mays now has one solid contender, one of the five best teams in the league – New Westminster; and two tough opponents in Maracaibo and Gotham City. Dr. Anton's team and Mr. Bloom's team have been rivals in the Mays for many years, but now they'll only meet for one series a year. Still, moving to the Williams means head-to-head matchups with two other capable teams: Northboro and Zion. Warrenton is not a challenge this year, but it's hard to keep a good Jack down.

Overall, the realignment process is a wash. The Havens would have been good wherever they were placed.



Whitey Bulger's former henchman associate, Boomer Wells, has turned around this moribund franchise and made it into a playoff contender. Now someone needs to talk to Mr. Wells about his habit of shipping out traded players in burlap sacks and car trunks!

TQ: **37.0**



2016 northboro PHOENIX in review



by Steve Stein

We were lucky to finish above .500.

2016 in Review

Final Record: 82-80 (3rd, Aaron)

2017 was the target year. We decided to rebuild after the 2012 season, selling off Raffy Soriano, Ortiz, Werth, Melky, and Kinsler, while guys like Halladay and Rolen retired. We suffered through 2 100+ loss seasons, then 2 average seasons. Only 2 players remain from that 2012 squad. Was it worth it? Will the Phoenix we built have true staying power? Time will tell. (Bob thinks we will win between 70 and 120 games in 2018. I think he's right.)

What went right?

We were lucky to finish above .500 – we gave up more runs than we scored. Jose Abreu performed as well as his rookie 2015 season with a lot lesser card. Joc Pederson hit 33 HR. Corey Kluber was 16-9 with 251 strikeouts. Alex Wilson got 30 saves with a 0.74 WHIP – not bad for a 14. And that was it for the bright spots.

What went wrong?

We just didn't score enough runs. The bottom of the lineup – Hardy at SS and the catcher du jour – was a black hole. Abreu was the only guy to hit more than .255. Kole Calhoun hit .210. Joc Pederson, despite his 33 HRs, hit .190. We did establish a new TBL record for strikeouts (1,569) without any one player reaching 200 – 7 players had more than 100 strikeouts.

3 Things

1. *Figure out what's going on in the infield.* Since Scott Rolen retired in 2013, third base has been a wasteland. Frandsen was a bandage. Cody

Asche flamed out. The current occupant, Jung Ho Kang, can't get into the country because of his drinking and driving problems. At second base, we traded Kinsler to draft Jurickson Profar, who was promptly injured for TWO YEARS. Profar is falling far short of his expected level. We "solved" this by drafting lots of infielders the last couple of years (Diaz, Swanson, La Stella, Dietrich, Spangenberg in addition to Profar). Who will step up?



Kluber: Strikeouts

2. *Figure out what's going on at catcher.*

Chris Iannetta is fading into uselessness. Mike Zunino had a good first year, a horrible second year, and now a fantastic half-a-year. Will he finally thrive at the major league level? As in the infield, we drafted a couple more catchers this year (Herrmann and Recker). We hope to catch a break with one or more of those guys.

3. *Keep the pitching together.* We lucked out with Kluber and Garrett Richards, who were chosen in later rounds and blossomed into aces. (We'll see if Richards' elbow survives the non-TJ treatment he opted for.) Tyler Chatwood came back, so we have 5 full-season starters this year, even without Richards. In the bullpen, Addison Reed is living up to his potential and Alex Wilson is turning into a gem of a 7th round pick. Will Chris Devenski match his awesome 2016 performance? We'll see.

If you ask the Stein-Jordan partnership about their team's prospects, and their realignment to the Williams, and the state of the roster, and the outcome of the draft, you may get a very Charles Dickens response: *It is the best of times, it is the worst of times*. They are away from the fierce competition of the Aaron Division – and are now in the fierce competition of the Williams. They don't have enough pitching – their pitching is great. They can't score runs – the offense has some great bats. And so on.

The fact is, this is a very good team that has just had a very good draft. Divisional alignment matters, of course: Northboro would have fared better somewhere other than the Aaron last year, where Maracaibo turned in an unexpected 101-win season. Adding the right players, either through trades or the draft, matters as well. And there are things that make you competitive: Dr. Greenwald has his "fifteen players" theory, the Sensei will tell you that you only have direct control over a few things (like the bullpen and the speed game) and you should make sure you have options available. And yes, the dice matter. We are all at the mercy of how well or poorly we roll.

Ultimately, though, you throw your team out there and compete regardless of where it's placed and who you have to beat. If your guys are good and your instructions are good and you handle the roster well as GM and field manager, the team succeeds. Based on this roster, it seems like it's time for the team to succeed. Can they beat Grand Cayman, or Las Vegas, or Hudson, or Munich? Check back in several months. But there is no reason they can't compete. These are the best of times. Go do it.

Pitching: 13.0 Poised to shut down enemy lineups.



Kluber: First

The Northboro club has been building a solid pitching staff for a few years, but in 2017 it's come together in a big way. The rotation consists of five very competent starters, and a handful of starts from a lefty swingman. The bullpen is deep with a great closer and a lot of guys with great peripherals.

ROTATION. As noted, the starting staff has five regulars that take up almost all season. Corey Kluber (Grade 14 C+15 HR+21) is first, but not alone. Drew Pomeranz (Grade 14 C-21), Ian

SNT: Dansby Swanson.

The young shortstop prospect is a building block for tomorrow. He's one of two shortstops taken by Northboro in the draft; both he and Aledmys Diaz have bright futures.



Turnover Rate: 28%

Arrived: Alexi Amarista; Gregor Blanco; Chris Devenski; Aledmys Diaz; Teoscar Hernandez; Chris Herrmann; Mike Montgomery; Anthony Recker; Sammy Solis; Dansby Swanson.

Departed: Jose Abreu; Cody Asche; Aaron Barrett; Corey Dickerson; Josh Fields; Phil Gosselin; Kevin Plawewski; Chasen Shreve; Darnell Sweeney.



northboro PHOENIX

Kennedy (Grade 12 C-12 HR-21), Jake Odorizzi (Grade 11 C+15 HR-14) and Tyler Chatwood (Grade 11 C-33 HR+22) follow, covering 155 starts. All are righthanded other than Drew Pomeranz, and all other than Kluber have relatively low fatigue numbers. With a deep bullpen that shouldn't be a problem. The remaining 7 are exactly covered by lefty Mike Montgomery (Grade 14 C-21 HR+31, 21 fatigue). This is a great crew to send out every day, and they will give good service.

BULLPEN.

The relief staff is even better. They are led by rookie closer Chris Devenski (Grade 20* C+31 HR+51, 84 IP), who may be here for many years to come.



Devenski: Rookie closer

He has lots of help: Montgomery appears here for 64 innings as a Grade 17*, along with the slightly wilder Sammy Solis (C-44 HR+55). That adds up to 105 lefty semi-closer innings. Addison Reed has fulfilled expectations and will be a great setup man (Grade 16* C+44 HR+41), along with a handful of appearances from Tommy Kahnle (Grade 16* C-62 HR+35).

The final tier of the bullpen is also useful. Adam Liberatore (Grade 13* lefty HR+44), Alex Wilson (Grade 12* C+24 HR+35), Erasmo Ramirez (Grade 10* C+23 HR-14) and Corey Knebel (Grade 8* C-23 HR+24) give Northboro 240 additional innings.



This here is another team that's on the upswing. One of the best rotations in TBL is supported by a versatile bullpen. Their offense is good enough to contend in the new look Williams, or for a wild card spot.

With a good starting rotation and an excellent bullpen, Northboro is poised to shut down enemy lineups – even the best ones.

Offense:

10.0

Walk, walk, homer!

There are some interesting cards in the Northboro envelope, with a fair amount of power. The best power card belongs to full time DH Chris Carter (8 hits, 4 walks+22, 1-1-0-0, 10 13s) can drive the ball, but is very much hit or miss. Jung-Ho Kang makes better contact and has good power too (9 hits, 3 walks+42, 1-1-6-6); Joc Peterson is just as prone to the strikeout as Carter, but he can give the ball a ride (8 hits, 5 walks, 1-5-5-6, L-16 R+2). Aledmys Diaz has very good power as well (11 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0-0) for about 100 games.



Carter: Hit or miss

On a somewhat lower level, Mike Zunino had a bit of a power surge (7 hits, 4 walks+42, 1-1-0-0) but his card is a bearded lady. Teoscar Hernandez (8 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0), who will get some outfield time, has power but little else; and Brandon Belt (9 hits, 6 walks+22, 4 0s), J. J. Hardy (10 hits, 2 walks, 4 0s) and Tommy LaStella (9 hits, 4 walks+22, 4 0s) all have something going on at dice roll 22.

The remaining regulars and semi-regulars aren't quite as potent. Kole Calhoun (10 hits, 4 walks+22, 3 0s) is steady; and Derek Dietrich (9 hits, 3 walks+2 42s, 3 0s, L-13 R+1) and Seth Smith (9 hits, 4 walks+42, L-11) get on base at least against righties. Catching, other than Zunino, falls into the lap of Chris Iannetta (7 hits, 4 walks, 3 0s, L+5 R-5) and Chris Hermann (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-4-4), with occasional appearances by Anthony Recker (9 hits, 5 walks+42, 0-6-6, L+3 R-3).

There is some weakness at the bottom end of the lineup, but there are a lot of power hits and a lot of walks. The one thing that is really missing is speed: there just aren't very many steal attempts (Joc Peterson has 8, which is the most among regulars). They'll be channeling the Anton mantra of "walk, walk, homer!"

Defense: **3.5**
Not as strong as desirable.

Not so much. Brandon Belt (1B5) and J. J. Hardy (SS9) continue their Fielding One excellence, and Joc Peterson turned in an OF3 (32 arm) as did Kole Calhoun (31 arm). Belt and the two outfielders will get a chance to flash their gloves – but Hardy will ride the bench while rookies Aledmys Diaz and Dansby Swanson (both SS7s) get to practice fielding ground balls. Derek Dietrich is a 2B7 as are all of the other 2B7s other than Amarista (2B8); the catchers are all C7s other than Zunino (C8); Herrmann has a Th+3, but none of the others is positive. LaStella and Kang both ring up 3B3s. The rest of the outfielders are OF2s other than waiver pick Blanco (OF3). This defense is not as strong as desirable for a contender.

Bench: **3.0**
Helpful.

While he'll start sometimes, there isn't a lot of Dansby Swanson (11 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, L+4 R-2). There is a great deal of Phil Gosselin (10 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s, 2B7 3B4 1B3) and he will help on defense and as a pinch-hitter. Alexi Amarista (9 hits, 2 walks, 31 SSN for 11 SBA to lead the team; he's a 2B8 3B4 as well) is here to run and field, as is Gregor Blanco (8 hits, 4 walks, 2 0s, OF3). Jurickson Profar (8 hits, 4 walks+22, 2 0s, L-12 R+2) is the continuing prospect, but there isn't much for him to do. Still, between these spare guys and the versatile starters, this is a helpful bench.



And we may be looking at a great pennant race, even given the disparity in TQ between first and second place. Northboro, particularly on the mound, is very competitive; they have power and walks, and even if they can't run they should not be disregarded. This should be a playoff team, and that should be their focus.



northboro:
 Realignment

As noted, Northboro management is less than pleased at being placed in a division with what may be the best team in TBL. After 25 years in the Aaron, it's a bit of a shock to get moved over. The Williams is a whole new ballgame in a way, since there's the whole non-DH thing, as well as a resurgent Zion club.

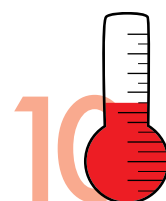
Our advice: *play your own game*. It's probably a wash, given the relocation of Las Vegas to the Aaron. No matter where a team goes in TBL, it will face opposition. It might have been New Westminster, or Brobdingnag, or Las Vegas, or Munich, or Hudson, or Calusa. There are good teams everywhere just as there are rebuilders everywhere.

We think it doesn't matter. Northboro is good. As we said at the beginning: *Go do it*.

TQ: 30.0



northboro PHOENIX



2016 ELDERS of zion in review

You can't keep a good Sensei down for long.



2016 in Review

Final Record: 62-100 (4th, Mantle)

There are those who are willing to undergo the pain of deep rebuilding in order to construct a team to contend. The history of TBL is littered with teams that sell off all the assets, perform poorly enough to draft high, then concentrate everything for a playoff run . . . and then do it again. There is a certain thrill to that approach, though it requires a complete lack of loyalty to particular players and an affection for cardboard that is best not interpreted euphemistically.

That is not the style of the Sensei. He always built for the long term and enjoyed the search for players that would be continually productive. Drafting – the key means of building a team – involves placing your bets on hoped-for success. If you make enough good bets you get Zion 1988-2003: 12 100-win seasons including eight in a row, seven World Series with four wins. If you make enough bad bets you get the last two years: 64 and 62 wins.

What went right?

In this 62-win campaign, very little went right for the Elders. It took some work to decide who would be pictured; Kenley Jansen (20 saves, 1.94 ERA, 25 hits and 50 Ks in 42 innings) fit the bill. The bullpen was actually pretty good; Blanton, Watson, Jennings and Herrera all pitched well, as did Uehara before departing in a September trade.

On the lineup side, Nick Hundley hit .312-12-54 in half a season. Charlie Blackmon hit .266

with 40 doubles. Clint Robinson, playing far too often, hit .287 with 11 homers.

What went wrong?

Everything else. Rubby de la Rosa got a chance to pitch regularly and went 8-20, 6.48. Jimmy Nelson, the “ace”, put up 8-18, 5.34. The team gave up 846 runs (but only 742 earned, due to 119 errors.) Overall the staff recorded a 4.68 team ERA, while the lineup scored only 676 runs and hit only 119 homers. Chin-Soo Choo was the poster boy for the offense: .225-6-36, with 155 strikeouts. It was a brutal year.



Jansen: Bright spot

3 Things

1. *The old season ends when the cards get put away.* There is no sense worrying about 2016: once the last game was done and the last stat sheets sent out, there is no need to dwell on the campaign.
2. *There is no such thing as impostor syndrome.* And there's no replacement for knowledge and research. Picks and trades made in more successful eras show that the Sensei still has mojo, and the evaluation methods used before still work.
3. *Success means building around key players.* Like Beltre or Larkin in the past, selecting a few key players and holding on to them is the best way to get back to regular success. Jansen and Blackmon and Seager are obvious standouts; this year's draft brought Benintendi and Bundy. There will be more. You can't keep a good Sensei down for long.

ELDERS of zion

Rich Meyer (33rd year); Hall of Famer

They may not contend for a playoff spot this year, but the talent could develop quickly. Mr. Meyer has this team headed in the right direction once again.



And thus begins the rebuilding effort. For the first time in league history, the Elders of Zion lost 100 games, barely. That in itself is an impressive feat. The next impressive feat will be leading the team back from the breach to competitiveness. No one doubts the Sensei will do it; the question is how long it may take.

Mr. Meyer has already begun assembling the pieces of the next dynasty. Last year's SNT Corey Seager looks like he'll live up to the incredible hype, and this year's SNT — the reward for a 100-loss season in 2016 — seems like a slam-dunk star. But there is still work to do.

There are still many, many aging faces on this team. The Sensei will also have to answer a looming question of who'll be the starting catcher of the future, now that he passed on the chance to take Willson Contreras in the draft. And eventually, he'll also have to turn his attention to the pitching staff, which still lacks an ace.

Pitching:
Potential to improve.

10.5

The 2017 waiver wire finally ended the Anibel Sanchez/Mat Latos era. They seemed like good ideas at the time, and they both showed flashes of brilliance. But it didn't last. This season, with several exceptions, the arms on this staff are all young. Most have the potential to improve. Will one starter step forward to become the next Tom Glavine? Or will the Sensei look elsewhere to trade for the next Greg Maddux?

At least this team shares a heritage with those glorious Zion teams of the years past: a solid bullpen led by a superb closer. If this team has any hope of competing in the current season, the bullpen will carry most of that burden. It may be that the Sensei will be content with bettering the team's record in the near term while compiling the pitching staff that will lead the next championship Elders team.

ROTATION. The team has no ace and has to rely on too many bottom-end starts. That nine starters take the hill (including the departed Sanchez) shows a team in transition. But three young starts have X strikeout letters, and an ace may emerge from the group. Rubby de la Rosa (Grade 11), Trevor Bauer (Grade 10 HR+22), lefty Steven Matz (Grade 10 C+26), Dylan Bundy (Grade 10), and placeholder Paul Clemens (Grade 10 C-31 HR-31) give Zion 88 double-digit starts. That's not bad.

Rookie Jon Gray (Grade 9) and Jimmy Nelson (Grade 8 C-35) take care of 61 more starts, for better or worse. That leaves waiver wire claim Jorge de la Rosa (Grade 4 C-31 HR-21) to fill in the rest. The good news is that the Elders now own the whole set of da la Rosas. The bad news is that the elder one has to pitch at all.

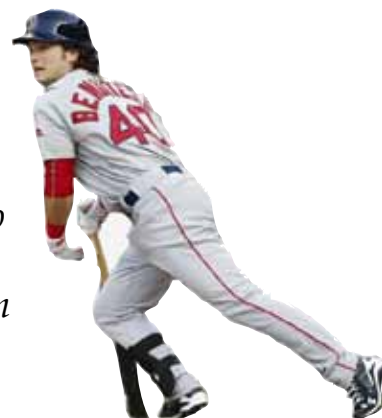
Turnover Rate: 31%

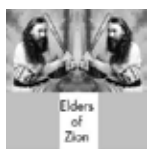
Arrived: Andrew Benintendi; Dylan Bundy; Paul Clemens; Jorge de la Rosa; Jon Gray; Mitch Haniger; Jhan Marinez; Bruce Maxwell; T.J. Rivera; A.J. Schugel; Ronald Torreyes

Departed: Carlos Contreras; Aaron Hill; Dan Jennings; Mat Latos; Dixon Machado; Clint Robinson; Hyun-Jin Ryu; Anibal Sanchez; Grady Sizemore; Aaron Thompson.

SNT: Andrew Benintendi.

Mr. Meyer actually traded down in the TBL draft to pluck this Fred Lynn clone in the first round. No one will be surprised by an MVP season in his near future.





ELDERS of zion

BULLPEN. Like years past, the bullpen starts and ends with the stopper Kenley Jansen (Grade 24* C+41 HR+34, with all the strikeout letters: KXY), who offers 69 innings. "Awesome" doesn't do him justice. He's set up by the ageless wonder Joe Blanton (Grade 17* HR+22) and Kelvin Herrera (Grade 14* C+34 HR+26). They add 152 strong innings. When the Elders lead late in the game, they'll be tough to beat.



Jansen: All the letters

The middle innings belong to the only lefty in the pen, Tony Watson (Grade 15*), and righty Michael Lorenzen (Grade 14*). There's also rookies A.J. Schugel (Grade 12* C+21 HR+26) and Jhan Marínez (Grade 10* HR+35). They add 232 innings. The mops are Randall Delgado (Grade 8* C-31) and Bundy (Grade 8*). The pen has the grades and the innings to rescue the starters, which may be a common refrain.

Offense:
A team strength.

11.0

Defense:
They'll make the easy plays.

3.0

For the first time in recent memory, the hitting review doesn't start with the Elder Statesman — not because he's slipped, but because others have caught up. Charlie Blackmon (12 hits, 2 walks+22, 1-4-5-6, D26 for 26 attempts, L-5) turned in a stellar season. Last year's SNT Corey Seager (11 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0-0, L-8 R+2) blossomed, too. Elder-for-forever Adrian Beltre (11 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-0-0-0, L+5, R-3) put up another solid card. They'll play most days.



Blackmon: Stellar

Yasmani Tomás (10 hits, 2 walks, L+12 R-6, 1-5-5-6) also contributes plenty of power. There's a great platoon with SNT Andrew Benintendi (11 hits, 3 walks+22, 5 0s, L-13 R+5) and Abraham Almonte (10 hits, L+2 R-3, 5 0s), but they can cover only

about 100 games. Nick Hundley (9 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0-0, L+7 R-5) offers some more power, while Yunel Escobar (11 hits, 3 walks+22, 3 0s, L+4 R-3) offers more hitting.

The rest of the lineup is less impressive. John Jaso (9 hits, 4 walks+22, L-13) and Brandon Guyer (3 0s, 9 hits, 2 walks+24s+22, L+8 R-8) would make a great platoon if they played the same position. Part-timers Ronald Torreyes (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks+22, L-7 R+2) and Matt Szczur (3 0s, 10 hits, 2 walks) are useful. Scooter Gennett (3 0s, 9 hits, 3 walks, no shift) has fallen to dead average. Roberto Pérez (2 0s, 6 hits, 5 walks, L+2 R-3) gets some playing time, too.

The hitting highlights can sometimes run seven deep in the Elders' lineup. Even the guys who don't hit can at least hope for a base on balls. If the table-setters get on base, there'll be ample opportunity for the power to shine, and the starting pitching may need all the support it can get. Offense, like the bullpen, is a team strength.

The highlight reel begins with Adrian Beltre (3B5). Roberto Pérez (C8 Th+6) does this defense thing very, very well. And ... that's it. Corey Seager (SS8), John Jaso (1B3), the second basemen (both 2B7s), and most of the outfield are all average, which means they'll make all the easy plays and occasionally a difficult flash of leather.

Andrew Benintendi (OF1), Nick Hundley (C6 Th-4), and Yasmani Tomás (1B2) hope the ball goes the other way. Playing Hundley, in particular, may hurt the team.



Rich Meyer's 2016 team lost 100 games for the 1st time in franchise history. This after dropping 98 games in 2015. They are much improved for 2017, but still will have trouble staying in contention. Somewhere around the .500 mark seems likely.

Bench: Some flexibility.

3.0



zion:
Realignment



ELDERS of zion

Like Mr. Beard, who plays every game with 25 players, the Sensei like to use his bench to the best advantage. He has some flexibility among the regulars, as large shifts sometimes force regulars to the pine. In addition, T.J. Rivera (3 0s, 12 hits, 1 walk+22, L-12 R+7) offers a great pinch-hitting card against righties. Shin-Soo Choo (1-6, 8 hits, 4 walks+42+22, L+7 R-5) can hit against lefties. And Bruce Maxwell (3 0s, 10 hits, 3 walks, L-10 R+3) may get to hit some, but he fields as well as Hundley.

3rd

Third place is better than last place. This is a much stronger Zion team than the one that lost 100 games in 2016.

They may not contend for a playoff spot this year, but the talent could develop quickly. Then again, with the Sensei rolling the dice, this team could surprise the two teams picked ahead of them. Most importantly, though, Mr. Meyer has this team headed in the right direction once again.



Seager: Hype equalled

Before realignment, the Elders was a fixture in the Mantle Division, which has provided some dominant teams in the past, including the Elders.

Between 2016 and 2017, things have changed. Melrose has stepped back and Munich isn't the same team that won the World Series last year. That would have left Zion fighting a likely losing battle with Hudson.

With realignment, they're facing Grand Cayman, Northboro, and rebuilding Warrenton. We at the *Annual* think the realignment is a wash. Even. At least the Sensei will have a chance to play games without the DH, which is a part of the *Zeitgeist* of the new Williams Division.

Players born after 1990 (8): Bauer, Benintendi, Bundy, J. Gray, Lorenzen, Matz, C. Seager, Torreyes.

Players born from 1987 to 1990 (16): Almonte, Clemens, R. De La Rosa, Delgado, Gennett, Haniger, K. Herrera, Jansen, Martinez, B. Maxwell, Nelson, T. Rivera, R. Perez, Schugel, Szczur, Tomas.

TQ: **27.5**



2016 warrenton GIANTS in review



It was not a team built for a deep playoff run:

2016 in Review

Final Record: 86-76 (2nd, Clemente)

You can fault Jack Chapman for some things, like his devotion to the San Francisco Giants (even in years where they're not very good.) Offering a player from their roster is often a good way to initiate trade talks. Buster Posey, Joe Panik, Madison Bumgarner, Angel Pagan, Yusmeiro Petit, Jake Peavy, Hunter Pence . . . years and years ago, in another incarnation, Trader Jack tried to pry Matt Williams loose from Maracaibo, with an offer that was simply too much.

What you *can't* fault him on is his devotion to winning, the "right" way, without resorting to American League rules. Warrenton continues to send out lineups without the DH; they won a TBL championship that way, and managed an 86-76 record last year doing that. Now there's a TBL division where at least some of the teams, some of the time, will do the same: and those of us who don't take an interest in that particular style can't do much in the way of scoffing, since, well, *Championship*. They'll be playing this way this year too: but it probably won't make much difference, as this is rebuilding time in the Pacific Northwest.

What went right?

The *Annual* didn't think they'd make it very far in 2016, but the club surprised us with 86 wins and a playoff spot (though it was a quick exit). Buster Posey was again a bright spot hitting .308-16-85, the best hitter on the club. Adam Jones was fine as well (.272-32-85). Madison Bumgarner hit .278 with 8 homers, and in his regular position went 20-8, 2.24,

with 319 Ks and 15 CG. Jake Peavy punched way above his weight, going 12-3, 2.27; George Kontos recorded 30 saves. The team was outscored 672-668, so the five losses that turned into five wins is probably due to skilled field management. You can't fault Mr. Chapman there either.

What went wrong?

This club plays to win, which might have been contrary to a grand plan in 2016 – they might have done well to perform worse.

It was not a team built for a deep playoff run: they didn't score enough runs, they hit only 134 homers and stole only 38 bases; the team ERA was 3.70 – most pitchers were like Zimmermann (12-12, 4.25) or Buehrle (13-11, 4.32) than Bumgarner or Peavy. Pedro Alvarez, the other big power source, hit 21 HR but struck out 164 times. This was a .500 team.



Posey: Bright spot

3 Things

1. *Throwing in the towel.* It was clear that the 2017 edition wasn't going to be much better, and was likely worse. It was clearly time to take things apart.
2. *But not everything.* Lots of things are gone, and that which replaces them should struggle – which might have been started last year, but wasn't. But Posey, Bumgarner, Pence, Jones and a few others are still here.
3. *Prepare for next year . . . with a closer?* The opportunity to acquire Aroldis Chapman – no relation, apparently – was too good to pass up. He may have trouble with regular work this year, but will definitely be part of the rebuild.

warrenton GIANTS

Jack Chapman (9th year)

This Giants team could win every one of their ace's 34 starts and still lose 100 games.



Every once in a while, just to keep us honest, apparently, the *Annual* gets things wrong. Really wrong. Such was the case of last year's prediction that the Warrenton Giants would finish 2016 in third place and out of the playoff picture. In our defense, we didn't have them that far out of the playoff picture, given the mediocre competition in the International Conference.

So, the defending league champs went out and proved us wrong, winning 86 games and claiming the second Wild Card slot by a 10-game margin! Madison Bumgarner won 20 games. Adam Jones slugged 32 homers. They had just enough support to outlast the competition, such as it was. (No other team in the conference came close to .500.)

That the Giants were bumped from the playoffs in six games by a superior Calusa team was an afterthought. The effort to make the playoffs showed off Mr. Chapman's managerial skills to make the best of he had to work with — all the while playing without the DH. It also showed what a good manager and some luck can do with a decent team.

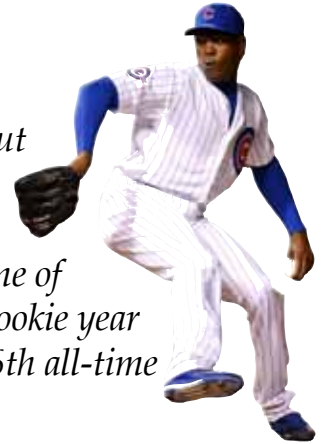
Pitching: **4.0**
It won't be pretty.

This version of the Giants has an ace and a closer every other team would love to own. But even Trader Jack probably won't send either of these two fine pitchers packing. Since both are still in their 20s, they represent the building blocks of the next great Warrenton team. And with some astute draft picks and timely trades, that team may not be far off.

The problem with this pitching staff, however, lies beyond these two keystone pitchers. This

SNT:
Aroldis Chapman.

Part of the great exodus out of Riverwoolf, Chapman ended up in Trader Jack's hands. Chapman's been one of the best closers since his rookie year in 2012 — he's already 16th all-time in saves.



Turnover Rate: 51%

Arrived: Aroldis Chapman; Matt Duffy; Brett Eibner; A. J. Ellis; Ramon Flores; Dillon Gee; Conor Gillaspie; Johnny Giovatella; Nick Goody; Heath Hembree; Trevor May; Gregorio Petit; Albert Pujols; Adam Rosales; Denard Span; Albert Suarez; Nick Tropeano; Chien-Ming Wang.

Departed: Jeremy Affeldt; Alexi Amarista; Mark Buehrle; Carl Crawford; Mayckol Guaipe; Blaine Hardy; Omar Infante; George Kontos; Jean Machi; Michael Martinez; Jeff Mathis; Casey McGehee; Tyler Moore; Evan Scribner; Jon Singleton; Jake Smolinski; Rafael Ynoa.

Giants team could win every one of their ace's 34 starts and still lose 100 games. It's not likely, but it's also not outside the realm of possibility. The drop-off in grade and talent makes it seem like an earthquake separated the two top pitchers from the rest of the staff. There will be no miraculous climb to a playoff spot this year.

ROTATION. Madison Bumgarner (Grade 15 C+23) will feel the pressure to win this year. If he struggles, this team is



Bumgarner: Pressure



warrenton GIANTS

doomed. After his 34 starts, it falls to Nick Tropeano (Grade 11 C-35 HR-26) and Albert Suarez (Grade 8 C+22) for just 25 more starts — which, we'll point out, is less than a full season. These three are the only starters who can steal a hit without help.

The rest of the rotation carries the moniker "Pray for Rain." Righty Jordan Zimmermann (Grade 5 C+23) and lefty Wade Miley (Grade 4) at least aren't innocuous, which is more than you can say for Jake Peavy (Grade 3), Matt Cain (Grade 3 HR-23), and Eddie Butler (Grade 1 HR-26). This lot has to suffer through 103 starts. Most days, it won't be pretty.

BULLPEN. As mentioned above, this team has the dominant Aroldis Chapman (Grade 25* HR+51, with KX strikeout letters). When he gets the chance, he'll slam the door. The questions are: *How many chances will he get and Will he even be able to use up his 58 innings?*

He's set up, if you can call it that, by a decent Heath Hembree (Grade 12*) and his homer-prone cohorts: Dillon Gee (Grade 10* C+21 HR-23), and Trevor May (Grade 8* C-21). Together, they add 146 innings. Nick Goody (Grade 8* C-21 HR-36), Chien-Ming Wang (Grade 7* HR+21), lefty Enny Romero (Grade 7* C-62), and Yusmeiro Petit (Grade 6* C+33 HR-31) contribute another 184 innings. It ain't nearly enough. The bottom of the rotation may age five years over the course of the season.

Offense: 5.5
Favors power over speed.

Like most TBL teams, the Giants have some power, but Pedro Alvarez (9 hits, 4 walks, L-7,



Alvarez: Power over speed

1-1-6-6) and Adam Rosales (8 hits, 4 walks, 1-4-5-5, R-3) are the only four-power-number cards on the team. And they have 19 13s between them, so most days, there'll be more swings and misses than anything productive. Alvarez bats clean-up versus right-handed pitching.

Others contribute power with better contact skills, such as: Buster Posey (10 hits, 4 walks, 1-0-0, L+4 R-3),

Hunter Pence (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-6-6), Albert Pujols (10 hits, 3 walks, 1-0-0, no shift), Wilmer Flores (10 hits, 3 walks+22, 1-5-6, L+11 R-7), and Adam Jones (10 hits, 2 walks, 1-0-0, L-8). Then there's Brett Eibner (7 hits, 3 walks, 1-6-6, L+4 R-5), who has a role vs. lefties.

Leadoff hitter Angel Pagan (10 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, E30 for 19 attempts, L-4) represents the best speed on the team. Part-timer Johnny Giavotella (10 hits, L-6, 3 0s) at least has 10 hits. The final three semi-regulars are just average: Joe Panik (9 hits, 3 walks+22, 3 0s, L-6), Denard Span (9 hits, 3 walks, 3 0s, E25 for 19 attempts, L-8 R+2), and Matt Duffy (9 hits, 2 walks+22, 3 0s).

This team favors power over speed. The lineup features no 11-hit cards. It's a mix-and-match lineup without many good options. As a result, they'll struggle to score runs when they aren't rolling power numbers. It's all well and good to load up with players on your favorite team when your favorite team wins championships. In other years, well, here's what can happen.

Defense: 4.5
If that wasn't bad enough . . .

The good news starts with All-World catcher Posey (C9 Th+3), who gets to play almost every day. Panik (2B9) plays versus righties, and Duffy (3B5, SS8) is the best on the team at both those positions. All the outfielders are average (OF2) with mostly average arms, except for

Pence (35). Pujols (1B3) and Rosales (2B7) will at least make the easy plays, which is more than you can say about Alvarez (3B3) or Flores (3B3, SS7).

If that wasn't bad enough, there's Giavotella (SS6), who's slated to play versus right-handers on the board game.

Bench: **2.5**
You'd expect more.

The forgotten man in the team instructions appears to be Conor Gillaspie (10 hits, 2 walks, 1-3-6, L-7), who can also play the field (3B4, 1B3). He's joined on the pine by backup catchers Bobby Wilson (9 hits, 2 walks, 1-6, L+4 R-3, which is the exact same shift as Posey) and A.J. Ellis (8 hits, 3 walks+22, 2 0s). Both can field, but have big negative arms. Gregorio Petit (9 hits, 2 walks, 3 0s) can play almost everywhere, including short (SS8), so he's a useful piece, but you'd expect more from a team that plays without the DH.

4th

Coming off a league championship and a playoff season, Warrenton will have to suffer through 2017. There are a few bright spots — such those 34 games MadBum starts — but they'll have to survive the play in between.

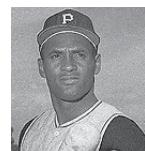
When the hits are rolling, they'll be competitive, but they'll need to continue their streak of luck. Then again, Mr. Chapman has a World Series victory under his belt, and his teams have recently outperformed expectations. If Pedro Alvarez hits more homers than the errors he'll make in the field, that will be a victory.



Posey: All-world



warrenton:
Realignment



warrenton GIANTS

Warrenton comes from the Clemente Division, in which he battled Whitman year in and year out. In fact, one of those two teams won the division since the Giants entered in 2014.

Realignment sends them back to the Williams Division, where they started life in their current incarnation, and where the franchise had resided for fifteen years. The twist this year is that, due to Trader Jack's devotion to National League baseball, the Williams is (to some extent) the "non-DH" division: some of the teams have agreed among themselves to have their pitchers bat when they play each other. When the Giants won the World Series without using a DH, we stopped talking about it as a handicap.

In any case, they now have to face not one, but two playoff-bound teams in Grand Cayman and Northboro. And you can't write off Zion, despite their 100-loss season in 2016. Overall, it represents tougher competition for the Giants. We score this a loss.

Vegas



Trader Jack is not exactly living up to his moniker lately. His team definitely looks ready for a rebuild, yet players like MadBum and, especially, Aroldis Chapman, who is completely superfluous are still here. Chapman might leave at the midseason trading period for future considerations.

TQ: 16.5



breakthrough

There are fringe players on TBL rosters right now who might be important players on rosters in 2018. Some of those names appear in the list below. Some won't make it, but last year's list included Corey Seager, Stephen Matz, Raisel Iglesias, Travis Shaw and Jerad Eickhoff in the top ten.



1 Aaron Judge, OF, Hoboken.

He's already shown that he can stand up to the New York hype. If they keep throwing him fastballs, he'll keep hitting them to the moon.



6 Jose Berrios, SP, Midwest.

Another Minnesota hurler for the Guru to watch develop. He had a rough rookie season but should be lots better in the coming one.



2 Andrew Benintendi, OF, Zion.

Trust the Sensei's insights; he's landed a top shelf player who has all five tools and is showing them off every day in Boston.



7 Joe Musgrove, SP, Riverwoolf.

He jumped from AA to the majors last season, and injuries have made him a critical man in Houston. Success will make this Riverwoolf pick look better.



3 Alex Bregman, 3B, Rye.

He sprinted through the minors and was clearly The Guy He Wanted for Mr. Musselman this year. He should have a breakthrough season in 2017.



8 Josh Bell, 1B, Hoboken.

This power-hitting first baseman has an excellent batting eye, and looks to make a big impact for the Pirates in 2017 and in Hoboken shortly after.



4 Dansby Swanson, SS, Northboro.

The young shortstop will have ample opportunity to develop with the Braves, and Northboro can give him time too reach his potential.



9 Orlando Arcia, SS, Maracaibo.

His glove is already prime time, and he'll be given every opportunity to grow into his position in Milwaukee – and in Maracaibo.



5 Julio Urias, SP, Detroit.

Born in 1996, he was the youngest player in the 2017 draft. Guys don't get to the majors at age 20 unless they have great arms.



10 Yulieski Gurriel, 1B, Midwest.

It doesn't happen too often that we project great things for a 32-year-old first time carded player, but he may have great impact – a Cuban Ichiro, if you like.

Honorable mention: Tim Adelman, P, Rye; Jett Bandy, C, Knoxville; Aaron Blair, P, Melrose; Eddie Butler, P, Warrenton; Wilmer Difo, IF, Maracaibo; Jose Dominguez, P, Gotham City; Zach Eflin, P, Blue Hill; Brett Eibner, OF, Warrenton; Greg Garcia, 3B, Hudson; Mitch Haniger, OF, Zion; Donnie Hart, P, Hudson; Teoscar Hernandez, OF, Northboro; Seth Lugo, P, New Westminster; Daniel Mengden, P, Grand Cayman; Whit Merrifield, IF, Rye; Ariel Miranda, P, Detroit; Raul Mondesi, IF, Melrose; Omar Narvaez, C, Blue Hill; Jarrett Parker, OF, New Westminster; Tommy Pham, OF, Gotham City; Manny Pina, C, Blue Hill; Edubray Ramos, P, Rye; Cody Reed, P, Blue Hill; Joey Rickard, OF, Whitman; Ryan Schimpf, 3B, Gotham City; Braden Shipley, P, Midwest; Mallex Smith, OF, Rye; Brandon Snyder, IF, Las Vegas; Matt Strahm, P, Maracaibo; Trayce Thompson, OF, Melrose; Andrew Toles, OF, Hoboken; Andrew Triggs, P, Riverwoolf; Jose Urena, P, Brobdingnag; Luke Weaver, P, Strong City; Joey Wendle, 2B, Calusa; Tony Wolters, C, Whitman; Michael Ynoa, P, Whitman.

future

Every year we look forward to see who might be the big names in the next draft. Sometimes these predictions are prophetic, and sometimes they fall short. Last year, four of our top ten were selected in the first round in 2017; we were a little disappointed that some of our names didn't make it. You be the judge. Thanks – once again – to Rich Meyer for his help.



1 Cody Bellinger, OF, Los Angeles (N)

A power hitter with skills at first base and the outfield, he's cut down his swing and gotten more aggressive.



6 Manny Margot, OF, San Diego.

Speed and defense are his game, and he has surprised in early play in 2017. He'll be someone's leadoff hitter next year in TBL.



2 Yoan Moncada, IF, Chicago (A).

A high-ceiling strikeout pitcher, he has his Tommy John surgery already behind him. He's back with a new team.



7 Ian Happ, IF, Chicago (N)

A switch-hitting infielder, he could become a 20-20 man in the majors. His future may be in the outfield.



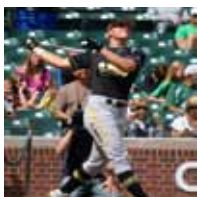
3 Antonio Sentazela, P, Colorado.

A hard thrower who seems to be thriving at high altitude, he's off to a good start in 2017.



8 Lucas Giolito, P, Chicago (A).

A high-ceiling strikeout pitcher, he has his Tommy John surgery already behind him. He's back with a new team.



4 Austin Meadows, OF, Pittsburgh

A left handed outfielder with a sweet swing, he got to Triple-A at age 21, and if he can stay on the field he'll be a serious impact player.



9 Tyler Glasnow, P, Pittsburgh

He throws very hard, and needs to work on mechanics; but if he settles down he'll be a great part of someone's rotation.



5 Gleyber Torres, SS, New York (A)

Part of the payment for Aroldis Chapman from the Cubs, he may yet win the trade for the Yankees.



10 Clint Frazier, OF, New York (A)

Part of the payment for Andrew Miller, he has great speed and raw power. He might be a 2018 star – but a top 2017 TBL pick.

Honorable mention: Willy Adames, SS, Tampa Bay; Ozzie Albies, IF, Atlanta; Jorge Alfaro, C, Philadelphia; Christian Arroyo, IF, San Francisco; Lewis Brinson, OF, Milwaukee; J. P. Crawford, SS, Philadelphia; Jose DeLeon, P, Tampa Bay; Rafael Devers, 3B, Boston; Josh Hader, P, Milwaukee; Brent Honeywell, P, Tampa Bay; James Hoyt, P, Houston; Trey Mancini, OF, Baltimore; Francis Martes, P, Houston; Hunter Renfroe, OF, San Diego; Victor Robles, OF, Washington; Amed Rosario, SS, New York (N); Justus Sheffield, P, New York (A); Eric Thames, 1B, Milwaukee.

editorial

by Walter Hunt

Another year turns, and we're still here. It's a continuing wonder that we manage to thrive in an environment that increasingly leaves APBA behind for shinier, faster, ostensibly more appealing things. A number of years ago when the Game Company looked like it might go under we thought about doing our own cards, providing our own ratings, carrying on as if there were no obstacles to the continuation of our mutual hobby.

Of course there are obstacles; age, time, too many things to do that take priority. We lose managers because they can't do what needs to be done to participate: this year it was the Taylor brothers, and as long-time members of TBL they will be missed. Our Commissioner is a non-playing participant for precisely this reason and we're glad to have him in that capacity if it's what he can manage.

There are some departures that are unavoidable. We have not been touched, at least not recently, with the loss of a friend in the league; there have been a few close calls, but it hasn't happened yet. It will, given our average age. I don't know what that will feel like, except that it will not be pleasant. It will remind us how ephemeral this all is, how it matters in the moment but not otherwise – TBL is a series of memories and compilations of lifetimes: a promising rookie becomes a regular star becomes a grizzled veteran becomes a recollection. It is more so because we have imposed our own reality upon the major league one, our players only cardboard representations of real people whose lives only reach us a year later. This year, for example, Brobdingnag is starting not one, but two pitchers who are actually dead: Yordano Ventura and Jose Fernandez. Joke all we want, but this is their last card, just like Oscar Taveras and Steve Olin and a number of other players who lived on in this ethereal cardboard state

one year past the tragedy that ended career and life. But that's the beauty of APBA, really: Willie Mays is young; Mickey Mantle's alive and his knees don't hurt; Mark Fidrych is in 1976 forever. There is no curse, not in Boston and not in Chicago; the Mets can be awful or amazin', depending on the season; Drysdale can be a Giant and McCovey a Dodger if that's what someone wants. And it can happen now, or 20 years from now – the cardboard doesn't care.

The point I'm rambling around is that our cardboard reality allows us to enjoy our favorite sport in a way unknown by most sports fans, and engage in competition that tawdry rotisserie players and daily / weekly stat gatherers simply cannot imagine. Ours is a world where that 35th guy matters, where middle inning relief means something, where a good infield defense can help win a pennant.

Because this is so, we have built up a long record of memories, of high points, of players long since gone (into retirement, if not gone altogether). But for every favorite guy that has departed, a new prospect appears, refreshing us with our annual draft. The realignment of 2017, while disruptive, is probably good for all of us: it shakes us out of a rut we didn't know we occupied, and gives us new rivalries and new perspectives. But the game is the same, the league persists, and we're still here.

The game matters, and our friendships matter. Some stressful moments have threatened to tear that apart, but cool heads prevailed and we're still here. Enjoy 2017: it will never come again.



commissioner's report

by Ray Murphy

So, how am I doing? As far as I know, nobody's called for my impeachment, now a year into my second stint in the commissioner's chair. That's a good sign, right? (Sorry if that's too on-the-nose for the times we live in.)

Seriously, though: my role as non-playing commissioner has been, to this point, everything I had hoped it would be. It's fantastic for me to stay perched on the periphery of this league. In many ways, this non-playing commish gig is the equivalent of having box seats in the first row behind home plate. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to look over people's shoulders during the offseason trading period. Daniel's big-splash entrance to the league, complete with instant destruction of the Taylor boys' roster core was something to behold.

Not to plug my other gig, but I wrote an article for BaseballHQ.com back in March that referred heavily to TBL: (it's a free read)

<https://www.baseballhq.com/content/gms-office-other-side-draft-day>

Key excerpt if you don't want to go read the whole thing:

Driving home (from the TBL draft this past February), I realized something interesting: over the course of that evening, catching up with these longtime competitors and friends, we had actually talked very little baseball. I talked to guys about their recent loss of a parent, their children's college plans, retirement timelines, the state of public education in our country, this year's crop of chiles in New Mexico, and other topics even further removed from fantasy baseball.

And that's why I'm serving in this non-playing commissioner role: to maintain the ties of a quarter-century with this group of guys, to keep a foothold in their community.

In short, that's why I am doing this. It was terrific to see so many of you that night, and I appreciate your finding a role for me in your community.

While this gig is working out nicely for me, it's also important that it work out well for the rest of you. Last season was rather uneventful in terms of issues that bubbled up to my inbox. That came as no surprise; you guys are quite good about handling issues directly and resolving them amicably. Still, don't hesitate to loop me in where needed. I don't "rule with an iron fist", but I am more than happy to smooth over ruffled feathers as needed.

Thanks to Walter and the team at the *Annual*, who produce this one-of-a-kind publication every spring. Thanks also to everyone who shares the work of keeping this league running so smoothly into its second quarter-century. Particular thanks to Joe Auletta and the crew that is working to put together the Arizona draft for 2018. I hope to see a bunch of you there!

-Ray



A year has passed for Professor John L. Williams at California State University in Sacramento, and his team is still watching and studying TBL. I recently received an update from Dr. Williams regarding their scholarship.

This rather long email is an update on the presentations Chris Maben and I have made this past spring based on the TBL *Annals*.

The first conference, *Summit on Communication and Sport*, was held in Phoenix, Arizona in late March. My coauthor Chris Maben traveled to the conference and presented the paper. This paper focused on the rhetorical style found in the TBL's *Annals*. For example, teams that had poor seasons or were expected to have difficult seasons were described in positive ways. This was viewed as ways in which the TBL *Annals* are used to building comradeship and league cohesion. He reports that during the presentation some of the audience members went to the TBL homepage to check things out. Those in attendance were impressed and grasped the complexity of the TBL's simulation.

The Lecture

As mentioned in a previous email Chris Maben this semester is teaching a class about Media and Sports. He and I delivered a lecture about tabletop sports games with an emphasis on baseball simulations. We described the TBL's structure and its history. Most of the students, because they

were raised in the digital age, we unaware that these games existed. We provided them an opportunity to play a couple of innings of a 1860s dice baseball game followed by a couple of innings of APBA, basic version. They were impressed with the dedication of the TBL members to their league.

The Presentation at the Popular Culture Association Convention

In general, this presentation described the contents of the TBL's *Annals*. A brief history of the league was provided. A printed, in color, copy of the one of the annuals was also available for those in attendance to examine. The post presentation discussion focused on the complexity of the TBL's simulation. Some of the topics mentioned included accuracy of the league's statistics, the creation of an innocuous player category, and the strategy of building down.

Both Chris and I observed that many in attendance were unaware that APBA and the other tabletop sports games were still available and were the centerpiece of the leagues. The other observation was that those who heard our presentations were fascinated that success in the league does not result in financial rewards. Chris and I both emphasized that success produced psychic rewards.

The Next Set of Papers

Chris and I are already drafting our next papers. One paper will be devoted to looking at how three teams have been described in the annuals. The teams are Blue Hill, Las Vegas, and Whitman. They were selected because they all joined the league in either 1996 or 1997 and are still in the hands of their original owners. The focus will be on how their levels of success are described. This language will be compared to a body of published research about how fantasy leagues participants. Specifically, the words and phrases that are used when discussing ability to draft a winning team.

The second paper will be focused more on simulation leagues and their constitutions. The focus will be on how the leagues, especially the ones that used APBA or other commercially available simulation games, structure themselves. We see this an example of the Uses and Gratifications theory. This will require us to argue that tabletop sports games like APBA are a form of mass media.

There is a potential third paper in the making. It is growing out conversations with other colleagues at Sacramento State. It will attempt to address the phrase “secret sauce,” which has come up in the *Annuals*.

A member of the Philosophy Department with a specialty in Ethics suggested integrity as a potential ingredient. For the league to sustain itself it seems critical that its members trust each other to play fairly (ethically).

Another ingredient is dedication. A second colleague with an interest in Organization Communication thinks that concept of meaningful work is a way of explain the dedication aspect. The amount of research, recording keeping, game playing, etc. creates a baseball league simulation that TBL members see as enjoyable, which sounds like the concept of meaningful work.

In all our presentations we acknowledge how grateful we are for your assistance.



In our turn, we should be very grateful for these scholars' interest in our league. Their focus on the more recent issues of this publication is obvious when Dr. Williams remarks about our positive presentation of rebuilding teams – we are kinder and gentler now! But the themes of trust and dedication – foundation stones of our long and cordial friendships – are accurate and extremely complimentary. When the papers are published we will try to make sure they're available for league members' perusal.



One of these years the Cubs will win
A pennant for all loyal fans;
A city has waited over a century for this.
Perhaps that time has become the present?

A pennant for all loyal fans
Something Ernie Banks never received
Perhaps that time has become the present
For Cub fans to have their glory.

Something Ron Santo never received--
the recognition for outstanding achievement.
For Cub fans to have their glory
In a park with daylight baseball.

The recognition for outstanding achievement,
Playing in the month of October
In a park with night-time baseball
Against an A.L. team.

Playing in the month of October
The Windy City would be so happy for a win
Against an A.L. team
And all sins of years gone by will be forgotten.

The Windy City would be so happy for a win,
(One of these years ...YES!!! the Cubs *did* win)
And all sins of years gone by will be forgotten--
A city waited a century for this.

TBL

The Transcontinental Baseball League is a 24-team, continuous ownership APBA Baseball League that plays a 162 game season using the Master Board Game and the Computer Game. We play roughly twenty games a month from April through November. TBL uses an innovative, realistic pitching system and restricts players to real-life usage.

Our members are loyal, fun-loving and astute, and we have a high rate of retention. Now in our thirty-sixth season, our pennant races are always competitive and exciting.

TBL is always interested in adding backup managers to its roster. To get involved, send e-mail to our Commissioner, Paul Harrington, at

rmurph3@comcast.net

or TBL's unofficial recruiter and analyst, Walter Hunt, at

hotc@walterhunt.com.

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